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

A copy of the latest financial report, registration filed by this organization, and a description of our programs and activities may be obtained by contacting us at: 345 18th Ave SE, Suite 200, Bellevue, WA 98005, 425-679-5500. Pet Partners was formed in Washington. If you are a resident of one of the following states, you may obtain financial information directly from the state agency:


Georgia: A full and fair description of our programs and our financial statement summary is available upon request at our office and phone number indicated above.

Maryland: For the cost of copies and postage, from the Office of the Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 974-5584.

Mississippi: The official registration and financial information of Pet Partners may be obtained from the Mississippi Secretary of State’s office by calling 1-888-236-6167. Registration by the Secretary of State does not imply endorsement.

Nevada: Contributions may be tax deductible pursuant to the provisions of sec. 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. §170(c).


North Carolina: Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-919-814-5400. The license is not an endorsement by the state.

Pennsylvania: The official registration and financial information of Pet Partners may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Virginia: From the State Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, PO Box 1763, Richmond, VA 23218.

Washington: From the Secretary of State at 1-800-332-4483 or http://www.sos.wa.gov/charities/.

West Virginia: West Virginia residents may obtain a summary of the registration and financial documents from the Secretary of State, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Wisconsin: A financial statement of the charitable organization disclosing assets, liabilities, fund balances, revenue and expenses for the preceding fiscal year will be provided to any person upon request.

REGISTRATION WITH A STATE AGENCY DOES NOT CONSTITUTE OR IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THAT STATE.
A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

C. ANNIE PETERS

In this issue, we’re celebrating the importance of community through our Community Partners and Community Groups. These volunteer-led groups of registered handlers, evaluators, and instructors provide additional local support to our dedicated handlers, from being a point of contact for facilities looking for therapy animal teams to mentoring, fundraising, and sharing a sense of camaraderie and support.

As we have banded together to get through the last 20 months, our Community Partners and Community Groups went the extra mile, keeping teams engaged locally and even enjoying the occasional Zoom happy hour. I had the pleasure of joining a few of those and it’s always so much fun to see the real stars of our Therapy Animal Program. Thank you to everyone who got their dog, cat, bird, guinea pig, rabbit, or llama to look into the camera and say hello! It certainly helped me get through this difficult time.

It was also important and gratifying to stay in touch with our Community Partner and Community Group leaders through our Town Hall gatherings. These events allowed many of you to share your creative virtual visiting ideas. We were then able to pass those ideas along to our wonderful handlers who may not have the presence of a local group. Everyone benefitted—most of all the clients served.

If your local community does not have a Community Partner or Community Group, you can read more about starting one in the feature article, and then reach out to me using the Contact Us option on our website at petpartners.org. I would love to speak with you about getting your community organized!

Of course none of this would be possible without our incredible and highly appreciated volunteer team evaluators. We are projecting (and celebrating!) that during this year, even with waiting for vaccines and then getting sucker-punched by the Delta variant, almost 3,600 evaluations will have safely taken place. That’s wonderful, and a true testament to the commitment of our evaluators, who felt they could safely continue this important work with the appropriate precautions.

Unfortunately, this is only about half of how many evaluations are required annually to keep our Therapy Animal Program thriving. We are faced with a backlog of handlers needing evaluations and an unprecedented amount of interest from prospective handlers. (May I take a moment here? I am reclaiming the word “unprecedented” from my most hated COVID-19 term “unprecedented times” and using it in a positive way!)

If you are an evaluator who is just getting comfortable with the idea of returning to conducting in-person evaluations, our Learning Experience staff of Charis, Lisa, and Moira are here to support you! We’ve taken numerous steps to support safety and minimize risk at team evaluations. Your community needs the love of therapy animals now more than ever.

If you are a renewing or prospective handler ready to be evaluated, please bear with us as we inch closer to normal, and show your evaluators some love and support. We’re eager to get you evaluated and ready to visit again.

Some areas have been impacted by losing use of facilities where evaluations were held. If you have access to a free, sizable space in your community, please let your evaluators know, or get in touch with us! Together we can rebuild our robust Therapy Animal Program community and welcome more teams who are eager to serve.

Before signing off for this issue, I want to take a moment to acknowledge and honor the tremendous sense of loss felt throughout this difficult time. We’ve lost dear volunteers like Tom Olsen, Carolyn Marr, John Arko, Molly Woodbury, and others. Everyone who had the opportunity to benefit from their contributions to their communities through therapy animal work has been touched by their devotion. We’ve also lost so many of our animal partners during this time. We’ve heard from so many of you who think about the last visit you went on without knowing it was the last visit for your therapy animal partner. We’re both saddened and uplifted by the wonderful photos you share with us and the stories of how your animals touched lives.

Thank you to all of you, and good health to you and your community, however you define it.

— Annie
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

PET PARTNERS GROUPS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

by Elisabeth Van Every

Pet Partners has 10,000 volunteers in communities all over the United States, and in several other countries. Every therapy animal team, team evaluator, volunteer instructor, and evaluation volunteer is crucially important to bringing the benefits of the human-animal bond to their communities.

Most of these volunteers give their time and effort on an individual basis, which is how our Therapy Animal Program is designed: we want our volunteers to have the opportunity to choose where they want to volunteer and how they structure their volunteer time. This flexibility offers our volunteers a wide range of volunteer opportunities, and allows each individual volunteer to have a unique impact in their community.

But Pet Partners does have an opportunity for our volunteers to come together in local groups. These groups provide additional options for volunteers who would like to work with other Pet Partners volunteers, and help increase the impact of individual volunteers. They can provide a coherent identity and a central point of contact for facilities seeking therapy animal visits, including providing options for multiple species. They can help provide instruction and evaluations for prospective therapy animal teams, which increases the number of teams in the community. And they can provide a focus and sense of community for everyone who wants to support the vital work of therapy animal visitation.

There is no requirement from Pet Partners that our volunteers be part of a local group, and the majority of Pet Partners volunteers are not associated with a local group. However, the option to be part of a group is something that many volunteers enjoy.

The benefits of therapy animals have been especially important over the past year and a half as we’ve dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. In many communities, local Pet Partners groups have played a significant role in ensuring that people still benefit from the human-animal bond. We want to highlight this work and why local groups matter so much to their communities.

The Role of Pet Partners Groups

There are two types of local Pet Partners groups:
• Community Partners consist of 20 or more registered Pet Partners teams and at least one Pet Partners licensed team evaluator.
• Community Groups consist of at least five registered Pet Partners teams, with or without a Pet Partners licensed team evaluator.

Both types of groups can be found across the country, and even outside the U.S., and both types are important. Community Partners with many members can serve a larger geographic area and provide many teams to meet a variety of needs, along with offering evaluations to support both new and renewing teams. Community Groups can serve a specific area and give individual therapy animal teams more visibility, which can highlight their presence for the community. While a Community Group can be a step along the way to becoming a Community Partner, it’s not a requirement, and many smaller groups thrive in their particular communities or settings.

There are a number of reasons that local volunteers choose to form Pet Partners groups. Many groups focus on a particular geographic area, or on a specific facility. Some volunteers want a way to connect with other Pet Partners volunteers so they can visit together. Some groups organize to make the presence of Pet Partners in their community more visible. And some groups serve as networks that provide mentoring for new therapy animal teams and help Pet Partners volunteers connect with visiting opportunities, workshops, team evaluations, and other needs.

Many Pet Partners handlers first became volunteers after having personal experiences with therapy animal visits, and for some this led to a decision to create a local group. “Our original founding teams became involved from personal experiences with having pets visit family and friends in care and hospital settings,” says Mary Gilbert with Pet Partners of Central New York. “The local numbers of teams grew with the help of the wonderful people who became instructors and evaluators with Pet Partners, allowing us to continue to grow to serve our communities.”

Compassionate Paws, Inc. began after the founder, Dr. D’Ann Downey, conducted research on the effects companion animals had on the health of certain populations. “She wanted to bring alive the impact of what she discovered and express it in the community,” says board member Misty Rigas.

Kathy Murray with Visiting Pet Teams of South Mississippi says, “After Hurricane Katrina, our community was in distress and needed a special touch.” Local volunteers wanting to provide therapy animal visits discovered there were no therapy animal groups on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. They created a group to serve the coastal Mississippi area and ensure their...
communities could benefit from the effects of therapy animals.

Other groups developed as a result of relationships with facilities. Becky Jankowski, founder of PAWSitive Therapy Troupe, originally became a therapy animal handler and team evaluator after experiencing how her dog comforted her father at the end of his life; but she was also a nurse at the Hines Veterans Administration facility, and was asked to pilot a “Pets for Vets” program there. Becky says, “We started with just five teams, but we expanded within a year to the adjoining Loyola University Medical Center campus. From that early start, we continued to grow.”

Music City Pet Partners “has a long-standing relationship with the Monroe Carrell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt and Vanderbilt University Medical Center campus,” says activity director Ellie Wetzel, and the group that formed from that relationship was then able to expand their services to other parts of the community.

North Carolina Pet Partners volunteers at a group event.

Donna Jett with Pet Partners of Greater Ft. Worth says their purpose was “to get like-minded people together to share experiences and to learn from each other. The founding members were responsible for mentoring a lot of the current members and the current members are responsible for mentoring new and potential members.” This chain of knowledge ensures that experience gained by all volunteers will continue to be passed forward.

Special Support for the Community

Local Pet Partners groups serve in many of the same types of settings in their communities. Hospitals and other healthcare facilities, assisted living and residential care facilities, campus and workplace stress relief, and libraries and schools for Read With Me™ programs are all common settings. But groups also have unique and special ways they support their individual communities.

Executive director Deborah Carr says that a particularly satisfying setting for Utah Pet Partners members is participating in special programs in juvenile court. “These programs meet weekly in court and the young people involved have to meet certain requirements in order to wipe their records clean and get back on track for a healthy, productive life,” she says. “The therapy teams accompany the small group of kids in front of the judge as each gives their report.

Denver Pet Partners has built deep connections with their community, and in 2019 they were asked to take part in the 20th anniversary gathering for survivors of the Columbine High School shooting. Teams were stationed outside the school to provide support for survivors as they entered the building. “One former student remarked that she could not have entered the school if we had not been there providing emotional support,” says media director Laura Ackerman. “It was a deeply moving experience.”

Pet Partners of the Tennessee Valley is a small group, with just nine teams, but they are dedicated to providing visits for their local Camp Rainbow, which provides summer camp experiences for children with serious medical needs.

Wags for Wellness volunteers have a special activity for the Christmas season: they gather on weekends to make fleece blankets that they donate to patients who will be spending the holiday in the hospital.
“They gather mid-afternoon on Christmas Eve and spread out throughout the hospital visiting with their dogs and presenting the handmade blankets,” says Sandra Haskell.

Pet Partners of Las Vegas—Love Dog Adventures is often the first experience many local facilities have in partnering with therapy animals, and providing AAI to specific populations. “We tend to go where they have not worked with animals before as they trust our teams greatly,” says group founder and president Sue Grundfest. “We work with very sensitive populations such as behavioral health hospitals for adults and youth, active-duty military and first responders, and children living with trauma and other issues.” And because they are in the convention capital of the U.S., they have regularly taken part in conventions and conferences being held in the city, providing stress relief and education about therapy animals.

And sometimes, the ability to offer a large number of teams with diverse visiting experience is a specialty in itself. Pet Partners of Southern Arizona has about 75 teams, some based in the area year-round and some who are “snowbirds,” who live elsewhere for part of the year and bring their visiting skills to those other communities. The group’s teams visit in a variety of settings including medical, educational, older adults, military, first responders, and universities. Group leader Diane Alexander says, “I think our willingness to visit so widely is one of our strengths. We offer opportunities for everyone.”

Adjusting Activities for COVID-19

Like everything else, in-person therapy animal visits have been affected by the risks and restrictions of COVID-19. One of the benefits that Pet Partners groups have in these times is the presence of multiple teams and a structure that allows for planning and communication in developing new strategies for providing therapy animal visits. Many groups were able to develop a variety of alternative visit options so they could continue serving their communities. Virtual visits and video presentations were popular everywhere, as a way of giving people the opportunity to see therapy animals live even if they couldn’t be there in person. But online events and videos also provided opportunities to connect with local communities and support volunteers in new ways. Utah Pet Partners has developed a robust online library of educational videos for their members and prospective volunteers, and even created a helpful video for their teams with guidance and ideas for holding successful virtual visits.

Virtual visits and video presentations were popular everywhere, as a way of giving people the opportunity to see therapy animals live even if they couldn’t be there in person. But online events and videos also provided opportunities to connect with local communities and support volunteers in new ways. Utah Pet Partners has developed a robust online library of educational videos for their members and prospective volunteers, and even created a helpful video for their teams with guidance and ideas for holding successful virtual visits.

North Carolina Pet Partners held online meetings for their members to stay in touch, and created special videos for client groups they weren’t able to see in person. They also created a coloring book that features some of their therapy animals, which “is a useful tool to give to places we can’t visit in person right now, but will be useful in the future as well to spread the word about what we do and the importance of the human-animal bond,” says Beth Kuoni.

Pet Partners of Sun City Texas started a project to send letters weekly to their local fire stations and fire administration offices, written to seem as if they were from the group’s therapy dogs. “These letters are funny, inspiring, and give the fire staff a few minutes of stress relief every week,” says group leader Ruth Olsen. “Photos of our dogs are hung all over each of the fire stations and they know all the dogs by name. So far, we have sent out over 480 letters.” The group plans to continue the letters and eventually add in monthly visits to the fire stations as well.

Pet Partners of the Tri-State did virtual visits, postcards, and therapy animal cutouts for their regular clients and facilities; but they also had an established history of Walk With Me™ sessions in their community, and when the weather permitted, they were quick to offer these walks as a safe visiting option. Group leader Cyndie Kieffer says these events were “quite a hit, helping to offer much-needed connection while enjoying the many urban trails in the area.”

Visiting Pet Teams of South Mississippi has a long-standing relationship with Pass Christian Library for Read With Me visits, and the library was eager to find ways to continue offering the visits in some form. The initial offering was virtual story time videos, which were posted and shared from the Pass Christian Public Library Facebook page. “The video viewership was outstanding,” says Kathy Murray. In fall 2020, the group offered drive-up events to support the We Are All Ears project for reading at home. Families would drive to the library to see the therapy animal teams and receive “Grab-n-Go” bags with books and reading activities to take home. “Talk about some happy faces when the children saw their beloved pet teams!” Kathy says.
Pet Partners of Central New York provided their healthcare workers with window and virtual visits, videos, and cards, but they also made special deliveries of fruit, sweet treats, and personalized notes during the holiday season. “They had so often been so generous and loving to us it was impossible to sit by,” says Mary Gilbert.

Pet Partners of Columbus (GA) worked with their local hospital to provide onsite visits to the staff during working hours. Group leader Angie Zapata says, “As soon as a few of us got credentialed as AACR teams, I approached our local hospital and we were approved to do in-person visits with staff at the hospital.” The hospital helped set up specific safety protocols for the visiting teams to make the visits as safe as possible, and the AACR training provides the handlers with knowledge of mental health first aid and other skills for supporting the staff through the trauma of the pandemic. Angie says, “This has been a very stressful year for everybody, but the staff greatly appreciates that we still continue to visit.”

Challenges

Many Pet Partners groups, regardless of size or location, say that there are some ongoing challenges, particularly with the restrictions presented by COVID-19. These include recruiting new therapy animal teams, finding spaces to hold evaluations, and meeting demand for visits.

Many groups have relationships with local dog training establishments and pet care businesses that help them recruit new members. Due to the pandemic, many of these establishments have had to reduce activity, which reduces the number of prospective new teams. Ruth Olsen says, “Due to COVID, we did not have local dog training classes so there are no dogs on the near horizon.”

Diane Alexander notes that the lack of

To get started establishing a Pet Partners group, please contact us through our website: petpartners.org/about-us/contact-us/.
community events in general, and especially those focused on animals, has made recruitment difficult for their group and limited opportunities to introduce people to their group and their work. They hope for an increase in these events soon.

Locations that are suitable for holding team evaluations can be difficult for some groups to find even in more normal times; COVID-19 has significantly reduced availability of many others. Ellie Wetzel says, “We have had difficulty finding evaluation space since the primary venues we would use in the past are not allowing reservations.” And Laura Ackerman says, “Before COVID we were limited in space available to us for evaluations, workshops, and meetings. Since the start of COVID, we have very few places available to use for these events.”

And both of these situations can play a role in a particular challenge that was brought up by a number of groups: not having enough teams and volunteers to meet the demand in their communities.

Sue Grundfest says that attracting new volunteers and fulfilling requests for therapy animal visits is the group’s top priority. “The demand is high. Every day we get new requests and we are prioritizing returning to our established partners before taking on new assignments,” she says. “The worst thing we could do is promise something we cannot deliver.”

Beth Kuoni mentions that new team recruitment of younger volunteers is especially challenging, along with meeting demand for visits that require a regular commitment (such as reading programs), and avoiding the problem of a small number of teams doing a disproportionate amount of the work.

And Deborah Carr notes that it’s about more than just having new teams. “Meeting the demand for teams has always been our biggest challenge, but it takes a balance of being able to recruit and train people, test them, and mentor them without burning out the volunteers who do all those roles,” she says.

Even so, groups have advantages with their networks and visibility. Pet Partners of the Tri-State has half a dozen members who are able to offer time or space for team evaluations, and also focus on spreading the word about the group and building connections.

Music City Pet Partners has increased the group’s visibility through advocacy activity, such as requesting proclamations for National Therapy Animal Day across their service region and even at the state level, which puts them in contact with local political leaders; and through their relationships with high-profile facilities, which often leads to media coverage. They’re hopeful these community-building activities will help them add new volunteers.

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And Misty Rigas sums up what her group means not just to their community but to their members: “To witness how our Pet Partners teams adapted to the changes of how we visit has been remarkable. They continue to give and share their hearts and love with those in our community even through this unprecedented time.”

Dedication to the Mission

Even with challenges, local Pet Partners groups maintain their dedication to bringing the benefits of the human-animal bond to their communities. “From the moment I became an evaluator, my goal was to create a Community Partner,” says Cyndie Kieffer. “I wanted to form a group of teams that could promote the human-animal bond in a variety of settings.”

Angie Zapata notes that prior to COVID-19, “All of the teams in my group were committed to the visits they assigned themselves to and did not miss a beat.”

Every Pet Partners volunteer is vitally important to our mission. Local groups amplify the power of Pet Partners teams and the power of therapy animal visits, and that means even more people can benefit from the human-animal bond.
The groups listed below are currently recognized by Pet Partners. More information about our local groups, including areas of activity and contact information, is available on the Community Partners page of the Pet Partners website.

**Community Partners**

- Central Arkansas Pet Partners
  Little Rock, AR
- Compassionate Paws Inc.
  Rome, GA
- Delta Pet Partners of San Antonio
  San Antonio, TX
- Denver Pet Partners
  Littleton, CO
- ElderPet
  Durham, NH
- MO-KAN Pet Partners
  Overland Park, KS
- Music City Pet Partners
  Franklin, TN
- New England Pet Partners Inc.
  Pelham, NH
- North Carolina Pet Partners
  Greensboro, NC
- Paws 4 Healing
  Santa Ana, CA
- Paws and Effect
  Des Moines, IA
- Paws for Love
  El Paso, CA
- Pawsitive Outreach
  Spokane, WA
- Pawsitive Therapy Troupe
  Downers Grove, IL
- Pet Partners of Acadiana
  Lafayette, LA
- Pet Partners of Akron-Canton
  Akron, OH
- Pet Partners of Central CT
  Avon, CT
- Pet Partners of Central New York
  Syracuse, NY
- Pet Partners Central Ohio
  New Albany, OH
- Pet Partners of Central Oregon
  Bend, OR
- Pet Partners of Central Texas
  McGregor, TX
- Pet Partners of the Coastal Bend
  Corpus Christi, TX
- Pet Partners of Cobb County
  Marietta, GA
- Pet Partners of Columbus
  Columbus, GA
- Pet Partners of East Carolina
  Winterville, NC
- Pet Partners of Greater Atlanta
  Atlanta, GA
- Pet Partners of Greater Austin
  Austin, TX
- Pet Partners of Greater Cincinnati
  Cincinnati, OH
- Pet Partners of Greater Dallas
  McKinney, TX
- Pet Partners of Greater Ft. Worth
  Aledo, TX
- Pet Partners Greater Youngstown Area
  North Lima, OH
- Pet Partners of Johnson County
  Iowa City, IA
- Pet Partners of Lake Havasu City
  Lake Havasu City, AZ
- Pet Partners of Las Vegas—Love Dog Adventures
  Las Vegas, NV
- Pet Partners of Long Island
  Lake Grove, NY
- Pet Partners of Maryland
  Germantown, MD
- Pet Partners of North Alabama
  Huntsville, AL
- Pet Partners of North Florida
  Ponte Vedra, FL
- Pet Partners of the Palouse
  Troy, ID
- Pet Partners of Phoenix
  Glendale, AZ
- Pet Partners of Portland
  Portland, OR
- Pet Partners of Prescott
  Prescott, AZ
- Pet Partners of the Red River Valley
  Moorhead, MN
- Pet Partners of Richmond
  Richmond, VA
- Pet Partners of South Central Connecticut
  Hamden, CT
- Pet Partners of SE Connecticut
  New London, CT
- Pet Partners of Southern Arizona
  Tucson, AZ
- Pet Partners of Sun City Texas
  Georgetown, TX
- Pet Partners of the Tri-State
  Mount Carmel, IL
- Summa Health’s WAGtime
  Akron, OH
- Superiorland Pet Partners
  Ishpeming, MI
- Sutter’s Paws On-Call
  Sacramento, CA
- Teton County Pet Partners
  Jackson, WY
- Thera Pets of the Roanoke Valley Inc.
  Roanoke, VA
- Tufts Paws for People
  North Grafton, MA
- UH Portage Medical Center—Wags for Wellness
  Ravenna, OH
- Utah Pet Partners
  Provo, UT
- Vermont Pet Partners
  Killington, VT
- Visiting Pet Teams of South Mississippi
  Gulfport, MS
- VT Helping P.A.W.S.
  Blacksburg, VA

**Community Groups**

- Pet Partners of Argentina
  Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Pet Partners of Caguas Puerto Rico
  Caguas, PR
- Pet Partners of Coastal Carolina
  Elizabeth City, NC
- Pet Partners of Dutchess County
  Wappingers Falls, NY
- Pet Partners of East Texas
  Longview, TX
- Pet Partners of Greater Portland
  Auburn, ME
- Pet Partners of Heart to Heart Huntsville
  Huntsville, AL
- Pet Partners of Hellas
  Athens, Greece
- Pet Partners of the Midlands
  Columbia, SC
- Pet Partners NC Triangle
  Durham, NC
- Pet Partners of Northeast Arkansas
  Jonesboro, AR
- Pet Partners of Northern Alberta
  Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada
- Pet Partners @ Ohlone Humane Society
  Fremont, CA
- Pet Partners of the Oregon Coast
  Newport, OR
- Pet Partners of San Juan Puerto Rico
  San Juan, PR
- Pet Partners of Tennessee Valley
  Stewart, TN
- Pet Partners of Vail Valley
  Edwards, CO
Current Research Projects in Support of AAI

For three years in a row, Pet Partners has honored our mission to support empirical investigation on animal-assisted interventions (AAI) by partnering with the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) to fund research on studies including therapy animals. This partnership not only allows us to work closely with academicians and researchers in the field, but also elevates our ability to advocate for the highest possible standards of practice to be implemented in therapy animal research.

Three research projects that were funded through this collaboration are currently underway:

1. Direct Experimental Assessment of Therapy Dog Handlers on Child and Dog Behavior During AAI

Led by Dr. Alexandra Protopopova from the University of British Columbia and Dr. Erica Feuerbacher from Virginia Polytech Institute and State University, this study aims to determine how different therapy animal handling styles influence stress behavior in both children and dogs in session.

Children with autism spectrum disorder will be randomly matched with a unique therapy dog, and researchers will measure variables such as stress behavior, affiliative behavior, and social behavior of the child and the dog through behavioral coding and salivary cortisol. This study will be unique in its focus on handling behaviors: comparing passive, restrictive, and treat-based handling styles.

The researchers expect that the most restrictive handling of the therapy dogs will result in less therapeutic benefit, along with higher levels of stress in the dogs. The data from this project will ultimately inform a scientific appreciation for the best way to handle therapy animals, promoting efficacy for the intervention and enjoyment for the animals who are involved in the interactions.

2. Implementation of Canine-Assisted Forensic Interviews with Children

Dr. Kamala London and Dr. Janet Hoy-Gerlach of the University of Toledo are conducting a study to provide evidence-based guidelines regarding how and when to incorporate therapy dogs in legal settings. Although there has been a recent increase in therapy animals being present for forensic interviews, there has not yet been much research conducted on this intervention. This lab-based study will examine the effect of the presence of a therapy dog on the quantity and quality of children’s event reports.

Children aged 6–9 will experience a rich, interactive, staged event. A week later, the children will undergo an analogue forensic interview, where exposure to Pet Partners therapy dogs will be randomly varied. Using transcribed interviews and video recordings, behavior during the interaction with the therapy dog, including the duration of time the child spent petting the dog, will be scored.

It is predicted that the therapy dog–assisted interviews will bolster children’s event reports, leading to increases in both quantity and quality of children’s reports. The findings from this investigation are also expected to support therapy dog–assisted forensic interviews as a safe, affordable, and widely available technique that may improve the accuracy and quality of event reports among maltreated children.

3. Canine-Assisted Anxiety Reduction in Pediatric Emergency Care

Dr. Alan Beck of Purdue University and Dr. Jeffery Kline of Wayne State University are coming together to study the impact of therapy dog visits on the anxiety levels of children in emergency room care.

Children aged 5–17 with clinical anxiety will be recruited from Riley Children’s Hospital and randomized to receive either a 15-minute visit from a child life specialist or a 15-minute visit from a therapy dog/handler pair as an adjunct with the child life specialist. Physiological stress will be measured by collecting salivary cortisol.

The researchers expect that the children and parents in the therapy dog group will report greater decreases in anxiety and that children or adolescents with psychiatric complaints, autism-spectrum disorder, or brain injury will have a greater reduction in anxiety with exposure to therapy dog teams than those without these conditions.

We are excited to see what findings come from these innovative projects, and we look forward to working together with the researchers and our network of handlers and practitioners to incorporate these findings into practice. Another funding opportunity for researchers will be made available through the HABRI website this fall with proposals focusing on animal-related engagement and animal welfare and diversity in AAI being specifically encouraged.
You provide a wonderful service as a volunteer therapy animal team.
Do you know a professional interested in AAI?
Please share this exciting news!

Learn More: petpartners.org/learn/aat-professionals

AAAIP
Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals

A community of professionals who incorporate therapy animals into their practice:
- Mental health providers
- Educators
- Allied health practitioners
- Justice system professionals
- Researchers
- Trainers and behaviorists
- Anyone wishing to practice AAI in a professional context

AAAIP will offer the following services to its members:
- Education
- Certification
- Connection
- Resources
- Research

COMING IN 2022
A Circle of Care in a Time of Grief

by Elisabeth Van Every

Ruth Olsen has been a Pet Partners volunteer since 2007. She has worked with three therapy dog partners so far, and she and her current partner Rascal are also an Animal-Assisted Crisis Response team. She has served as a Pet Partners licensed team evaluator and volunteer instructor for several years, and previously served as a National Program Educator, helping to train new Pet Partners evaluators. She was a founding member of Pet Partners of Greater Austin, and currently leads Pet Partners of Sun City Texas. Her dedication to serving her community through therapy animal visitation runs deep.

Ruth’s husband Tom joined her as a Pet Partners volunteer in 2011, also working as a handler with each of their three therapy dogs. They enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer together and bring the benefits of the human-animal bond to their community. This included when they began therapy animal visits at St. David’s Hospital in Georgetown, TX. Tom also spent some time at St. David’s as a patient receiving care over the years. “He got to know the staff well and lovingly called them ‘his girls,’” says Ruth.

Sadly, Tom passed away due to COVID-19 in January 2021. His loss was felt profoundly by his fellow Pet Partners volunteers and the community, and of course by Ruth. After taking a break, Ruth returned to volunteering (to the extent possible under the conditions), in part as a way to honor the time she and Tom spent making therapy animal visits together.

In August 2021, Hugh Brown, the CEO of St. David’s, reached out to Ruth. “He called me to beg for the therapy dogs to visit his overwhelmed and stressed staff,” says Ruth. They spent a few days working out the logistics of how teams could return to the hospital safely, setting requirements that included vaccination for handlers, masks for handlers and staff while visiting, a special entrance for the teams to minimize contact, and a dedicated room for staff to visit with the teams. When all of the safety protocols were in place, they agreed on a schedule and time for the teams to visit.

On August 19, the designated day for the teams to begin visiting again, Ruth and Rascal were the first team onsite. “We were greeted by staff even before we got into the building,” says Ruth. “Rascal was beyond excited to see people and work again.” They were at the hospital for 90 minutes and visited with at least 25 staff members.

But the visit was profoundly meaningful beyond just resuming the visits. “For me, the best part was who I got to see,” Ruth says. She was able to see two of the staff members who provided care for Tom when he was a patient at the hospital. “I got to hug them and thank them for helping and befriending Tom so much. It was emotional, some tears and long hugs.”

As of October 1, 12 Pet Partners teams have been involved in stress relief visits at St. David’s. During that time, approximately 600 staff members have spent time visiting with the teams. Ruth says, “Some visits were one minute, some were 15 minutes. We had staff hugging, crying, and petting dogs quietly, and others showing us photos of their dogs, and just for a few minutes forgetting about their stress.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant an overwhelming level of trauma, loss, and grief for people everywhere. Hundreds of thousands of people and communities in the U.S. have lost loved ones, and others have lost health even after recovering from the immediate effects of COVID-19. Healthcare workers have experienced trauma and intense stress as they’ve worked to care for people with the disease and watched so many of them succumb. And even people who haven’t been directly exposed to the effects of COVID-19 have experienced the loss of regular routines, activities (such as volunteering), and so much more. The effects of the pandemic have touched everyone to some extent.

Returning to visiting and supporting their community again has been important for the volunteers at St. David’s, as well as the staff. The visits provide moments of relief and care for the stressed, traumatized hospital staff, and shows them that their community values their work and their well-being in this difficult time. For the therapy animal teams, it’s an opportunity to give back to their community, to support the people who are caring for others and help ease their trauma, and to demonstrate how important it is to them to be able to provide this support. “Being able to support our local hospital staff who are working so hard again means lots to all of us,” says Ruth.

More than ever, the work done by Pet Partners teams is part of a larger circle of care: The comfort, calm, and joy offered by therapy animal visits provides vital support for communities in a time of grief. And this support helps build the connections that enable communities to work together and provide care for each other as we continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic.

And for Ruth, this circle of care has been especially important as she deals with her own loss. “Tom was with me when we started volunteering at St. David’s about 10 years ago,” she says. “It has gone full circle.”
In August 2021, the PAWS Act was signed into law by President Biden, thanks to the thousands of Pet Partners advocates who sent letters to Congress in support of this important legislation. Formally called the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service members for Veterans Therapy Act, the PAWS Act brings the powerful benefits of the human-animal bond through a trained service dog to veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The PAWS Act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement a five-year pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans diagnosed with PTSD as an element of a complementary and integrative health program. The VA may also now provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses who do not have mobility impairments. Pet Partners is proud that our grassroots advocacy program has been mobilizing on behalf of the PAWS Act for four years. Back in 2017, we even hosted a town hall with the bill’s sponsor. Thanks to your determination and commitment, real progress has been made on behalf of our wounded service members.

In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed legislation directing the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets to convene a working group to examine the need for statewide standards for therapy dogs. Pet Partners was proud to be invited to participate and make recommendations for therapy animal standards in the state of New York. The resulting guidance, published in 2020, articulates criteria for animals, handlers, and therapy animal organizations that aligns with Pet Partners’ commitment to animal welfare and client safety. This guidance is now available for others to reference, and can provide assistance to advocates working with legislators on standards for therapy animals. Pet Partners is pleased to have played a role in the creation of this guidance.

2021 has seen significant advocacy action, after a largely quiet year in 2020 due to restrictions and legislative session cancellations because of COVID-19. We’re pleased to have Pet Partners advocates making a difference in legislation and awareness about therapy animals.

**Advocates Encourage Communities Across the Country to Proclaim National Therapy Animal Day**

After the challenges of the past year, National Therapy Animal Day 2021 on April 30 was a big, joyful recognition of how important therapy animals are to communities everywhere. And Pet Partners advocates played a crucial role in the celebration, using our online action alert to send requests to their city, county, and state officials encouraging them to proclaim April 30 as National Therapy Animal Day in their communities.

More than **70 communities in 23 states** across the U.S. issued proclamations recognizing National Therapy Animal Day and the impact of therapy animals. This is the largest number of communities to date to recognize National Therapy Animal Day in this way, and it brings vital recognition to the work therapy animals do everywhere. This recognition strengthens efforts to create legislation that supports standards and access for therapy animals.

**Pet Partners Advocates Help Pass the PAWS Act**

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**State Legislation for Therapy Dogs in Courtrooms**

Pet Partners was involved in the passage of two pieces of legislation in 2021 that provide therapy dogs for witnesses in court proceedings: Texas House Bill 1071 and Maryland House Bill 186. Both laws highlight the standards of practice in AAI which ensure animal welfare as well as client safety.

**Therapy Animal Guidelines for the State of New York**

In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed legislation directing the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets to convene a working group to examine the need for statewide standards for therapy dogs. Pet Partners was proud to be invited to participate and make recommendations for therapy animal standards in the state of New York. The resulting guidance, published in 2020, articulates criteria for animals, handlers, and therapy animal organizations that aligns with Pet Partners’ commitment to animal welfare and client safety. This guidance is now available for others to reference, and can provide assistance to advocates working with legislators on standards for therapy animals. Pet Partners is pleased to have played a role in the creation of this guidance.
On September 25, our incredible walkers, teams, and sponsors came together to show the power of the human-animal bond in the World’s Largest Pet Walk. This year’s walk was the most successful yet! The number of registered walkers more than doubled from 2020, and the number of walking teams increased significantly. We also had the participation of more Pet Partners local volunteer Community Partners and Community Groups than ever before. People walked in nearly all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. And there were walkers in 10 other countries as well! And while plenty of dogs took walks, other species participated too, including cats, miniature horses, guinea pigs, rabbits, and even an alpaca and a pigeon.

Participants could choose to walk any distance, at any time, and at any location that worked for them. Some supporters held socially distanced events in community parks, others walked solo, and some took their pets for a swim because the weather was still in the high 100s. No matter how walkers participated, their activities made a HUGE difference.

Most importantly, participants raised more than $70,000, which will support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program as well as Walk With Me and other initiatives that bring the healing benefits of the human-animal bond to so many people. The need for life-changing therapy animal visits has increased significantly with the effects of COVID-19, and these funds will help greatly to keep the mission moving forward.

Please check out #WorldsLargestPetWalk on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to see all the delightful photos from participants.

Be sure to save the date for our 5th Annual World’s Largest Pet Walk, which will take place on Saturday, September 24, 2022. We’re eager to have you walk with us next year!

Thank You to Our Sponsors

Blue Shield of CA • Dog is Good for Good
American Pet Products Association • BNY Mellon • Pet Plate

Walk Champions

New this year, we welcomed our first National Walk Champions, Roslyn Lindeman and Abbey, from Pet Partners of North Florida. They have been a registered Pet Partners therapy animal team since 2018 and they spread unconditional love and joy at memory care units, retirement villages, a children’s advocacy center, and a cancer treatment center.

“I knew Abbey was meant for therapy animal work from the moment she found the crook of my arm and nuzzled right in. Her unconditional love soothed my soul and melted my heart; I just knew this was her calling,” says Roslyn.

We are so honored to have Roslyn and Abbey as the face of the walk and the winners of our top fundraiser award!
Making It Easy to Create a Will
Support the people and causes that mean the most to you

F R E E W I L L

Pet Partners has a tool that you can use to complete your will, in the comfort of your home, at no cost to you. We have partnered with FreeWill, an online will writing service. Visit freewill.com/petpartners and have peace of mind knowing you’ve completed a necessary step to provide for your family, your loved ones, your pets, and the nonprofits that are important to you.

Do you want a court to decide how to distribute your property? Probably not. Making a will allows you to decide what will happen to your assets. If you don’t have a will, make it a goal to complete one in 2021. Go to freewill.com/petpartners today and start your will.

This information is not intended to provide you with legal or financial advice.

NEW IN 2022

Pet Partners Pet of the Year

Does your dog stand out from the rest of the pack? Is your feline friend known for their amazing cat-itude? Perhaps your horse is ready to gallop into a new role! We are excited to announce that Pet Partners is seeking pets to compete for the title of 2022 Pet Partners Pet of the Year.

This new and exciting inaugural six-week fundraising competition is the perfect way to celebrate your best friend while supporting a great cause! Funds raised by pet contestants (with help from their favorite humans) will support the Pet Partners Therapy Animal Program. This amazing program brings unconditional love, happiness, and healing to millions of older adults, patients, veterans, and children in need all around the world each year.

The national title of Pet Partners Pet of the Year is awarded to the pet whose fundraising team raises the most funds during the six-week competition. The winner and runner-up will be crowned at the close of the competition and awarded wonderful prizes for their efforts.

Prizes for the winner include a professional photo shoot, being featured on the cover of Interactions magazine, their likeness appearing on the design for an official Pet Partners T-shirt campaign, media interviews, and so much more!

To nominate your pet for Pet Partners Pet of the Year, use the Contact Us option at our website.
The Pet Partners Pop-Up Shop has Popped Back Up!

Our limited-time Pop-Up Shop is stocked with the official logo merch and past design favorites you’ve been requesting! All proceeds from the sale of these official products benefits Pet Partners. The shop will be open for a limited time, so don’t wait to order your favorites. Visit petpartners.org today to check out the available items!