



## What Makes a Person and Animal Suitable to be a New England Pet Partner's Volunteer Therapy Team?

**IMPORTANT:** Please be mindful that your dog or cat must be at least one year old to qualify for the screening. If you have rescued / adopted your partner, you must have lived with it for a minimum of six months before you may test to be a NEPP Volunteer Therapy Team.

We look for specific qualities in the people and their companion animals who will qualify as NEPP volunteer therapy teams. Pet owners who are considering this kind of service should read the following with care and consideration because, while this manner of volunteering can be extremely valuable and rewarding, it is not always enjoyable or appropriate for every person, pet or team.

## What Quality Does a Person have to Demonstrate to Be a Successful Team?

Providing animal-assisted therapy is a human health and social service. It is not a sport or competition. Your role in the process is empowering and important. It is not a casual, stress-free kind of volunteering. Many experienced volunteers liken it to a para-profession. You will often be “alone” with patients and a staff member. Beyond the mentoring and training phases, NEPP offers support in every way possible, but it is your ultimate responsibility to make connections with staff, good matches with appropriate clients (or groups) and to maintain a professional commitment with integrity.

- ☉ We inspire people who demonstrate good social skills, who can smile and relax, and at the same time relate comfortably with staff, patient and their animal partner.
- ☉ We look for things that will be essential when you do AAA / AAT visits, such as, are you on time? Did you prepare carefully by reading the material you received? Did you come to the test appropriately prepared? Are you willing to ask questions (clarify) when you don't understand something?
- ☉ Do you listen and communicate well with staff, patients or others you may encounter on a visit or in therapeutic session?
- ☉ Can you set boundaries and clarify guidelines to staff, teachers, family and friends who may not be in-tune to what your visit entails?
- ☉ We observe your relationship with your animal companion; how well do you know them, their personality and their needs? How does this animal feel about you or in different situations? Does your dog (for example) look to you for guidance and response to your requests? How do you guide your animal, and make requests (tone, style, etc.). How do you re-assure and make your animal companion feel safe?

## Consider your Willingness, Ability and Comfort Level Relating to the Following:

- ☹ Do you enjoy making conversation with strangers, extending yourself in often difficult moments?
- ☹ Will you be comfortable with unpleasant situations surrounding various therapies such as strong bodily odors, people in pain, depressed, angry or unpredictable behaviors (excitable)?
- ☹ Will you be willing to learn about the various patient populations you will be working with such as adults with Alzheimer's, children with autism, people with mental challenges or terminal disease? How about children with ADD or ADHD?
- ☹ Will your animal companion be comfortable with the same situations above and if not, which population would best suit both of your needs so you can make a difference while not stressing out yourself or your companion.
- ☹ Does your life circumstance give you enough wiggle room to be committed to volunteering? Patients and staff depend on you and your companion.

## What Kinds of Animals Will Qualify?

Besides dogs and cats, many other species make wonderful visiting animals that can form strong human-animal bonds. Here are a few: birds, rabbits, goats, domestic rats, hamsters, guinea pigs, ducks, chickens, miniature pigs, llamas, cows and horses.

At this time, New England Pet Partners, Inc. specializes in animals that are easily “portable” for taking into health care institutions. **Snakes, ferrets, lizards and wild or exotic animals are not accepted by NEPP and/or by Delta Society's® Standards and Practice.** Exotic animals are not legally acceptable as pets in many states, and without more research documenting their predictability over time; we cannot accurately evaluate their behavior and reactions to stress. **As of 2002, the Delta Society, thus NEPP, no longer accepts any animals trained in bite work.**

**NEPP** requires that all teams who pass a team evaluation and registered as pet partners, contribute 8-hours of volunteer-community service to NEPP (i.e. volunteering at team evaluations and/or events). We can and do sign off on community service hours for students, when appropriate for the school / college.

**NEPP** supports newly registered teams by offering (1) shadowing / mentoring on a visit either with your Partner or on a visit with ours.

Enjoy the Journey!