

# Grandparents, Grandkids Share First Hugs Since Pandemic at Palo Alto Retirement Community

By John Ramos | May 5, 2021

PALO ALTO (KPIX) — We usually gauge our success battling the pandemic using infection rates and vaccination numbers but Wednesday in Palo Alto, there was a more human indicator of progress in the struggle to return to normalcy.

At the Moldaw Residences, a Jewish retirement community, Jan Weinman is one of the lucky ones. She has her dog Yoshi to keep her company.

“He knows my moods, he knows my routine,” she said, “and when I’ve been sick — and I have been sick this year — he’s right beside me.”

The facility has strictly followed all the rules and as a result, they’ve only had one case of COVID-19. The complex has worked hard to provide remote activities for the residents during the pandemic including virtual tours of places like Israel and New York City, conducted by tour guides live on Zoom.

Still, Weinman and all the other residents have missed the human touch after spending the last year cut off from family and friends.

“If you’re a single person living in an apartment and you’re isolated for a year and you don’t have anyone to touch for an entire year, that’s very detrimental to people’s health,” said Executive Director Elyse Gerson.

“I’ve seen my daughter a couple times,” said resident Sonveig Jensen-Brodsky, “but I have not had a hug yet and I haven’t seen my grandson since forever.”

But Wednesday, because all 220 residents are now fully vaccinated, they held an ice cream social in the courtyard that offered something infinitely sweeter than just the ice cream.

After a year of phone calls and zoom meetings, they were finally able to savor a hug from their children and grandchildren. Melanie Rabkin found her grandkids not only missed her but also the place she lives, which had become a kind of second home to them.

“The kids have missed coming here, you know?” she said. “Apart from missing me, they have missed coming here. I was so surprised, ‘when can we come and have dinner here again?’ That kind of thing,”

It felt like the pandemic had ended when Weinman finally got a hug from her daughter and grandson, even if it did make Yoshi a bit jealous about having to share her.

“Ohh, I can’t even — there are no words. Like, when I hugged them for the first time I felt like I just melted!” she said.

In a crowded place like the Bay Area, it’s easy to take the presence of other people for granted but live alone for a year and you realize the human touch is something we cannot live without.