



St. John Ambulance

SAVING LIVES
at work, home and play

The Therapy Dog Program Opportunity

If you're a dog owner, then you know firsthand the powerful healing and stress-relieving effects that quality time with man's best friend can have on your mind, body and spirit. Dogs love unconditionally: they don't judge, and they don't hold grudges and they don't discriminate.

Do you have a dog that loves people and can enjoy their company quietly and calmly? If so, why not consider joining the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program? The program offers a whole host of benefits to both you and your dog.

Benefits of the Therapy Dog Program

You'll uplift people's spirits.

Whether you and your dog visit seniors in a long-term care facility, working adults in their office or children at their school, your very presence has the ability to brighten someone's day. You never know what another individual might be going through, but by allowing them to spend quality time with your dog, you might very well help them get through it.

Reduce stress and lower blood pressure.

According to an [article](#) from Harvard Medical School, the mere act of petting a dog has been shown in several studies to lower blood pressure and reduce stress. This means that your dog can literally have a healing effect on others, just by receiving some well-deserved attention and petting!

Draw people out of their shells.

In a similar vein, interacting with dogs has also been shown to increase sociability, which is good for long-term health. This is an especially important benefit as it related to children and seniors, who are particularly prone to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Make a real difference in your community.

It feels good to know that you're making a positive impact on those around you in your community. By participating in the Therapy Dog Program, you'll bring joy, stress relief and real health benefits to a wide variety of people who need it... and the benefits extend to your own happiness. Participating in the Therapy Dog Program is one of the most rewarding ways you can give back to your community.

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St. John Ambulance is an international humanitarian organization and is a foundation of the Order of St. John



Receive formal recognition for your efforts.

The rewards of participating aren't only intrinsic, either. As a member of St. John Ambulance, you're also entitled to all of the formal recognition and awards that come with being an active volunteer. These awards span the full spectrum from recognizing your hours volunteered to rewarding outstanding efforts and beyond. For more information on our awards, please click [here](#).

Build and expand your network.

Volunteering with St. John Ambulance gives you the opportunity to attend community events and build your personal and professional network. You'll be invited to attend volunteer appreciation events, as well as other community events that allow you to meet and network with other like-minded individuals.

Allow your dog to fulfill its life's purpose.

The benefits extend to your dog, as well. Dogs that are approved to participate in the Therapy Dog Program are those that have demonstrated that they have a kind heart and genuine love for meeting other people. Participating in the program allows your dog to work in a job that allows them to do what they love: bringing joy to others. And isn't finding work we love doing what we're all looking for?

A Short Story Illustrating the Power of the Therapy Dog Program

The following excerpt comes from a testimonial by Therapy Dog Program volunteer Carmie McCormack, and powerfully illustrates the transformative impact that your involvement in the program can have on someone else's life.

Helen was an 83-year-old lady that Choice (my miniature long-hair dachshund) and I visited at a senior's residence for over a year. She had always owned dogs and loved having Choice come to visit her, so much so that she kept a box of Milk Bones in her room.

... As soon as we entered the building for our visits, Choice would insist on visiting Helen first. At first I thought the attraction was for the cookies, but I soon came to believe that there was so much more to it. Helen would talk to Choice and ask her questions like "Has your Mommie taken good care of you this week?" and I think that on some level, Choice must have been answering her. One day Helen asked the question and then looked at me and said that Choice had been lonely that week.

I was shocked because I'm a shift worker, and has just finished a run of working days, which leaves Choice alone longer than usual. ... Helen and Choice developed such a strong



bond that was shared so privately between them that I almost felt as if I was intruding on them.

... On one of our visits, Choice and I went into Helen's room and a nurse was in with her. When I told her that we would come back later, she asked us to stay, knowing how much comfort Choice always brought to her. When I put Choice on the bed, Helen stirred and opened her eyes. Choice sat at Helen's shoulder and stared into her eyes as if she was looking for re-assurance and Helen's return gaze was equally as intense.

The nurse was telling me that Helen hadn't opened her eyes in days and that she was very weak. The doctors had expected Helen to pass days earlier and didn't understand what was keeping her going, but I'm sure I know. After a few minutes, I told Choice that it was time to go and she did the most amazing thing. She gently leaned over and gave Helen a kiss on the cheek and a kiss on each eye, and Helen smiled in a way that I've never seen before, like a smile of Angels. I believe that Helen was waiting to say good-bye to Choice and that during their last conversation; she passed away 20 minutes after we left the room.

This is just one of the many powerful stories our volunteers have shared about the bonds they have built with others in their community through the Therapy Dog Program.

How You Can Get Involved

Before your dog can begin visiting people, it needs to go through our Therapy Dog Certification Program, where it will be put through a series of 13 tests to determine if it has the right temperament and mannerisms to join the program. You will also need to apply to become a member of St. John Ambulance and participate in 10 mentored visits at facilities. Once complete, you'll be able to start making visits on your own!

Visit Seniors' Centres

New volunteers to the program are encouraged to start by visiting seniors in long-term care and retirement facilities. Many of those staying in these facilities do not have the luxury of being visited by family on a regular basis, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Visiting with your dog can help brighten their day and give them just the pick-me-up they needed.

Take Part in the Paws 4 Stories Program

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Dogs who have demonstrated success visiting seniors and have logged at least 40 hours of service may be invited to test for their ability to visit children in schools. The demand for this service in schools is tremendous, as therapy dogs provide a number of benefits to children.

Many children have a fear of reading out loud; they may be shy, or they may be afraid of making a mistake. The Paws 4 Stories Program allows them to read for 30 minutes to a therapy dog that will neither judge nor criticize, creating a safe space for them to practice without fear of judgment or sounding silly.

If your dog loves children, consider participating in the Paws 4 Stories Program – for each child that is able to participate, there are many others who don't have the opportunity because there simply aren't enough dogs to meet the demand!

Visit Places of Business

More and more frequently, we receive requests from businesses to receive visits from therapy dogs to their offices. Business owners are beginning to realize the value that the stress-relief provided by therapy dog visits can bring to their organization.

What to Do Next

If you're interested in getting involved in the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and making a meaningful difference in your community, please click [here](#) for information on how to get started. We hope to hear from you soon!

