

PAWS Pet Therapy – School Information Sheet



About PAWS Pet Therapy

PAWS pet therapy is a registered charity founded in 2012. PAWS train and support dogs and handler teams to carry out safe, enjoyable pet therapy visits to people with a range of needs. PAWS primarily operate in New South Wales, with teams in the ACT and South Australia.

Common questions asked by students about Paws Pet Therapy

1. Can you explain, in your own words, what you think animal-assisted therapy is?

Animal-assisted therapy is a means of providing psychological and/or physiological benefits to people from spending time with an animal.

2. Why did you want to become a volunteer?

I chose to become a volunteer because I enjoy interacting with people and love being able to share the benefits that my dogs bring to others.

3. What is required of a volunteer?

Volunteers need to reflect Paws' core values which are: professionalism, safety, compassion, inclusiveness, open-mindedness and honesty. Volunteers also need to like people as they're not just there to show off their dogs, clients will sometimes want to chat.

On the technical side, volunteers undertake a written course at home in their own time, and then attend a training and assessment day where we set up mock situations to practice safe handling of their dogs and assess how they interact with clients with a variety of needs.

4. What is required of a dog?

We require dogs to be at least 12 months old and we use evaluation on assessment days to determine whether the dog is confident and mature enough to take on therapy work as well as having a fondness for people.

5. What breed is best suited to pet therapy?

The short answer is there is no breed best suited to pet therapy. At PAWS, we have dogs of all shapes and sizes from Great Danes to Terriers to Chihuahuas. We look at their overall suitability for pet therapy, not their breed.

6. What kind of training does a dog need/will receive?

There is no prior specific training needed, but good manners and the ability to control the dog is necessary. The dog and the volunteer must also have a good working relationship.

Most of the training provided is targeted more towards the volunteer than the dog and we provide tips and videos on how to practice safe interactions at home. Therapy dogs mainly need to have intuition and empathy, but it's something that cannot be trained, that's why we focus more on training the handler.

7. What do you have in place to ensure the welfare of dogs?

When being assessed, the volunteer and the dog are evaluated on their connection and the volunteer's ability to understand their dog's feelings. Stress is presented differently in dogs and the best way to prevent it escalating is to ensure the handler can tell their dog's specific signs of stress. If a dog is seen to be stressed on visits, they are cut short in the dog's best interest.

Another way to ensure the welfare of dogs is to only allow a maximum of 1.5 hours per visit so they don't become burnt out.

8. Do dogs like pet therapy?

Although it may be tiring for the dog, they love the attention and compassion they receive from clients. Our volunteers will tell you that as soon as our dogs have their vest on, they know what their job is, and they can't wait until they get through the door!

9. How does pet therapy help people?

The benefits of spending time with a dog are well documented and include physiological health benefits, encouraging social interactions, and emotional support for patients, their families and staff. A session of pet therapy can stimulate memory and encourage reminiscing in dementia patients and reduce stress, anxiety and depression for mental health patients, providing a welcome distraction and an interaction involving unconditional affection. Staff at all facilities also benefit from PAWS visits, and when staff are happy, they are more likely to provide high quality care.

10. What kinds of people or places do you visit?

PAWS teams visit a wide variety of facilities, providing tailored pet therapy to clients of all age groups and backgrounds:

- Hospital wards including:
 - Palliative care
 - Rehabilitation
 - Cancer centres
- Aged care
- Mental health facilities
- Support for workers in high stress roles (e.g. ambulance control centre)
- Universities
 - Mental Health Week
 - RUOK days
 - Exam support
- Libraries – support HSC students
- School groups
 - Special needs
 - Children with autism
 - After school and vacation care
- Paws 'n' Tales reading program – working in schools with children with literacy issues, aged 4-8
- Jab Dogs – Supporting student during vaccinations

Volunteer Past Experiences

We have provided a sample of personal experiences from our volunteers

“I had been doing regular aged care and hospital visits for a couple of years when a special request came through from a lady whose mother was at the ends of her life and had asked for a visit from a small dog. I had not done visits to palliative care at that stage so I was a little uncertain how Bunny and I would cope. I didn’t need to worry though as Bunny was perfect, the lady was in a fair bit of pain and was not very responsive by the time we were able to visit, however Bunny just knew what was needed and snuggled in close to her side where the lady was able to rest a hand on her and the two of them had a sleep together. I felt privileged to be in a position to be able to give the lady that final opportunity to feel the comfort of a small, warm, trusting body curled up against her and also to be there for her family and provide something positive amongst all of those hard days.”

– Jody and Bunny

“My Australian red cattle dog Jack and I visit Taara Gardens once a fortnight. On our very first visit, (it was our supported visit with Sharon), Sharon knocked on the door of one of the residents whose room was dark so we thought she may have been asleep. We heard a small croaky voice saying, “I’m not well, I’m not well today”. Sharon let her know we were there with Jack for a visit and she responded again with “I’m not well” at this point Jack poked his head through the doorway as he could hear her, and I feel like he knew she was needing a visit from him!! Well she saw Jack and she almost leapt up out of the bed and was so happy and excited to see him and have pats and cuddles. It was at this moment I felt the enormity of what Paws does!!!”

– Michelle and Jack

“My favourite PAWS story concerns a ten-year-old boy. He has Tourette’s Syndrome and I think gets bullied at school as he is very reluctant to attend. He loves coming to the Library to read to my dog. One day he came in, threw himself on the couch, hugged Cooper tightly round his neck, cuddled him and exclaimed “this is the BEST 20 minutes of my week!””

– Louise and Cooper

“While walking through the wards, a man in a housecoat and slippers, with tears in his eyes, saw Maple and got down on the ground to let her come snuggle with him. He said he has just had really bad news and Maple just crawled all over him. I let her stay with him for quite a while, and when he stood back up, he had a smile on his face and said that was just what he needed. “

– Tara and Maple

More specific questions

11. How do you fund the organisation?

PAWS Pet Therapy is funded through a combination of:

- Fees for service
- Fundraising activities
- Government and community grants
- Donations
- In kind donations

12. Do you think there needs to be more/better government support to animal therapies?

Rather than funding, I believe the government support should be in the form of clearer legislation and regulation related to assistance dogs and therapy dogs. Community recognition of the benefits provided by dogs has rapidly increased, but the government has not kept pace.

If you want any more information about PAWS, see our (Ctrl and click photos to be sent to site):



[Instagram](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Website](#)