



WHAT ARE THERAPY DOGS?

Therapy dogs are **not** service animals.

A service animal is defined by the ADA as any animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. This can include guide, mobility, sound alert and medical alert/response work. Their work is handler-focused and benefits their handlers who have disabilities. Federal law generally permits qualified people who have disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals in all places of public accommodation. Service animals are not considered “pets.” You should never pet a service animal when it is working.

WHAT DO THERAPY DOGS DO?

Therapy dogs can be used in variety of different ways. They are used for:

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): This is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal is incorporated as an integral part of the clinical healthcare treatment process. AAT is delivered or directed by a professional health or human service provider.

Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) provide opportunities for motivational, educational and/or recreational benefits to enhance a person’s quality of life. AAA’s are provided by a professional, para-professional or volunteer who demonstrates knowledge about animals and the human populations with which they interact.

What does Research Show?

Studies are beginning to show that there are many health benefits from the interaction with animals:

In General:

- Petting an animal can reduce blood pressure in both healthy and hypertensive people.
- Research at the UCLA Medical Center has shown that a 12 minute visit with therapy dogs helped heart and lung function by lowering pressures, diminishing release of harmful hormones and decreasing anxiety among hospitalized heart failure patients. Benefits exceeded those that resulted from a visit with a human volunteer or from being left alone.
- Self esteem is enhanced through unconditional acceptance by the animal

For the Elderly and Disabled:

- Medication costs dropped from an average of \$3.80 per day to \$1.18 per patient per day in new nursing home facilities in New York, Missouri and Texas that had animals and plants as an integral part of their environment (1995).
- Increased social & verbal interaction has been noted among patients in a long-stay psychiatric population and in nursing homes.
- Decrease in depression has been also been noted in long term care and mental health patients
- Loneliness and anxiety are also reportedly reduced. Life in a long term care facility can be lonely and boring. A visit from a therapy dog can break up the routine and stimulate the mind. Touch is one of our last senses to go. Animals can give the elderly back the feeling of being a nurturer.
- Improved focus has been noted in Alzheimer's patients and persons suffering from clinical depression. When patients with dementia are given AAT, they become less agitated and more interested in social interaction. This is especially true in the late afternoon or at sundown when agitation tends to escalate.
- Memory functions are stimulated, especially in Alzheimer's patients
- Speech functions are aided and encouraged in stroke patients
- The mobility impaired become motivated to do simple physical activities such as petting and brushing
- Fine motor skills, wheelchair skills and standing balance have been noted to improve

For Children:

- Therapy dogs promote a general feeling of wellbeing (children, elderly, general hospital admits). Ten years ago, almost all nursing homes forbade animals. Now almost half have pet therapy programs.
- Animal interaction provides unconditional affection to those who lack it (persons in prisons and shelters, especially domestic violence shelters)
- Reading skills have been noted to improve in children who read to dogs
- Behavioral distress in children having fear or anxiety has been reduced during physical exams or to dental visits.

- children waiting to testify in court receive support and have less anxiety when allowed to spend time with an animal

WHAT MAKES A GOOD THERAPY DOG & HOW IS A DOG REGISTERED?

Temperament is the most important factor. A dog that is friendly and well behaved is on the way to certification. The dog who is trained to work around people who are bedridden or in wheelchairs, who is always under the handler's precise control, who can perhaps perform a few entertaining tricks is half way there. Obedience training is important, but unless the dog is friendly, all the training in the world will not make a therapy dog.

There are several organizations that register, license or certify therapy animals. In Marquette County, the therapy dogs are registered with a national organization, the Delta Society and their Pet Partner's Program. This an internationally recognized non-profit organization based in Portland, Oregon, whose mission is "to improve human health through service and therapy animals." (www.deltasociety.org) In order to become a pet partner through this organization, the handler and dog must complete a team evaluation. This testing involves situations a therapy dog team will most likely encounter in its work.

The Delta testing includes:

- Accepting a friendly stranger—demonstrates that the team can greet a stranger appropriately.
- Accepting petting—demonstrates that the team has suitable social skills and control for visits.
- Appearance and grooming—Demonstrates that the team's appearance is suitable for visits, the animal welcomes being groomed and examined and permits a stranger to do so
- Out for a walk—Demonstrates that the handler is in control of the animal and is the animal is comfortable moving with the handler
- Walking through a crowd—this exercise simulates a crowded corridor and demonstrates that the team can move politely in pedestrian traffic and under control in public places.
- Reaction to distractions—Shows the animal can remain confident when faced with common distracting situations
- Sit, down & stay on command
- Come when called

- Reaction to a neutral dog—Shows the animal can behave politely around an approaching dog, the handler is aware of the animal’s potential response to a dog and can help the animal succeed
- Overall Exam—this exercise demonstrates that the animal will accept and is comfortable being examined by a stranger and the handler knows how to present the animal on a visit and how to help the animal accept and welcome being touched all over.
- Exuberant and clumsy petting—The animal will maintain self-control and will tolerate clumsy petting by people who have differing physical abilities or who do not know proper etiquette around the animal and the handler can work with the animal to help it tolerate such attention.
- Restraining hug—Shows that the animal will accept or welcome restraining and that the handler can assist the animal to accept or welcome such a situation
- Staggering and gesturing individual—this exercise demonstrates that the animal will exhibit confidence when a person acting in an unusual manner approaches and then interacts with the team. The handler has the skills to interact with such a person while attending to the animal.
- Angry yelling—shows the animal will not be upset when someone exhibits angry emotions and the handler can help the animal tolerate such a situation.
- Bumped from behind—Demonstrates the animal is able to recover when a person bumps into it and that the handler can not only tolerate the animal being bumped, but can also assist the animal to recover.
- Crowded and petted by several people—This exercise demonstrates that the animal will tolerate crowding and petting by several people at once and the handler has the social skills to visit with a group of people while still attending to the animal and maintaining its well-being
- Leave it—the animal will ignore a toy left on the floor.
- Offered a treat—the animal will take a treat politely and gently.

In addition to the evaluation testing:

For the dog

- Dogs must be at least one year old
- Pass a general physical exam,
- Have a rabies vaccination as required by state law
- Be current on other immunizations as prescribed by your vet
- Be free from internal and external parasites.

For the Handler:

- Handlers must pass an open-book written test
- There is a charge to register as a pet partner team
 - \$75 for a 2 year registration
 - \$30 for additional handler on same dog
 - \$40 for pet partner without a dog
 - \$40 for pet partner with a disability
 - \$40 for a senior pet partner Teams must retest every 2 years.