



Pet Therapy Program Information Frequently Asked Question's (FAQ's)

What is the Pet Therapy Program?

Those of us who own pets know they make us happy. But a growing body of scientific research is showing that our pets can also make us healthy, or healthier. Research has shown how beneficial pet therapy can be to the elderly, especially those who are living in a nursing home. Regular visits with pets, can have positive physical, emotional, and mental benefits. Physical benefits include lowering blood pressure, lowering heart rate, and reducing overall stress. Emotional benefits include reducing anxiety and depression, decreasing loneliness through increasing social interaction with the pets and their human companions. Consistent interaction with a pet has been shown to cause an increased release of serotonin and dopamine in the brain which can help calm and soothe a person's body. This can be helpful for patients with Alzheimer's dementia, as regular pet visits may help to decrease unwanted behaviors and calm their agitation. There are also mental benefits that are a result of increased mental stimulation, whether it's talking to the pet directly, asking questions to the pet's owner or talking with other residents about the animal. All of these things help to keep the brain active.

Who is overseeing the Pet Therapy Program?

The Pet Therapy Program is currently being coordinated by the Humane Education Department. The contact for this activity is Christine Gonzales, Director of Humane Education. She can be reached via email at cgonzales@humanesocietycc.org or 240-754-7460.

Who can be involved in the HSCC Pet Therapy Program?

The Humane Society of Charles County (HSCC) "Pet Therapy Program" is open to all individuals over the age of 18. Past pets that have participated in the program include dogs, cats, rabbits, and birds.

Where do we visit for the HSCC Pet Therapy Program?

Approved pets and their owners visit various facilities around the Southern Maryland area. Currently, pets and their owners visit Genesis Elder Care in La Plata, Morningside House and Fenwick Landing in Waldorf, as well as, The Charleston of Waldorf Senior Community facility.

How does my pet become part of the HSCC Pet Therapy Program?

Owners will need to go through an orientation process and the pet will need to go through an evaluation process. Although Canine Good Citizen testing is a desired certification for dogs, it is NOT a requirement for participation in the Pet Therapy program. Temperament and appropriate pet behavior are key requirements for successful participation in pet therapy.

Who is responsible during this time of evaluation and orientation?

The individuals are responsible for their pet during the evaluation and orientation into the program. In addition, the individuals are responsible for their pet during the pet visits to the various facilities.

This sounds like a program I would like to be involved in, what do I do now?

If you visit the shelter for information on the HSCC Pet Therapy Program:

1. You will be provided the HSCC Pet Therapy Program Volunteer Record Form.
2. You will need to complete the HSCC Pet Therapy Program Volunteer Record Form. The information needed will be the individual's name, phone number, pet's name and age, and a preference of where you would like to do pet visits.

Can I contact the individual directly who is overseeing the Pet Therapy Program?

Yes, you may contact Christine Gonzales directly, her e-mail address is:

cgonzales@humanesocietycc.org

So what steps do I need to take to continue with the Evaluation & Orientation?

If you would like to take part in this exciting opportunity, please read the steps below to start the process of becoming a member of the "Pet Therapy Program."

1. Submit the HSCC Pet Therapy Program Volunteer Record Form. Either by walking into the shelter, calling, or emailing Christine directly at the email above. This form will soon be posted to the Pet therapy webpage as well.
2. The Therapy Pet applicant will then be contacted by Christine Gonzales to go over the information.
3. Your pet will then need to be evaluated for his/her suitability for this program. The evaluation is temperament testing and evaluation of behavior with common situations found in the typical therapy dog environment. Everything will be discussed with you once the evaluation of your pet is complete.
4. If your pet passes this initial evaluation process, you will be provided the Maryland Health Certification Form. This form needs to be completed by your veterinarian and lists the immunizations, fecal exam results, and last examination information for your pet.
5. Once the form from the veterinarian has been completed, the pet owner should contact Christine Gonzales to set-up the facility orientation with location and date/time. The Health Certification should be brought with the animal. We will also need a photo of the owner and pet to put on the Pet Therapy Volunteer badges.
6. At the facility orientation you will be given your the pet therapy badges, and your pet will be provided a scarf for attachment of the badge. A tour of the facility will be done, as well as go over what to do and what not to do when you and your pet visit.

Overview of Process

STEP 1

Complete Pet Therapy Volunteer Form
(Turn into Humane Society or to Pet
Therapy Director)

STEP 2

Pet Temperament and Behavior
Evaluation completed at the Humane
Society in Waldorf

STEP 3

Veterinarian completes Pet Health and
Medical Certification Form

(Form to be turned into Pet Therapy
Director or provided at the facility
orientation)

STEP 4

Pet Owner provides a photo of
themselves and the pet for use in Pet
Therapy Badges

STEP 5

Facility orientation for Pet and Owner
Receipt of Badges and Scarves for Pets