

Therapy Dog Certification:

Empirical Report

Presented To:

AKC Stephenville Chapter

Presented By:

Lindsay Bender and Kelley Hutchinson

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	ii
Abstract	iii
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
History	1
Benefits.....	1
Research	2
Interview with Micky Van Loon.....	2
Knowledge Test	3
Dog Therapy Survey Graph.....	4
Training at Texas Dog Academy	6
Discussion.....	7
Process.....	7
Cost.....	7
Requirements	8
AAT Therapy Dogs	8
AAA Therapy Dogs	8
Conclusion	9
Recommendation	9
References.....	10
Appendix A: Dog Therapy Survey	11

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Hours Spent With Personal Dog	4
Figure 2: Basic Training.....	5
Figure 3: Use of Personal Dogs.....	5
Figure 4: Bill Walter's Mural	6

Abstract

Therapy dogs are a great asset to anyone that may need one. They can help many different people. Therapy dogs can make the depressed happy, help with medical conditions, and can help the blind with everyday activities.

We found the information needed on how to get a dog certified for therapy use, why it is beneficial to have a therapy dog, and the requirements. Therapy dogs are for many reasons and you do not have to have a disability to have a therapy dog. An owner can take their dog to local hospitals, schools, and nursing homes to bring joy to a person's day. On the other hand, a therapy dog can help a person in special need with a handicap.

We also have interviewed Micky Van Loon and Bill Walters to understand the process that a dog needs to go through before becoming certified. We conducted a random survey of 62 people and found out that 66% of these people had dogs, but only 22% were interested in getting their dog certified for therapy use. We think that if people knew how to get a dog certified for therapy use, then maybe more people would be likely to get a dog certified for therapy use.

Introduction

Have you ever wondered what a dog wearing a cape and are always with a person in public places are doing. Well many people use these dogs as therapy dogs. A lot of people don't know exactly how to get the dog certified for therapy use, or where to get a therapy dog for people that are in need or disabled. This report will inform the American Kennel Club (AKC) chapter in Stephenville, TX of how they can get their dogs certified as a therapy dog. This will give the Stephenville AKC Chapter an extra option to have that will help in the community.

Background

This section will give insight on the background of therapy dogs and the importance to have access to one.

History

Dogs have been used as therapy dogs in multiple health facilities, schools, during times of need (i.e. September 11th), and to help the blind and disabled move around. Therapy Dogs International (TDI) has said that a study has been done to prove that when a person pets or handles an animal it reduces blood pressure, strain, stress, and can bring a person out of being lonely or depressed.

The two ways that dogs can help people, according to TDI in the article "Therapy Dogs," is through Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). With AAA it is "casual activities where people and pets connect." Dogs do not need any specialized training to help with the AAA side, but they do need to be calm, friendly, and well behaved. AAT is where a dog is helping with the more physical needs of a person. "Dog grooming, walking and even Frisbee throwing can help with coordination, strength, and flexibility." Whereas AAA dogs work with multiple people and do not need any special training, an AAT dog does need training and usually works with the dog owner only.

Dogs have always been a great companion. According to Stanley Coren in his book The Intelligence of a Dog "evidence as far back as predynastic Egypt there was a demands for small 'toy' dogs, who seemed to have no other function that as pets and companions" (2006). Dogs mannerism has always been to look for a leader and know where their place is in the pack, whether it be another dog or a human owner. Dogs have been there for pets for children and single people, to talk to when there is not another ear, and to put a smile on peoples face.

Benefits

If the Stephenville AKC chapter were to get more dogs certified for therapy use, then students in local schools could become more relaxed, the elders who don't have anyone in their family will be able to enjoy some needed company, and the citizens who are depressed can have the support and love of a pet to boost their spirit.

Many people are in therapy for a number of reasons. The use of a therapy dog can boost a person's spirit, bring a smile, relieve stress and sometimes even lower their blood pressure. With the help of therapy dogs, a person that is on medications may be able to lower the dose they are taking, make it easier for a person to get around, lift their spirit, have a reason to get up in the morning, and even just a best friend. Therapy dogs are also very helpful to those that are blind and disabled. These dogs can help a blind person cross

the road, help someone in a wheel chair open a door, or even help someone know when they will have a seizure. For these reasons, it is important to have therapy dogs available in the Stephenville area, especially being in an older town with fewer resources near them.

Research

This section is to show the research that we have done in order to make it easier for the members of the Stephenville AKC Chapter to get their own dogs certified for therapy use.

Interview with Micky Van Loon

Micky Van Loon is a current member of the Stephenville AKC Chapter. Micky explains that therapy dogs are there to assist a person that have medical problems are usually born with instinct. Micky describes a knowledge test that is color coded when observing the dog. The dogs can be anywhere from 6-8 weeks old to take this knowledge test. If the puppies are marked as potential use for therapy dogs then the dogs go to a family that is their foster family for sixteen months. The dog in training goes everywhere with the family including work, school, and out to eat. This allows the dog to get familiar with everyday activities. It also allows the dog to become accustomed to things that the dog's owner will be doing with them as well. While with the foster family and the dog in training must wear a cape, this identifies that they are a therapy dog in training and allowed to be present with the owner. Micky also explains that the dog does not have to belong to a breed association to be a therapy dog candidate. Larger breeds are the most common dogs for therapy, but there are many kinds of breeds for therapy use. The most common breeds that are used are Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, and German Shepherds; because of their size, they are physically able to have their owner be dependent on them if necessary.

Micky also shared a story with us about an autistic child who grew up with a therapy dog who was the boy's right hand man. The parents saw the boy advance in everything the doctors said he would not do if he were in a depression state. The dog opened the boy up to trust and friendship. Sadly, a driver hit the dog one day and the boy totally shut down and became back in his depressed state. He saw doctors, therapist, medication, everything. The doctor finally told the parent is maybe another dog would be beneficial, so the parents of this now young man called Micky about her ad in the paper of AKC German Shepherds. Micky told the family she was not sure if that was the best thing for the boy but they could come out and see the dogs. The boy acted as if he was not interested at all when they first arrived. The family shared the story with Micky in great depth and finally after hours of being at Micky's house the boy said he wanted to go see the puppies. He saw them and came back and then asked Micky if he could hold one. She said yes and the boy seem to be somewhat intrigued by the dog. The parents noticed this and asked Micky if they could buy the dog and she agreed. The parents soon contacted Micky shortly after and shared with Micky that the boy started living life again. He was happy and not depressed anymore. He was totally off his medication and back to himself once more.

Knowledge Test

According to the Celhaus German Shepherd's "T Litter Temperament Test", puppies took the test at 55 days old. The following are the different tests that the litter took:

1. Acceptance/Attachment
 - "The first test involves evaluating the pup's acceptance of the strange place and its willingness to interact with the stranger. Ideal reaction is eye contact and interest in the stranger but not sign of nervousness in the interaction (we don't want a "Protect me!" attitude), followed by visual investigation of the surroundings and then a return of attention to the tester."
2. Pain Sensitivity
 - "The loose skin over the ribs is gently pinched and the pup's reaction is noted. Ideal reaction is to notice the pinch but be unconcerned by it. We also look for a willingness to forgive the tester."
3. Retrieve
 - "Next, willingness to retrieve is evaluated using different toys: a stuffed toy, and a tennis ball. Ideal reaction is to repeatedly bring the toy back to the handler rather than moving off to "posses" it. The type of bite on the toys is evaluated: a full mouth bite shows more confidence and drive than a front-teeth-only bite."
4. Perseverance
 - "Then perseverance is evaluated by seeing how enthusiastically they will pursue, grab hold, and tug on a sack. Ideal reaction is to pursue enthusiastically, grasp with a full mouth bite, tug and do everything possible to possess the sack. We like to see a pup get its whole body on the sack in effort to subdue it."
5. Courage and Aggression
 - "Next, courage and aggression was evaluated using an "Old MacDonald" cow which sang and moved erratically. Will they stand their ground? Will they go investigate it? Excellent reaction is to go to the moving, clanking train and check it out. Extremely excellent reaction is to actually attack it while it moves. Good reaction is to investigate it after the tester turns it off. The tester encourages the pup to investigate after it is turned off, if it wouldn't while it was "singing" and moving. She notes how much encouragement is needed."
6. Fear
 - "The a metal pan filled with metal items (horseshoes, nails, bolts, etc.) is dropped behind them from a height of about 2 feet while they are looking away from it. Will the pup hold its ground and then go look at what dropped from nowhere? Excellent reaction is to acknowledge and turn towards the sound and then confidently go see what made the racket. The tester encourages the pup to investigate, if it doesn't on its own. She notes how much encouragement is needed. I find most of my pups look towards

the racket and keep on playing with the toy they had, rather than stopping their play to investigate.”

7. Surprise

- “The last test involves getting the pup to chase you (or a toy or the burlap sack) towards a doorway, from behind which an umbrella is opened suddenly and then lowered to the ground, still open. They are evaluated on how they recover from being startled and if they’ll go investigate. Ideal reaction is for the pup to startle but hold its ground, then move right up to check out the umbrella. A super excellent reaction is to go up and bite it and/or walk all over it. The tester encourages the pup to investigate after the umbrella is on the ground, if it doesn’t on its own. She notes how much encouragement is needed.” (2006)

Dog Therapy Survey Graph

Below are some of the graphs to shows the results of the survey.

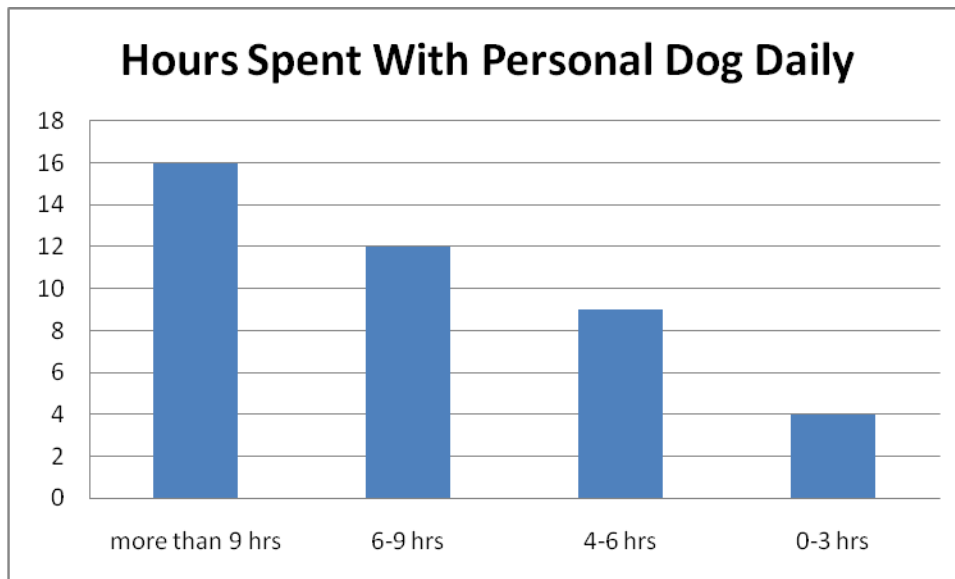


Figure 1: Hours Spent With Personal Dog

The graph above shows that out of 62 surveys taken that there are more than half of the people that spend more than 6 hours per day with their dog. When getting a dog certified for therapy use, that dog must be with you at all times to interact with different situations. You must be able to have the time available to spend with the dog.



Figure 2: Basic Training

The above graph shows that out of 62 surveys taken, only 5% of their personal dogs have been through some sort of basic training. If the other 88% were to want to use their dog for therapy use, they would need to put their dog through basic training first. This is a huge asset to having a well mannered therapy dog.

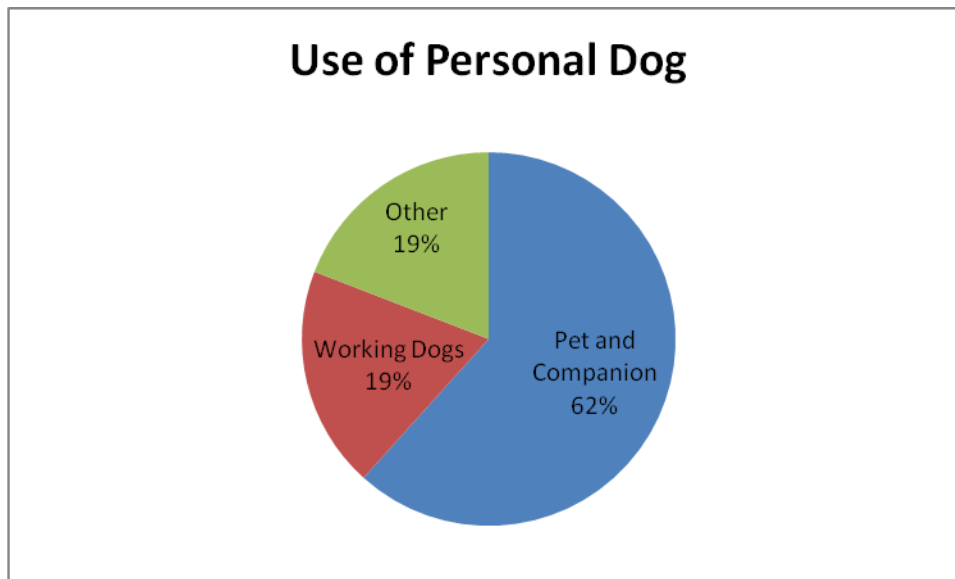


Figure 3: Use of Personal Dogs

The above graph shows that over half of the surveys that were taken use their dog for a pat and a companion. These dogs would be a great asset for therapy use. They want to serve their owner and are there for their owner. They will not be nipping at a person's

heels trying to herd them into a room. If these dogs have the correct basic training, then these dogs would be great for therapy use.

Training at Texas Dog Academy

Texas Dog Academy, with owner Bill Walters, in Acton Texas was willing to meet with us to discuss the starting points of a therapy dog. He explained to us that any kind of dog therapy starts with obedience. Walters explains that the dog must know its place in the relationship. The dog views the owner and its relationship the same as a dog pack. Below is the mural that was on the wall in Bill Walter's office:



Figure 4: Bill Walter's Mural

This mural is what Bill Walter's goes by when training a dog and its family basic commands. His mural states, "Owner learns it, Dog learns it, Learn to use it together." For example:

- Sit
- Come
- Stay
- Down
- Heel

The owner has to learn what they are teaching the dog, then the dog learns the commands, and then the dog and owner learn the commands together.

Bill has done therapy training before with nursing home patients. Therapy dogs that are for multiple people are a little different from one owner use. An owner can have their dog visit facilities that benefit from therapy dogs. The dogs must have all their shots up to date, and must be well mannered with basic training. Most places do not mind if a therapy dog is there as long as they are familiar with the training facility or training program that the dog has been through for basic training.

Discussion

This section will talk about the following topics:

- Process
- Cost
- Time
- Requirements
- Advantages
- Disadvantages

Process

The first step, according to Bill Walters, is to make sure the dog has a good understanding of basic obedience. Without basic obedience, the dog will not be off to a good start for therapy use.

The next step will be to figure out if you would like to use your dog for Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) or Animal Assisted Activities (AAA). If you would like to use your dog for AAT, you will need to begin to train your dog in a higher level of training. Depending on who the dog will be helping will determine on what other commands the dog will need to know. Will the dog need to know how to open a door? Will it need to know how to pick up a pen on the floor? Will it even need to know when to allow a blind person to walk across a busy street? All of these things, and many more activities, the dog will need to accomplish many more obstacles than just basic training.

If you are planning to use your dog for AAT, you may not need much more training. This dog will go to take to local hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. The most the dog will need to know is basic training. According to Bill Walters, the local nursing homes will need to know how the dog reacts to certain things, that the dog is up to date on its shots and vaccinations, and that the dog handler knows how to handle the dog.

Below are the steps to certify your dog for therapy use according to the website for Alternative Solutions:

1. Your dog must pass the Canine Good Citizen Test
Contact the American Kennel Club or Therapy Dogs International at 973-252-9800 or Delta Society 425-226-7357 or 425-226-7557
The Canine Good Citizen Test is designed to ensure that a dog can be a respected member of the community and facility because it is well trained and well mannered. This means that your dog is suitable for community visits.
2. Provide up to date information regarding your dog.
 - a. Shot Record
 - b. Health Certificate
 - c. Copy of Vet License
3. It is recommended that you have insurance. You can obtain this information from Therapy Dogs International at the above number.

Cost

Although some training can be expensive, people who are physical disabled and have a diagnosed disability have the option to get a therapy dog of their own. It is a lengthy process but most non-profit organizations have ways the potential owner can get a dog without the big cost. Organizations like “Planet Dog Foundation,” are willing to

help the disabled as much as possible as long as the financial support is there from donations and fundraisers. Most of their 21 grants were targeted toward New England in 2005 because of limited resources, but they plan to revamp for the years to come and look in to other resources.

NEADS, (Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans) on the other hand want their client to have at least \$6,000. That is the cost to raise and train an assistance dog. NEADS states they will not deny anyone a dog but can earn through the following:

- Volunteering time
- Get employer to match your cost
- Come to the graduation
- Spread the word

Requirements

Below will discuss the requirements for AAT and AAA therapy dogs.

AAT Therapy Dogs

For dogs in AAT therapy, the dog trains for almost 2 years. These dogs are determined if they would be good at AAT therapy use at 6-8 weeks of age. Once the dog knows basic obedience, the dog will then begin more detailed training that will fit the person that will own the dog later on. The dog will then move to its permanent owner, who will train it in other activities that the owner may need the dog to do. While the dog is in training, the dog must wear a cape that allows the public to know that the dog is in training for therapy use. Once the dog is with its permanent owner, the dog will then wear a cape telling the public that it is a therapy dog. This cape allows the dog to go into buildings that dogs normally cannot go into, such as:

- Restaurants
- Grocery Stores
- Clothing Stores

The dog needs to be up to date on its shots and vaccinations. The dog must go with the person that is training it for the first 2 years everywhere that person goes. This allows the dog to become accustomed to different situations.

AAA Therapy Dogs

For dogs that are for AAA therapy, the dog mainly needs its basic obedience. This dog is for multiple people. The dog needs to be able to sit calmly while approached by a stranger to pet them. These dogs are for the following:

- Hospital Visits
- School Visits
- Nursing Home Visits

Since these dogs are to be around multiple people, they need to be on their best behavior. The dog will also go with the person training them everywhere with them for a course of almost 2 years, similar to AAT dogs. This allows the dog to become accustomed to different situations.

Conclusion

Therapy dogs can be a great asset to a person with disabilities. Although it may be costly to get one certified, they can be used for many different reasons and be a great help to someone in need. They help with medical reasons like depression, anxiety, and high blood pressure. Just having a dog in a person's company can do great things for a person's health. They help with medical reasons like depression, anxiety, reducing medication, assisting handicap people with everyday living, and even lift the spirits of the elderly. Just having a dog in a person's company can do great things for a person's health. There have been many great accomplishments from therapy dogs as well as the recipient in the past, and more to come with a wider outlook of knowledge.

Recommendation

With all of the research that we have done to find out the history of therapy dogs, the process to get a dog certified as a therapy dog, and even finding out that it can be pricey; we truly believe that therapy dogs can be a great asset to any one person as well as the community. If you were to get your dog certified for AAA, then you not only would be able to have a calm dog on your hands, but you could help the community and bring joy to another person's life.

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Appendix A: Dog Therapy Survey

Dog Therapy Questions

For Technical Writing Class

Gender: (circle one) Male Female

1. Do you currently have a Dog? _____
If so, how many? _____

If you answered no please do not fill out the rest of the questionnaire

2. How old are your dogs? _____
3. How many years have you had your dogs? _____
4. What kind of breed is your dog? _____
5. Have you ever been interested in taking training courses to certify your dogs?
Not Interested Interested Very Interested
6. How much time do you spend with your dog each week?
0-3 hours 4-6 6-9 more than 9 hours
7. What is the main purpose for your dog? _____

8. Has your dog ever been to dog training classes? Yes No
If so what kind and where? _____
9. Would you be interested in using your dog for therapy? Yes No
10. Comments: _____
