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Pet Partners’ mission is to improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond.

In 2017, about 3 million visits will be made across all 50 states.

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PUBLICATION CREDITS:

Editor: Annie Peters

Contributors: Mary Bohmke, Mary Margaret Callahan, Steve Dale, Linda Dicus, Steven Feldman, Dr. William McCulloch, Brynna Morgan, Annie Peters, Traci Pryor, Elisabeth Van Every, Dr. David Williams

Graphic Design: Laxman2Creative

Cover Photo: Dr. Elizabeth Lynch

Pet Partners
425.679.3500
www.petpartners.org
A Letter from the President and CEO Annie Peters

As we close out this anniversary year, we take pride in our past but look to the future. We had a gratifying celebration, education and networking event in Bellevue in September. How wonderful to meet so many dedicated volunteers and to hear stories about visits and the amazing animals that make them possible.

Some of these animals come into our lives from difficult beginnings. Earlier this year we released a Position Statement on Rescue Animals as Therapy Animals. The condensed version? “Rescue animals can make great therapy animals if that’s your goal, but remember you must be prepared to offer that animal a forever home.”

You Are Your Animal’s Best Advocate (YAYABA™) isn’t solely for therapy animal visits.

When I first started at Pet Partners, a volunteer team evaluator jokingly said, “When I get a request from someone to evaluate a cat that they think would make a great therapy animal, I first tell them to make sure it’s really a cat.” (I’m sorry I can’t remember who said it—if it was you, please email me.) While we can tease and celebrate the differences of our animals, how wonderful that some cats do indeed make it into our program. As I’m reminded sometimes, not every nursing home resident had a dog; some are “cat people.” We recently signed an agreement with The International Cat Association (TICA) in the hope of encouraging more cats suitable for therapy animal work to get registered.

TICA was not our only international effort. With support from our partners at Elanco Animal Health through funding provided by the Eli Lilly and Company Foundation, we trained 12 new evaluators from seven countries: Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Poland, Romania, South Korea, and Switzerland. To say our reputation preceded us would be an understatement. One new evaluator teared up with pride when speaking about what it meant to him to be affiliated with Pet Partners. As this effort takes hold, we look forward to sharing more with you next year.

Domestically, we continue to advance our reputation as the leader in the field with new initiatives such as Walk with Me™, a pilot project around a special Youth Endorsement evaluation, and the launch of our advocacy efforts. If you’re not already signed up as a registered advocate, please stop reading and sign up right now at www.petpartners.org so that your voice can be heard. You’ll receive action alerts to let your elected officials know about the power of the human-animal bond on human health and well-being. It’s not difficult—we’ll provide you with the tools and messaging. You add your own story and reason for being passionate about the power of animals.

As you read this issue, take a moment to review the information that Dr. Williams is sharing about the importance of standards for therapy animal visits and how Pet Partners meets or exceeds these standards in every category. From client safety to animal welfare, the Pet Partners difference matters. As part of our advocacy efforts, you’ll see us being much more vocal about the importance of standards to protect long term access for all our registered Pet Partners teams.

I’ve commented before that for most of the types of therapy animals we register, they just don’t live long enough. So many of these wonderful animals have crossed the rainbow bridge this year. Our hearts go out to all of you. I want to take a moment in closing to recognize one dog who overcame negative stereotypes to excel as a therapy dog. From a difficult start in life, Salvadore was especially in tune with people facing personal crisis and a regular visitor to locked psychiatric wards. Big Sal is a testament that rescue animals can make great therapy animals. Thank you to Jackie Gunby for giving Sal a home and a purpose. May we all be as fortunate as Sal and find our purpose in life.
Dr. Elizabeth Lynch knows dogs. She’s a veterinarian, a dog owner, a participant in agility, freestyle, and barn-hunt competitions, and a long-time Pet Partners handler and evaluator, so she has plenty of experience with dog behavior and what makes for a good therapy animal. She’s also a strong advocate of adopting rescue animals and judging a dog based on temperament and abilities, not on breed. So when she decided to get a new dog to take over from her retiring therapy dog Sophie, she chose to look for a rescue dog, feeling certain that the right candidate was waiting for her at a shelter.

After browsing Petfinder, she identified a dog named Coco as a possible candidate. “I thought that I saw something good in his face,” she says. Elizabeth and her husband, along with Sophie, paid a visit to the shelter to meet Coco. The shelter attendant walked her back to Coco’s kennel, opened the door and slipped a nylon lead over Coco’s head, and then, she says, “He just SHOT OUT of the kennel!”

Once Elizabeth had the leash, Coco pulled so hard that he pulled her out onto the street and straight past the car where her husband and Sophie were waiting to meet him—“even treats wouldn’t stop him!” Finally, after going to the end of the street and back, Elizabeth was able to get Coco to slow down. Her husband saw the goodness in Coco’s face too, and Sophie indicated her approval. Coco became the newest member of the Lynch family.

Coco had been surrendered to the shelter by his previous owners because they didn’t have time to care for him. They had kept him confined in a basement, without much attention or exercise, and when Elizabeth met him he was bowlegged and missing a lot of hair. This lack of attention had caused him to become wild and starved for activity and attention. When they got him home, they confined him in the kitchen, and he jumped up on the kitchen table! Elizabeth’s children promptly dubbed him “Coco-NUT” because he was so nutty, and the new name stuck.

In his first weeks with his new family, Coconut continued to be a challenge to the idea of him being a therapy animal. On his first visit to the park, he jumped out of the car before Elizabeth could even get the lead on him and she had to chase him down. Normal walks did nothing to reduce his incredible energy, so Elizabeth trained him to walk on a treadmill; he could go for as long as 45 minutes before he’d be ready to stop. Hoping to harness his energy and give him the idea of working at a task, she then trained him to pull a wagon with her kids riding in it, uphill, for as long as he could go.

But these unusual training circumstances demonstrated that Coconut had the capability to learn and pick up new skills. Still believing in that “something good” she saw in his face, Elizabeth enrolled Coconut in obedience classes. The process didn’t go smoothly; Coconut had to repeat the Foundation class once and the Skills class multiple times. He still had issues with too much energy and a lack of focus. But Elizabeth was willing to be patient and work with him, and to uncover his true abilities. She noticed he had a strong propensity for scents, and began nosework training with him. This seemed to focus him, and his skills and energy finally started clicking together.

One year after being adopted into the Lynch family, Coconut received his Canine Good Citizen certification. And the care and
attention the Lynches gave him saw his legs straighten out and his hair grow in again. In the center of his chest, the hair formed a small golden heart. “It was a sign,” Elizabeth says.

In April 2013, Elizabeth and Coconut became a registered Pet Partners therapy animal team. His tremendous energy seems to bring with it a tremendous capacity for empathy and attention to those he visits. According to Elizabeth, he has a very special ability to know who could use a visit from him even if they haven’t said so. And he always knows when the family of a patient needs his attention just as much as the patient does. When Elizabeth puts his vest on him, Coconut becomes calm and focused, knowing that it’s time to work.

In the four and a half years since Coconut began his therapy dog career, he’s proven himself to be a superstar, making multiple visits each month at a variety of facilities. During the school year, he works as a reading therapy dog for two classes, kindergarten and 5th grade. He has also participated in a summer program for developmentally disabled children that is administered through the Greenwich Public School system. He visits dozens of patients each week in two hospitals. He is the only dog allowed in the medical ICU at one hospital, as well as the cardiology unit. He visits weekly with cancer patients at a chemotherapy infusion center. And he also makes sure he has time for the nurses and staff, because they need attention too. “It’s a big workload for a dog,” Elizabeth says.

To make sure that this workload doesn’t take a toll, Coconut gets plenty of time with his “hobby” activities. He enjoys dancing to the beat in canine freestyle, participating in Rally Freestyle and learning new tricks. He is a Nosework Level 3 Elite dog and achieved his Barn Hunt Open title. These activities allow him to let off that tremendous energy and have fun, so that he can be focused when it’s time to work.

Elizabeth makes a point of sharing Coconut’s history and his start as a shelter dog. She loves having the opportunity to talk about his background. She says many people are surprised to learn that he came from a shelter, and that he’s a mixed-breed dog. According to her, any dog can be a “success story” when you identify their abilities and strengths, and are patient in bringing those out.

“Many people say, ‘My dog could never do that,’” Elizabeth says. “My response is, many dogs can do this with the right attention and training.” And she couldn’t have a better partner to demonstrate that than Coconut, the dog who went from a wild shelter mutt to a superstar therapy animal.
Adopting a Pet for Animal-Assisted Interventions

By Steve Dale

Most dogs and cats found in animal shelters are there through no fault of their own. Sometimes their owners have died, moved, or do not have the financial resources to properly care for them. Other animals found in rescues might have been relinquished because of behavior issues. But the behavior problem may have been intertwined with the pet’s previous household.

Many shelter animals, regardless of their reasons for being relinquished, are suitable to be trained for animal-assisted therapy programs. The idea that animals must be raised and trained from birth to work in a therapy setting is simply untrue.

Rudy

A classically energetic and hardworking border collie, Rudy was given up by a senior citizen whose spouse passed away. The surviving owner claimed that her 4-year-old dog was acting out of control since her spouse’s passing. Without an outlet for energy or employment, the dog became destructive. At her age, and in a fragile emotional state, the elderly woman gave up the dog. However, Rudy turned out to be an ideal dog for an animal-assisted intervention program. He was gentle, great with children, and quite obedient. He also craved work. His new household reported he was their “best dog ever.”

Rudy is a great example of a rescued pet who was able to adjust and become a therapy animal. However, not all re-homed animals are suitable for therapy work, though that doesn’t mean they don’t make loving pets.

Borris

Borris is a gorgeous 55-pound shepherd mix. People would stop all the time and ask about him. Unfortunately, Borris backed away from strangers when they stopped. His owners adopted him specifically thinking about taking him to a local children’s hospital to work as a therapy dog. They were so intent on the idea that they took Borris to a dog training class. This made Borris a more obedient dog, but he still backed off when strangers approached. Determined, they hired a certified dog behavior consultant, and Borris improved immensely.

The instructor, though, offered the cold hard truth: Borris could do this, but he would be much happier not being greeted by multiple strangers, particularly with all the medical machinery around. Borris’ family got the message, and eventually adopted a second dog more suitable to visit the children’s hospital.

Like us, all animals are different. Some are introverts, some are extroverts. Some enjoy being around strangers and letting different people pet them, others don’t. Some dogs, like Borris, could transition in time to become wonderful therapy animals, although it might not be something that comes naturally to them.

Adopting a pet is a magnificent gesture, of course. If you are intent on using that animal for therapy work, talk to adoption counselors about the animal’s history (which may be unknown) and, most importantly, the animal’s demeanor at the shelter or foster home prior to adoption. Many of these animals can thrive in roles as therapy pets.
A Shared Vision for the Human-Animal Bond

Ask any pet owner and they’ll agree: The relationship they have with their pets is powerful—their pets make them feel better. Ask a therapy animal handler and you’ll be sure to get the same response along with stories of how their animals made a positive impact on someone’s life. We know from firsthand accounts, anecdotes, social media, and even local news stories that pets and therapy animals bring joy and comfort to so many people. Every registered Pet Partners team can tell you a story about the life-changing impact of the human-animal bond.

Their stories are powerful, but they are not enough if we truly want to make society a better, healthier place for pets and people. Beyond the personal stories and strong feelings of animal lovers lies the science. For veterans with post-traumatic stress to have ready access to service dogs; for more hospitals and nursing homes to promote high-quality therapy animal programs; and for more public spaces and housing options to more readily accommodate companion animals, scientific research documenting the positive benefits of human-animal interaction must be part of the equation for policymakers, health care professionals and other decision-makers.

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) is proud to partner with Pet Partners to share knowledge, resources, and a common vision. We believe that the healing power of pets must be better understood and accepted as a key contributor to human health and wellness—benefitting people at all stages in life, from early childhood development to healthy aging and everything in between. Pet Partners teams can be incredibly powerful advocates for this shared vision.

For its part, HABRI funds scientific research, which provides the underpinning for a more pet-friendly world and the expanded presence of therapeutic animal-assisted interventions. HABRI-funded research projects broadly examine the impacts of animal-assisted therapies, interventions and human-animal interaction. A few examples include studies that have found the following:

- Families with a child with autism spectrum disorder who had a pet dog experienced more family harmony and less parental stress than non-dog-owning families.
- The inclusion of therapy dogs in social skills training for children with autism was effective in facilitating a greater level of change in social skills, perspective taking, and decreased feelings of isolation and depression in the children.
- Therapy dog visits to children undergoing cancer treatment had a calming effect on the patients and helped reduce anxiety in their parents.

This year, HABRI is funding four new projects that can move both the knowledge and the practice of human-animal interaction forward:

- **The University of Western Australia**: The health and developmental benefits of companion animals for young children: advancing the evidence base
- **College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Missouri**: Shelter cat adoption in families of children with autism: impact on children’s social skills and anxiety as well as cat stress
- **Texas Tech University**: Integration of AAI and applied behavior analysis to improve academic performance in children with intellectual and/or developmental disability
- **University of Georgia Research Foundation**: Healthy Aging: human companionship through fostering felines

Good research takes time, and the outcomes are far from certain, but one day people could point to these studies as evidence that fostering shelter cats can have a positive impact on alleviating loneliness and social isolation in the elderly; that incorporating therapy dogs into applied behavior analysis can help to improve interventions for disabled children; that adopting a shelter cat can improve the social skills of children with autism; and that companion animals can facilitate improved health and development outcomes in children and families.

The field of human-animal bond research is growing and has tremendous momentum, which is important for organizations such as Pet Partners. When you combine solid science with the impactful, paws-on-the-ground program offered by Pet Partners, we can make an even greater impact for so many people who can benefit from the healing presence of animals in their lives.

Steven Feldman is Executive Director of the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI). To learn more about HABRI, please visit www.habri.org.
Raising Cane’s: Raising Funds for the Therapy Animal Program

Raising Cane’s Chicken Fingers recently held a very special nationwide fundraiser in support of Pet Partners. Launched on National Therapy Animal Day™, the campaign gave Raising Cane’s customers all over the country the chance to purchase a limited-edition plush Cane II dog wearing her therapy vest. Cane II, Raising Cane’s mascot, dedicated her life to visiting others as a registered Pet Partners therapy dog with her owner and handler Gwen Graves. “For years and years, she and my wife Gwen spent several hundred hours visiting children and adults at hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes throughout the country,” said Todd Graves, Founder & CEO of Raising Cane’s. “We will always remember Cane II.”

“Cane passed unfortunately last year after a long and wonderful life,” explained Gwen. “We wanted to honor her many years of service as a therapy dog. Our customers bought 10,000 Raising Cane’s therapy dog plush puppies to support this cause.”

Gwen knows first-hand the stress and worry that comes with a family member facing a health challenge. “This is so near and dear to my heart. When I was very young my brother was diagnosed with a brain tumor,” said Gwen. “He spent many years actually in and out of the hospital. I always knew that I wanted to give back in a hospital setting in some way.”

Cane’s personality and love of people helped Gwen to determine that becoming a Pet Partners therapy animal team was how she was going to give back. “Cane was the kindest, sweetest dog ever!” exclaimed Gwen. “I just knew she was meant to be a therapy dog.”

Gwen and Cane became a registered therapy animal team with Pet Partners, achieving a Complex rating that reflects their skills and strong bond. They volunteered together for many years at Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital in Baton Rouge, through the Tiger HATS program at LSU. “We would drive up to the hospital and Cane’s face would light up,” shared Gwen. “You could always just tell she was ready!”

Gwen has never forgotten one specific visit, even remembering the location of the exact hospital room. “We once visited a small child who was severely bitten by her neighbor’s dog,” said Gwen. “I was very nervous for her to see a dog for the first time since she was bitten.” It only took a few minutes for the young patient to connect with Cane, and even give her a hug. “I just thought, thank goodness she is not going to be afraid of all dogs for the rest of her life,” said Gwen. “Cane brought her some comfort.”

A generous donation of $100,000 was presented to Pet Partners last May in Baton Rouge, LA at the hospital where Gwen and Cane II made frequent patient visits. Pet Partners CEO Annie Peters attended the ceremony to accept the donation on behalf of Pet Partners’ thousands of volunteers. “With this generous contribution, from everyone who purchased a plush animal to the Graves family, we will be able to recruit and support more evaluators and volunteers so there can be more Pet Partners visits across the United States,” said Annie.
Earlier this year, The American Journal of Infection Control published “Animal Assisted Interventions: A National Survey of health and safety policies in hospitals, eldercare facilities, and therapy animal organizations.” The study concluded that “a lack of healthcare requirements among therapy animal organizations illustrates an important gap in knowledge and the potential for harm. Health care facilities must recognize this wide spectrum of policies amongst therapy animal organizations and become versed in questions for handlers before admittance to the facility.”

As a physician practicing in emergency rooms, the father of a 16-year-old registered Pet Partners handler, and a Pet Partners registered handler myself, I am uniquely qualified to see this situation from both sides. It is Pet Partners’ commitment to client safety that made it the right choice for us. And despite my role as Chief Medical Officer, we received no special treatment during the registration and evaluation process. My daughter Lauren and I were required to take the same basic education and pass the same evaluation test as all other teams, first with our Bouvier des Flandres, Gia, and now with our 2-year-old goldendoodle, Buttercup.

As physicians, we learn early on the golden rule of the medical care giver: First, do no harm.

We recognize that even the best intentions can prove disastrous if we do not recognize the many ways we can inadvertently put our patients in harm’s way.

That is why hospitals are so vigilant about infection control. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, hospital-associated infections constitute the biggest risk to patients when admitted to the hospital, affecting two million patients per year. These infections cause 90,000 deaths and add over five billion dollars a year in extra costs to patient care. (JP Burke NEJM 348:7 Feb 13, 2003). This is why as Pet Partners, we are also vigilant in our hygiene standards.

Furthermore, our rigorous and ongoing health requirements for pets and evaluation standards for teams ensure that the principles of not putting either the animal or the patient in harm’s way are strictly adhered to. This is why we ensure that each animal has a suitable temperament for animal-assisted interventions and is in good health, and that both the animal and handler are re-evaluated every two years.

I am concerned that while the interest in therapy animal teams is growing, there is a proliferation of individuals registered with local organizations lacking in standards, and some national organizations may also be lacking in meeting these critical standards. Lauren, Buttercup, and I want to keep advocating for high standards and educating health care administrators, risk managers, and volunteer coordinators about the importance of knowing who is in your facility so that we can protect this wonderful activity for all of us. We hope you will join us in taking every opportunity to educate the decision makers in order to close the knowledge gap and preserve access for all of us who visit as registered Pet Partners teams.

EDUCATE & ADVOCATE

Dr. David Williams discusses the importance of consistent and rigorous health and behavior standards for therapy animals.

Pet Partners and the Importance of National Standards

Pet Partners and the Importance of National Standards
Dear Colleagues,

What a joy to attend Professionalizing the Passion and our 40th Anniversary Celebration with so many of you. Speaking on behalf of the founders, our vision was realized because of your involvement. Seeing the dedication that our Pet Partners have and hearing so many stories of how you are making a difference in your community was more than we had hoped for. I know there are thousands more of you who were unable to attend but who are equally as passionate about sharing your animal to promote human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. Being widely recognized as the gold standard only continues because you uphold the highest standards for client safety and animal welfare on every visit you make.

The conference was an opportunity for me to see old friends and to meet the up and coming researchers and leaders in the field of animal-assisted interventions. My sincere thanks to the wonderful speakers, none of whom asked for an honorarium. I’m proud of our Pet Partners staff team at HQ for organizing such a well-executed event.

You have made our vision a reality.

In the bond,

Dr. William McCulloch

Conference Overview

Pet Partners was proud to host our 2017 conference, Professionalizing the Passion, September 8-9 in Bellevue, WA. With 21 leaders in the field of animal-assisted interventions presenting sessions ranging from research findings to personal development, the event featured a strong continuing education focus, while also providing opportunities for networking and a celebration of Pet Partners’ 40th anniversary.

Highlights of the conference included the following:

- The opening keynote with Dr. Patricia McConnell, titled Our Special Connection with Other Animals, which addressed the joy we receive from our animals as well as our responsibility to them.
- Expert panels, including a session on Therapy Animal Health and Welfare, underscoring Pet Partners’ commitment to the safety and well-being of our partners.
- Research presentations by Dr. Nancy Gee about how animals help students learn, and Dr. Maggie O’Hanlon about AAI for autism spectrum disorder.
• Dr. Rebecca Johnson presenting on dog walking for health, the supporting research behind our Walk With Me™ special initiative.

• A presentation by Steve Feldman of HABRI about the impact of the Human-Animal Bond on Society.

Dr. Aubrey Fine hosted the conference’s Friday evening dinner, where he announced a new scholarship opportunity for Pet Partners volunteers, The Magic Award. Established by Dr. Fine, this scholarship will be available annually to help fund a volunteer’s personal and professional development in the field of AAI. Applications for 2018 will be accepted through the Volunteer Center on the Pet Partners website until December 1.

We were also thrilled that Dr. Bill McCulloch, one of the three original founders of the Delta Society (now Pet Partners), was able to join us with his family to celebrate the organization’s 40th anniversary. A special retrospective video was created for the event, which can be seen on the Pet Partners YouTube channel.

We wish to thank PetSmart Charities and Aetna, whose generous support made this event possible.

All in all, it was a weekend that celebrated how much the field has grown, and inspired us for the work that remains to be done. We look forward to continuing to ensure safe and effective therapy animal interactions for all those who may benefit.
Ways You Can Support Pet Partners and Our Mission

**Delta Giving Society**

40 years ago, Pet Partners began as a small organization called the Delta Society. We grew to be the leader in animal-assisted interventions due to the dedication of a few forward-thinking doctors, veterinarians, and psychologists. Pet Partners provides an opportunity for donors to continue this legacy of innovation through involvement in the Delta Giving Society. This group of supporters donates $1,000 or more per year to sustain Pet Partners into our next 40 years. Please join us in providing Pet Partners with opportunities to advance our programs and advocate for the human-animal bond by becoming a member of the Delta Giving Society.

**Caring Community**

Are you interested in helping Pet Partners further its mission, but the thought of relinquishing assets you may need during your lifetime is prohibitive? A simple and versatile way to retain your assets during your lifetime while ensuring that Pet Partners can continue its important work well into the future is by making a charitable bequest. It’s as simple as including Pet Partners as a named beneficiary in your will. Please use our legal name, Pet Partners. Our Federal Tax I.D. number is 91-1158281.

Advantages of creating a bequest include:

- You retain control and use of your assets during your lifetime.
- You can modify your bequest if your circumstances change.
- Gifts from your estate may be exempt from federal estate taxes.

**Workplace Giving**

Did you know that many employers will match donations to Pet Partners? Some employers will even provide matching gifts for hours spent volunteering. Submitting your donation or volunteer hours for a match can make a significant impact for all therapy animal teams.

How can you donate through your workplace?

- Ask your HR department about matching gift options.
- If you work for the federal government, you can donate to Pet Partners through the Combined Federal Campaign by referencing #11650. You can choose how much you would like to contribute per paycheck, making donating easier than ever.
- Many smaller companies will allow employees to donate some of their paycheck during the holiday season for a match.
I have seen concern about rescue animals or dogs of certain breeds becoming therapy animals. Does Pet Partners have a position on these issues?

Pet Partners believes that adopted animals from shelters can make great therapy animals. Most homeless animals are adolescents or adults, and reputable organizations will perform a behavior assessment before making an animal available for adoption. Additionally, most animal shelters spend time getting to know their animals so that they can make good matches to ensure a forever home.

Shelter animals might not have the skills required to pass the Pet Partners team evaluation; obedience training can build these skills and a trusting relationship as well. In addition to focusing on the animal developing reliable basic obedience skills in a variety of environments, the handler should be learning to predict their animal’s responses to stimuli, read their animal’s body language, and adjust situations accordingly.

As far as breeds for therapy animals, Pet Partners recognizes that successful therapy animals possess a combination of important traits, including obedience skills, an affiliative nature, and a strong bond with their handlers. These traits make these animals appropriate for interacting with the general public and more reliable in animal-assisted interventions. Pet Partners has extensive experience in evaluating therapy dog teams and has observed no breed differences in therapy dog effectiveness. We are not aware of any evidence suggesting that any breed or breed mix is unsuitable to serve as a therapy dog.

The Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program registers dogs of any breed or mix of breeds able to demonstrate the skills and aptitude for therapy animal work through the rigorous Pet Partners evaluation process. This team evaluation must be repeated for renewal as a therapy animal team every two years. We encourage everyone, from facilities receiving therapy animal visits to cities and municipalities, to assess dogs individually rather than by a breed, breed type, or physical characteristics.

All of our position statements are available on our website. You can find our Position Statements page at petpartners.org/learn/position-statements/

I’ve heard about a new Youth Endorsement evaluation. Can you tell me more about this?

We’re excited to offer this new option for our Pet Partners teams! Pet Partners has started a pilot for a Youth Endorsement for registered dog teams. This endorsement involves a supplemental team evaluation, with exercises designed to establish a team’s appropriateness with youth. The evaluation is considered an endorsement—something desirable to have, but not required—in order to visit with youth populations.

The Youth Endorsement evaluation is currently in the pilot phase, where we can collect information on how the evaluation is working and potentially make course corrections before finalizing the procedure and making the evaluation more widely available.

12 team evaluators in regions around the U.S. were chosen for the pilot phase. Once testing has been completed and any adjustments have been made, the goal is to roll out this evaluation procedure to all licensed team evaluators. Additional training may be required before an evaluator could begin using this evaluation procedure.

Any currently registered team in an area with a participating evaluator can sign up for a Youth Endorsement evaluation via the Pet Partners website, the same way you would sign up for a standard team evaluation. During the pilot phase, Pet Partners will periodically email teams in areas where a participating evaluator in the pilot is present, letting them know that the Youth Endorsement evaluation is available in their areas. There is a $25 fee for a Youth Endorsement evaluation.
The Youth Endorsement evaluation is for non-carried dogs only at present. Once we have sufficient information from the pilot phase, we'll begin expanding to other animals.

Right now, the Youth Endorsement evaluation is a standalone process; teams may not do a standard evaluation and Youth Endorsement evaluation back to back. We want to ensure that participating dogs have a baseline level of suitability before having access to children during the evaluation. In addition, there are different equipment/assistant needs for the Youth Endorsement evaluation, so participating evaluators will have different dates for different types of evaluations.

Because this evaluation protocol is in a testing phase, the final outcome won't impact your primary registration with Pet Partners. If during the Youth Endorsement evaluation your team receives a Not Ready score, your registration status won't change and you won't need to stop visiting. The exception to this would be for behavior that would merit a Not Appropriate (NA) score, such as growling, snapping or lunging, which could impact your primary registration. As your animal's best advocate, you can and should stop any situation in which you feel your animal's behavior may be escalating to this point.

We'll continue to provide details about this process and the Youth Endorsement evaluation as we move through the testing phase, and we're looking forward to making this endorsement available to more teams in the future. Current volunteers can always find information about the Therapy Animal Program through the Resource Library on the Pet Partners website.

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**What is the Walk With Me™ initiative? How can I integrate it into my visits?**

Walk With Me™ is a new special initiative within the Therapy Animal Program for teams who would like to help promote physical activity in their community by inviting others to go walking with their registered therapy animal. It was developed in response to the Surgeon General’s Call to Action about walking for better health. This initiative is available to all current Pet Partners teams.

Pet Partners is committed to improving human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. We felt that this was a low cost, easily accessible animal-assisted activity that would promote the health of your community. We already know that walking is good for human health; health benefits of walking include increased cardiovascular fitness, reduced risk of heart disease and stroke, stronger bones, and increased muscle strength. And people who walk with an animal are more likely to meet physical activity recommendations.

There's no cost to be part of Walk With Me—it's available as an “add-on” to a Pet Partners team registration. Any current Pet Partners team can sign up, and new or renewing teams can sign up as part of the registration process. Current teams can sign up using the Contact Us form on the Pet Partners website. New and renewing teams can sign up through the Special Initiatives step in their online team registration.

You can integrate Walk With Me in a wide variety of settings with many different client types. Here are some examples of ways you could include it in your current visits:

- **Hospitals and healthcare facilities:** People recovering from surgery or undergoing physical therapy are often asked to walk as part of the recovery process. You and your animal could walk with them to help make the process more enjoyable and encouraging for them.

- **Assisted living facilities:** Residents are often encouraged to get some kind of regular exercise. You could incorporate walks around the facility or on the grounds with your regular visits.

- **Schools:** A walk with your animal could be part of an exercise program for students, or an incentive for improvements in academic performance—you could even combine Read With Me and Walk With Me in school visits.

These are just a few examples of how you could use Walk With Me as part of your visits. You can find more information and suggestions in the Walk With Me manual, which is available in electronic form through the Resource Library in the Volunteer Center on the Pet Partners website. You can also purchase a Walk With Me kit from the Pet Partners store, which includes a bound copy of the manual, a backpack, and a water bottle. To visit our store, go to petpartners.org and click Shop.

Any Walk With Me visit can be part of the Pet Partners mission to improve human health and well-being. If you have other questions about this special initiative, please get in touch with our Programs team through the Contact Us form on our website.
Don’t Miss Out!

Brand new Pet Partners shirts and sweatshirts are now available for order. Join us in celebrating rescue animals with our latest design! All proceeds benefit Pet Partners. Shirts start at $20.99 and come in a variety of colors, styles, and sizes. Act now because they’re only available for a limited time! Visit www.petpartners.org today.