



## Therapy Animals and Aging Adults

Have you considered bringing therapy animal visitation to your retirement community, senior center or nursing home? Pet Partners is the premier therapy animal program providing qualified volunteers in settings just like yours.

### What are the benefits?

- Improved mood, decreased depression, decreased loneliness, facilitation of memory
- Increase in socializing between nursing home residents and staff which is frequently documented to continue after the visit has ended
- Increased physical activity from stretching to pet, and co-walking with the therapy animal team

### Examples of Interactions

- Astute handlers will have different ways to have clients interact with their animal companions, although petting remains a time-honored way for people to engage with animals.
- From reminiscing about animals that one had as a child, to speaking with the handler about their animal, aging adults can engage in social activities in many ways through therapy animal visits, and frequently for longer amounts of time than with other activities.
- Even the observation of the therapy animal can be a positive experience.
- No one is required to be visited. In fact, the ability to decline an interaction can be powerful.

### How to Select Teams

In addition to meeting the basic standards for all therapy animal teams, look for other key characteristics for your particular setting.

- With this clientele, animals of any size who are calm and controlled in their movements are best suited to these quieter environments.
- It's about more than just the animals. A handler who enjoys making conversation with elders will amplify the positive impact of visits.
- Education is important. Handlers with access to continuing education about Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, such as that provided by Pet Partners, will be best prepared to deliver safe and effective visits.

### Learn More

- For details about Pet Partners' program and policies which promote safe and effective visits, visit [www.petpartners.org/facilities](http://www.petpartners.org/facilities)

# Why Choose a Pet Partners Team?

## Handler Training

- All Pet Partners handlers complete training prior to registration and have access to continuing education opportunities.
- Pet Partners offers the only handler training on infection prevention publicly endorsed by the Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA).
- Pet Partners offers a canine body language course consistent with SHEA guidelines.
- Pet Partners' education underscores the importance of healthy handlers and animals.

## Handler and Animal Assessment

- All Pet Partners handlers must pass a written assessment at the time of registration demonstrating knowledge of best practices for safe and effective visits.
- Pet Partners teams are required to pass an in-person, role play based evaluation every two years, more frequently than recommended guidelines, to continue visiting.

## Animal Welfare

- The core tenet of Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program is “you are your animal’s best advocate,” also known as YAYABA™. This requires handlers to modify or end interactions animals no longer enjoy, consistent with animal welfare guidelines.
- Pet Partners limits all visits to no longer than two hours, consistent with recommendations to limit overwork and fatigue.
- To register and renew, Pet Partners teams submit animal health screening forms signed by a veterinarian to ensure the overall health of the participating animal.
- Pet Partners ascribes to a relationship based handler-animal support model to be used during visits, a skill on which handlers are assessed during the evaluation process, known to Pet Partners handlers as PETS™.

## Safety Standards

- To ensure that policies reflect current scientific information, Pet Partners relies on veterinary advisors, including those with specialization in epidemiology.
- Based on their guidance, requirements for rabies vaccination and grooming are purposefully stringent.
- Policies prohibit raw protein diets, animals with compromised health, and protection dogs.
- Pet Partners has an easily accessible system for incident reporting and a thorough resolution process to determine if a team can resume visiting. When combined with training, Pet Partners has a very low incidence of serious accidents.

