



Steps to Becoming a Pet Therapy Volunteer

Step 1 – Application, interview and approval to begin Hospice Volunteer Training. Those who are progressing in their volunteer training may proceed with pet therapy preparation at the same time.

Step 2 – Pet Therapy Animal Application

Step 3 – Free Initial Assessment to determine the readiness and suitability of your animal for pet therapy with hospice. (see below “What Happens at the Initial Assessment?”)

Step 4 – Training and practice with local trainer of your choice, and education for yourself as the handler through Pet Partners online handler training, or another approved method

Step 5 – Complete Hospice Volunteer Training and all Orientation requirements

Step 6 – Pass formal WVH Pet Therapy Evaluation and provide veterinarian documentation of legally required vaccinations

Step 7 – Begin pet therapy visits with hospice patients and families

After four months of visits, the volunteer will be eligible for ***reimbursement of reasonable training expenses***, as well as an annual payment to defray the cost of the required yearly veterinary exam and fecal test.

Annual volunteer updates will include an evaluation of the animal to assess continued desire and suitability for making pet therapy visits with hospice patients, as well as current veterinary records.

Formal pet therapy certification with an outside organization will not be expected by WVH Hospice Care, so long as the volunteer team continues to meet WVH requirements. If you choose to become certified with Pet Partners, Paws for Love, or another animal therapy group in order to broaden your animal’s visit opportunities beyond hospice patients, WVH’s process will be excellent preparation. Funds are available to help support the costs of certification, so long as you also continue to volunteer with hospice patients.

What Happens at the Initial Assessment?

Your animal's basic obedience skills, friendliness toward strangers, as well as their ease with being handled all over their body and being in a new environment will be evaluated. The evaluation takes approximately 15 minutes. You will be asked to have your animal perform the following basic commands: **Sit, Stay, Down, Come, Leave It, Walk beside you on a leash without pulling**. You and your animal do not have to perform with precision at the initial assessment. How your animal reacts during a number of "challenges" including an examination (of paws, eyes, ears, body) by a stranger, a hug by a stranger, and redirection from distractions like food or noises will be observed. At the conclusion of the assessment, the evaluator will provide you and your animal with personalized recommendations for next steps, and information on the formal WVH Pet Therapy Evaluation.

Behaviors such as snarling, growling, snapping, pawing, extreme nervousness or shyness, excessive barking, signs of aggression towards other animals or people, potty accidents, jumping up on people or other animals are indications that your pet is not yet well-suited for pet therapy. Animals should be well socialized to proceed with preparation – this is important both for those who will be visited, and for the enjoyment of you and your animal during a visit.

The assessment has your animal's best interest at heart. If your animal is deemed "not ready" at the time of assessment, that is ok. You will be given resources on how to continue to prepare your animal and can re-assess again in the future, so long as the animal is not overly fearful or aggressive.