How It Works

After you receive your Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy certification letter, completed TMH volunteer requirements and received your volunteer badge you may begin participating in actual visits with your animal. Prior to receiving your badge you may only “shadow” Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteers on their visits.

There are two types of Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy visits: 1) Group, and 2) Individual, both described below. Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy recommends that new volunteers go on group visits for several months before attempting individual visits. If you elect to do individual visits, having gone on various group visits will help you discern the kind of facilities / populations that are most enjoyable for you and your animal. Some Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteers only attend group visits, some only attend individual visits, and some attend both types of visits. It depends on your preferences as well as your schedule.

**Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Volunteer Requirements:**

In order to maintain active status, Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteers should contribute a minimum of 10 direct contact hours per calendar year. An animal who visits less frequently than this may not keep up their social skills, resulting in anxiety on their part and less enjoyment for both of you.

**Tracking Your Volunteer Hours:**

At the end of each month, you will be asked to report your monthly volunteer hours. Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy tracks this information.

Track and report your hours in the following categories:

- Group visit hours
- Individual visit hours
- Indirect hours
- Number of interactions

Group and individual visit hours are both considered direct contact (i.e. interaction of your animal with facility residents). Even though visits may last less than an hour, for tracking purposes, round up to the nearest whole hour.

Indirect hours are for activities (with or without your animal) that do not involve direct contact with facility residents. Examples of indirect activities would be: shadow visits, representing Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy in a community event (e.g. Walk for Alzheimer’s, pet therapy demonstrations), assisting at Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training classes and evaluations, serving on Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy advisory board, etc.
Group Visits:

The Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program staff arranges the quarterly group visit schedule. The quarterly schedule is published on Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy’s website. **Important - let staff know which visits you would like to attend.** Groups comprised of 4-6 handlers and their animals go together into various Leon County facilities. Each group visit has a group host and Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy has formal facility agreements in place to ensure liability coverage. The group host signs in and out on behalf of the group. It is a good idea to let the group leader know if it is your first time visiting a given facility - they can alert you to any special features of the facility.

It is VERY important to arrive outside the facility 10-15 minutes prior to the scheduled time so the animals can “greet” each other before encountering facility residents.

Typically the group visit takes place in a central location (e.g. activity room, courtyard) and facility staff members are responsible for bringing interested residents to the designated area. During a group visit, each Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteer introduces their animal partner, maybe demonstrates a trick or two, and then the team members circulate through the room to interact with the residents.

Group visits typically last from 20 to 40 minutes. The length of time depends primarily on whether or not the animals are enjoying themselves. Handlers must judge whether their own animal partner begins to show any signs of stress, and if so, they may adjust their participation or excuse themselves from the facility.

Individual Visits:

Once you feel comfortable attending group visits you may elect to make individual visits at a particular facility. Contact the Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy Program Coordinator (Heather Gainey) and express your preferences. Heather will help you set up your visits visit with the facility. **DO NOT begin visiting a facility without notifying staff first.**

Individual visits may be arranged to take place at any of the locations where group visits take place. Individual visits may last longer than group visits, because they tend to be less stressful for your animal. Your animal becomes familiar with the facility and residents, and there aren’t other Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy animals present to be distracting. Individual visits can be particularly rewarding in that you develop relationships with residents and staff.

In addition, the following locations/programs fall into the “individual visit” category:

- The R.E.A.D. program
- Courthouse Therapy Dogs program
- Big Bend Hospice
- Tallahassee Memorial Hospital

All of these have additional training/screening requirements over and above our regular Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy training registration. Once you have become a
Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy volunteer, contact Stephanie Perkins, Heather Gainey or Sydney Hanselman if you are interested in any of these particular locations/programs.

Note that visit opportunities for both group and individual visits are sent out via email invitation at the beginning of each month. Visit opportunities for other special events and presentations are sent out via email invitation.