

Introduction Letter

Greetings from Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare,

Thank you very much for your interest in Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH) Animal Therapy. TMH is eager to engage with you, and we are happy to provide the following overview of how you can get involved.

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy is a highly-valued community asset. We coordinate visits by volunteer animal therapy teams to multiple facilities within the Big Bend area. These include long-term care facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, courthouses, and schools. Our teams also participate in specialized initiatives like the R.E.A.D. program and Courthouse Therapy Dogs. TMH interacts with diverse clients to provide improved mental health, motivation, recreation, education, rehabilitation, pain management, and other therapeutic services. Each animal therapy team has one human and one animal. Therapy animals are typically dogs; however, cats, mini horses, and other domesticated animals can be effective team members.

We offer two distinct volunteer pathways to support our mission:

Pathway 1: Animal Therapy Team (Handler & Animal)

If you wish to visit facilities directly with your animal, you can apply as a therapy team. Each team consists of one human and one domesticated animal.

Team Qualifications

- **Animal Health:** Must be at least one year old (6 months for pocket pets). Animals must be healthy, free from parasites, disease and infection. Animals with disabilities will be considered on a case by case basis. Dogs trained for aggressive protection or bite work are not eligible.
- **Handler Age:** Must be 14 or older (with guardian participation and written consent if under 18).
- **Vaccinations:** You must provide a copy of up-to-date vaccination records. A rabies tag alone is not acceptable.

Steps to Become a Certified Therapy Team

- **Step 1) Initial Screening Evaluation:** A 10-minute assessment of your animal's basic manners (Sit, Stay, Down, Come) and behavior around strangers, crowds, and loud noises. Aggressive behaviors, snarling, or excessive barking will negate acceptance. A non-refundable \$60 fee is required upon passing.

- **Step 2) Training Classes:** Includes three 2.5-hour classroom sessions on animal behavior and **five (5) 1-hour weekly sessions** with your dog practicing simulated facility encounters. You must also "shadow" an active team visit without your pet.
- **Step 3) Certification Paperwork:** Completion of the required application packet and volunteer forms during your workshop weeks.
- **Step 4) Formal Evaluation:** A **20-25 minute formal evaluation** in Tallahassee covering basic and therapy-specific skills.

Equipment Required during Screening, Classes and Evaluation

- **Acceptable Gear:** Flat collars, leather, fabric or biothane leashes (under 6 feet), and step in or front-clip body harnesses (e.g., Gentle Leader, Easy-Walk, Freedom, Martingales without metal links).
- **Unacceptable Gear:** Metal collars, chain leashes, retractable leashes, slip collars, pinch/spike collars, or electronic collars or spray collars. Moving or metal parts pose a pinching risk to patients.
- **Treats:** Treats are encouraged during screening, training classes, evaluations, and official facility visits.

Pathway 2: Volunteer Visit Facilitator (No Pet Required)

Volunteer Visit Facilitators keep things humming along! A Facilitator is a volunteer who suits up and helps without a therapy pet. This path is perfect if you have an active pet but want to visit without them occasionally, previously had a pet in the program, are waiting for the perfect pet to come along, or do not have a pet at all and just want to help out.

- **Program Representation:**
 - Act as the public face of Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy (TMAT) at events.
 - Answer questions from community members about our TMAT, services, and how to get involved.
- **Training Requirements:** Facilitators must attend the first three **2.5-hour classroom sessions** of our program. These sessions focus on TMAT history, dog body language and behavior, an overview of science- and behavior-based training methods, and TMH Orientation. While not required, Facilitators are welcome to attend the dog training classes for the **remaining 5 sessions**.

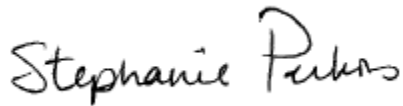
- **Clinical & Facility Visits:**
 - Keep track of patient interactions and assist with hand sanitizer.
 - Introduce the Animal Therapy Handler and pet to patients and staff.
 - Assist with facility navigation and any necessary clean-up.
 - Act as an "extra pair of hands" for the handler (e.g., refilling water bottles).

- **Special Events:**
 - Act as a liaison with the facility contact.
 - Arrive early to assist with parking, directions, and entry.
 - Manage crowd control so the therapy pets do not get overwhelmed.
 - Track interaction counts and assist with event clean-up.

Please visit www.tmh.org/animal therapy to submit your volunteer application. We look forward to many pawsitive experiences with you!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Perkins



Director

Tallahassee Memorial Animal Therapy

