

Team Skills Requirements

The Warm Hearts Network (WHN) trained volunteer teams provide volunteer visiting (Animal Assisted Activities) and /or assistance with healthcare/human service professional engagement (Animal Assisted Therapy or Animal Assisted Education) in the community. Our human-animal teams are screened, evaluated, and then registered to visit healthcare facilities, schools, senior living and activity centers, hospice, and others.

To be successful in these situations, the registered handler and dog must have well-established specific skills:

Expectations of Handler:

- Respects the dog's preferences and limitations for duration, population, and activity expectations
- Able to predict and respond positively to environmental factors that may prove challenging to the dog
- Able to identify general dog body language and their dog's common stress signals.
- Positive communication and handling techniques (example: communicates with words rather than physical force or leash corrections)
- Has lived or worked with dog consistently for at least 6 months
- Follow WHN policies and procedures
- Has a positive relationship with dog
- Uses a maximum of three cues to direct dog
- Is interested and willing to continue training with their dog to continuously strengthen the dog's behavior and skills

Expectations of Dog:

- At least two years old at testing time
- Has lived/worked consistently with handler at least 6 months
- Enjoys meeting new people and going to new places
- Engages with people other than handler- displays a desire to visit
- Has basic obedience skills: sit, come, down, stay, loose leash walking, gentle mouth under verbal control
- Be able to ignore or calmly observe another working dog without requiring an interaction with that dog (note: dogs should not visit with each other during volunteer visiting sessions)
- Be able to ignore or calmly observe and be redirected from dogs owned by residents at visiting facilities that may bark, lunge or jump at them
- Does not require a choke chain, prong collar, e-collar, head halter or leash corrections to maintain polite, controlled behavior in busy, public spaces
- Can respond correctly to a regular speaking voice within two cues
- Does not eliminate/mark indoors
- Can walk by food or pills on ground without picking it up (can 'leave it')