

Welcome to

Cold Nose,
Warm Heart!

Therapy Pets

a program of the
Wythe-Bland

Animal Welfare League



Cold Nose Warm Heart Therapy Pets

Pet Visits in Wytheville, Wythe and Bland Counties
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Pet Guidelines & Requirements

Cold Nose, Warm Heart! Therapy Pets

Accepting Strangers: The pet will allow a friendly stranger to approach the volunteer in a normal, everyday situation. The pet will show no signs of shyness, aggression, or resentment.

Petting: With the pet at the volunteer's side, the pet must stay in place while a stranger pets the pet on its head and body. The pet will show no signs of shyness, aggression, or resentment.

Grooming: Pet should be clean and fresh smelling, teeth clean and nails trimmed. Coat should be brushed thoroughly before visits so that excessive hair isn't released during petting and handling. Collars and any clothing should also be clean.

Walking on Lead: Pet (dog) should be attentive and responsive to volunteer while on lead, not pulling excessively or darting back and forth. Volunteer should be able to hold pet calmly at side when needed.

Walking In Crowded Areas: Pet should be able to be walked through crowded areas on lead, calmly and without showing shyness or aggression or 'inappropriate' affection (ie: jumping, begging, etc)

Reaction To Other Pets: In the presence of other animals, the pet should remain calm and controlled. Limited interest (curiosity) is acceptable, but jumping, hiding, pulling and aggressive behavior is not.

Reaction to Distraction: Pet should react minimally to strange stimuli like beeping, slamming doors, wheelchairs, shouting, moaning, coughing, rolling carts and noisy areas. These situations are common in hospitals and nursing homes.



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Volunteer Requirements and Guidelines

Just as we require our pets to be clean and well behaved, our volunteers must be, too. Here's what we're looking for:

Appearance: Volunteers must be clean and neat, in clean clothes. Dress should be somewhat conservative -- jeans and t-shirts are OK, but stay away from short skirts, short-shorts or skimpy tops. Let's keep the focus on the pets, not us! If you have a CNWH or WBAWL T-shirt, that's great. A name tag should also be worn when provided.

Health: Volunteers should be in good health and must NEVER bring any communicable diseases into a hospital or nursing home. A simple cold can be deadly to older immune systems. Drugs and alcohol are also forbidden during visits, no exceptions: If you do, you're out.

Age: A parent or guardian must accompany volunteers under age 15 during visits. The minimum age for controlling a pet is 10 yrs -- younger volunteers may join in on the visit, but cannot be in control of the pet.

Leashes: The pet's leash must be clean and in good condition. No spiked or choke collars are allowed. (if your pet needs a spiked collar, it shouldn't be in the program) Very long leads or retractable leads are not permitted. **Max lead length is 6 feet.** Longer leads can become dangerous around medical equipment or trip unsteady legs. Also remember: NEVER GIVE THE LEASH TO SOMEONE ELSE! We are fully responsible for our pets and you must be in control at all times.

Behavior: The volunteer must provide a very positive experience for the patient/resident/client. Yelling at or hitting a pet will not be tolerated. Volunteers should bring small, neat, non-crumbly treats to reward the pet or encourage tricks. Most of all, **SMILE!** Don't be shy -- you will be the best thing that happens to that person all day. Entertain them! Talk to them! Brag about your pet! Ask the resident if they ever had a pet and let them dredge up old memories. Encourage the resident to touch your pet: older people may lose their sight or hearing, but they never lose the sense of touch. Pets are relaxing and can lower blood pressure just through petting. Let the magic do it's work!



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Volunteer Talking Points & Suggestions for Dialogue

Therapy pets can make a wonderful impact on patients and residents, both the sick and the elderly. The simple act of stroking an animal's fur can reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, improve mood, exercise stiff muscles, and distract patients from their pain. All this comes naturally from just showing up with your pet, but as a volunteer you have the opportunity to make the visit experience so much more.

One thing I've heard many times from many health care professionals is that the minds of elderly patients must be stimulated to remain healthy. The same is true for other patients. A person in pain can feel better just by talking to someone. To help keep lines of communication open, I've collected some ideas of what to talk about during visits:

Pet History: Where did your pet come from? Was it a stray or a rescue? Was it the runt of the litter? Was it a fat puppy? Was it uncoordinated? Was it a working dog? Did it survive an illness or accident?

Pet Attitude: Is your pet hyperactive? Lazy? Smart? Not so smart? Does it chase squirrels, birds, groundhogs, etc.? Is it the boss of the house? A scaredy-cat?

Breed Features: What traits makes your Pug a Pug? Why does your Greyhound have long legs? Why is your Sharpei wrinkled? Explain it all and point it out on your pet. Let the patient feel the floppy ears or long fur or short snout.

Anecdotes: Tell some stories about what your pet has done, good or bad, smart or dumb.

Tricks: Is your pet well-trained? Did they go to obedience class? Show off some moves, talk about hard or easy it was to train.

Costumes and Clothing: Dress them up! Put on a cute shirt or coat, a bandana, a fancy collar, a hat, bunny ears, bowties, or a Halloween costume Have fun with it.

Photos: Bring along pictures of your pet doing something fun, sitting with Santa, playing with your kids, at a pet show, etc.



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Therapy Dogs Seem to Boost Health of Sick and Lonely

Lara Suziedelis Bogle
for National Geographic News

August 8, 2002

Three years ago, Marcia Sturm was walking her golden retriever, Bo, near her Los Angeles home. An employee from nearby Cedars-Sinai Medical Center approached her and asked if she would be interested in bringing Bo to the hospital's AIDS unit to visit with patients. She was, and she and Bo have been a part of the POOCH (Pets Offer Ongoing Care and Healing) program ever since.

Bo is one of a growing number of "therapy dogs" visiting people in hospitals, nursing homes, mental health centers and shelters, where they do everything from lift spirits to assist with physical therapy.

Evidence of positive responses to such animal-assisted therapy has mostly been anecdotal. But a recent study on elderly nursing home patients now offer scientific support that brief weekly visits from man's best friend can have a positive therapeutic impact.

A Dog's-Eye View

Sturm and Bo visit the AIDS and cardiac wards at Cedars-Sinai every other week. Volunteering more frequently isn't possible because Bo must be thoroughly bathed before each visit, and more frequent bathing can cause skin problems.

"At first he was scared of the gurneys, and ran from an IV pole," said Sturm. But eventually, Bo got used to the strange noises and machines, and now "he knows the hospital better than I do."

Bo seems to love his job, and eagerly takes to his "uniform," a blue scarf around his neck that identifies him as a member of the POOCH program. "Once I take the scarf out, he knows" it's time for his shift at the hospital, Sturm said.

Once at the hospital, Sturm checks the book that lists patients who have requested a visit, and she and Bo begin their rounds. Because he is a big dog, Bo rarely gets into a patient's bed, but he's tall enough that he can rest his head on the bed for a rub.

Elderly patients tend to have fewer relatives and visitors, and are particularly charmed by Bo. While they may be too sick for lengthy visits, some are so happy to see him that it brings them to tears. Sturm said, "You'll hear them say, 'He likes me. He's my friend.'"

Not only does Bo cheer up patients in the units he visits; he's a big hit with the staff, too. He also helps break the tension of family members in the waiting room by taking their minds off their troubles for just a few minutes as they shower Bo with affection. All that attention makes for a dog-tired volunteer. "By the time we get home," said Sturm, "he's pooped."

It's not all fun and games, however. Bo's work is serious business, and he knows it. Sturm pays close attention to signals that Bo might be stressed, such as the time they were visiting a dying patient and Bo nudged at Sturm and headed for the door. But for the most part, Bo is happy to visit with anyone. "Dogs are not prejudiced," said Sturm. "They don't see color."

A Different Kind of Helper Dog

Most people are familiar with dogs that assist their blind or otherwise disabled owners. Therapy dogs offer a different kind of help. Some pay informal social visits to people to boost their spirits, while others work in a more structured environment with trained professionals like physical therapists and social workers to help patients reach clinical goals, such as increased mobility or improved memory.

The POOCH program at Cedars-Sinai is an informal one, started six years ago by licensed social worker Barbara Cowen, who was working as the volunteer coordinator in the AIDS unit.

In the program, a dog may stay with the patient for as little as five minutes or as long as an hour, depending on the patient's needs, according to Cowen. Currently there about 30 volunteers in the program, and there is a waiting list of people eager to join their ranks.

Therapy dogs can be of any size and breed. In the POOCH program, they range from a large golden retriever like Bo to a tiny Chihuahua named Bubbles.

Temperament is key to being a good therapy dog. Being well trained is not enough; it must also be easygoing and patient, and comfortable with strangers.

"They can't be the kind of dog that only responds to its owner," said Cowen.

National organizations such as Delta Society and Therapy Dogs International, Inc. evaluate potential therapy dogs and train and register the ones that pass muster.

Therapy dogs themselves must be monitored to ensure their own health and well-being. Handlers keep an eye out for signs of stress such as excessive panting, a tucked-under tail, or erratic behavior to make sure that dogs are not overburdened by their work.

A trial period to assess the dog's comfort level usually helps figure out which dogs will enjoy the work. Cowen said, "If the dog doesn't look like it's having a good time, it just can't make it."

Human-Animal Bonds

Cowen said that nurses have noticed that after a POOCH visit, patients sometimes have slower heart rates and they require less pain medication. These kinds of informal stories abound, but scientific studies of the effects of animal-assisted therapy are rare.

Researchers in St. Louis recently completed a rigorous, scientifically controlled study showing that brief weekly visits with a therapy dog reduced the loneliness of elderly patients in a long-term care facility. All the patients chosen for the study had indicated that they cared for pets earlier in their lives, and would like to do so again.

Marian R Banks of the Veterans Administration Medical Center in St. Louis and William A Banks of the St. Louis University School of Medicine reported the results of their study in the July issue of *Journal of gerontology: Medical Sciences*.

They used a scientific measure known as the UCLA Loneliness Scale to test 45 patients before and after the visits, concluding that patients who spent as little as half an hour a week with a therapy dog were significantly less lonely after only six weeks, when compared to a control group.

But what is it about the dogs that creates such a powerful affect?

"It's not that the animals have magic vibes coming out of them," said William Banks. "It's a quality-of-life issue. It's about giving people access to what they like and enjoy."

According to Banks, the elderly patients in the study were not confusing the therapy dogs with childhood pets, but being reminded of the joy animals had brought them in the past. "Their response seemed to be, 'I had forgotten what a pleasure this was!'"



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Companion Animals as Social Facilitators

Although some pet owners are happy and fulfilled alone with their pets, other pet owners find their companion animals are important in helping them meet and interact with other people. Certainly meeting other people is a precursor to developing relationships that can grow into meaningful, health-enhancing, social support, and several studies have focused on the role of pets as social facilitators. For example, Hunt, Hart & Gomulkiewicz (1992) explored the role of small animals (rabbit and turtle) in social interactions between strangers in a park. This study found that in a community setting without special effort or obvious need on the part of the experimenter, the presence of small animals initiated approaches to their owners by unfamiliar children and adults and conversations between them.

In a related ethnographic study Robins, Sanders & Cahill (1991) looked at the dynamics of inclusion among dog owners in a public park. The authors conclude that dogs expose their owners to encounters with strangers, facilitate interaction among individuals previously unacquainted, and help establish trust among the newly acquainted. Dogs, then, can be an antidote for the human anonymity often found in contemporary society, and can help build friendships. One explanation for such behavior is that civil inattention is breached when there is some obvious similarity between individuals. A logical extension of this is that even people who are dissimilar in race, education, or socioeconomic status can find common ground for understanding and relying on each other.

--from The Healthy Pleasure of Their Company: Companion Animals and Human Health

Karen Allen, School of Medicine, State University of New York at Buffalo

This study demonstrates again how the presence of a pet can act as a bridge and open communication between people of very different backgrounds.



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A Case Study by Mary Burch, PhD, in Pet Therapy Assisting a Child in Foster Care

Aaron was a five-year-old child who had been placed in foster care by a protective services agency. His mother and father had long histories of alcohol and substance abuse, and it was decided that the home setting was not appropriate for a young child. Aaron had curly dark hair and bronze-colored skin; he was a beautiful child. A worker at the foster home called and asked me to visit with one of my dogs.

Aaron was depressed and would not talk to his counselor about his troubles. I took my Welsh Springer Spaniel, Sarge, on the visit. Sarge is a reserved dog and is comfortable working in therapy settings with reserved people. Aaron and Sarge were almost instant buddies. We all sat on the ground, and Aaron began to gently pet Sarge. Sarge rolled over and offered his tummy for petting. "So how are you doing?" I asked. "Fine," was Aaron's response. "How's school?" I said. "Fine," was Aaron's response. I didn't push him to talk. We sat for a long time saying nothing. Finally, Aaron said, "This is a beautiful dog. When did you get him?" I explained the early childhood version of responsible breeding and how I contacted a woman who knew so much about these dogs, and I waited almost a whole year for a puppy. "There's another place to get a dog," Aaron said. He then told me about the animal shelter. He saw it when his family took their pets to the shelter a few days before dropping off Aaron in foster care. The similarity of Aaron and the family pets was too close. I blinked back tears and forced myself to keep my emotions under control.

At the age of five, Aaron had seen a lot and was wise beyond his years. He, too, had some level of understanding of a culture where children and animals were expendable. "The animal shelter is a nice place," he continued. "They feed the animals, and they give them water, and they stay inside. But it is really sad because nobody wants the animals at the shelter, and they don't have a family to love them." It was quite clear that Aaron was talking about himself. He was in a foster placement where he was given a bedroom and good food. But Aaron wanted a family. He was not ready to talk to a counselor who asked him direct, difficult questions. Yet when Aaron talked about my therapy dog and other dogs he knew in the world, he could make his own feelings easily understood.

--from Wanted! Animal Volunteers by Mary R Burch, PhD

This case study is a good example of how a troubled individual, bound up tightly with emotional distress, may let down his defenses in the presence of a therapy animal or use the animal as an emotional surrogate.



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Animal Assisted Activities and the Growth of Nurturing Behaviors in Children

“...child-rearing values within our society tend to focus on the need to foster independence, initiative and assertion. The need for children to care for others, to learn how to contribute to the well-being of others outside of themselves is not well recognized by parents or by educators.”

“Experiences of interconnectedness with animals and with nature may be an important context within which more nurturing children may grow to be more nurturing adults.”

“...early relationships create an “internal working model“ or mental representation of parenting and being parented, which is carried forward in time and place to form a template for other relationships. This idea is now being fruitfully used to explain the intergenerational transmission of abuse. This line of research challenges us to look back at children as a sort of savings account into which nurturing and being nurtured experiences are stored for later withdrawal.”

“...we have evidence that nurturing animals and plants may be particularly beneficial for boys. This is because caring for babies and young children becomes associated in children’s minds with “women’s work“ or “what mommies do“ as early as 3 years of age and by age 4-5, boys become less interested in infants and their care and even avoidant of baby care experiences. However, we have found no such association in children’s minds when it comes to caring for pets or for plants and no sex differences in behavior as children develop. Because pet care is “gender neutral,” it may be a particularly useful training ground for the development of nurturance in boys.”.

--from Fostering Inter-Connectedness With Animals and Nature:
The Developmental Benefits For Children Gail F Melson, PhD.



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Skills you can teach using Animal-Assisted Activities in Developmental Disabilities Settings

Cognitive / Knowledge

- Recalling information about animals and breeds
- Remembering and naming the animal and volunteer
- Telling how a particular animal should be cared for

Gross Motor (big muscles)

- Walking with a dog or cat
- Walking to get to the therapy animal
- Throwing a ball or toy to a dog
- Running to get a ball for a dog
- Hitting at a suspended toy for a cat
- Passing around a cage or basket of a small animal
- Moving a wheelchair to get to an animal

Fine Motor (hands)

- Brushing or combing the therapy animal
- Fastening a leash, collar or coat
- Getting a treat from a box or package
- Giving treats to animals (under close supervision)
- Opening contracted hands to pet animal

Speech / Communication

- Saying animal's name
- Imitating animal sounds
- Giving a verbal command to the therapy animal
- Talking to animal (privately or supervised)
- Tell others about therapy animal
- Answer questions about therapy animal

--from Wanted! Animal Volunteers by Mary R Burch, PhD.



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Pet Team Info Sheet

Volunteer

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____ E-mail: _____

Emergency

Contact: _____

Pet Name: _____

Species: _____ Gender: M F NM SF

Description (breed, color, size...)

Pet

History: _____

Tricks or Special

Talents: _____

Last Vaccination: _____

Vet: _____

Tag # _____

