Canine Therapy Corps Volunteers and Their Dogs Motivate Recovery

Unique in Chicago, Canine Therapy Corps provides animal-assisted therapy to physically and emotionally challenged individuals.

Canine Therapy Corps uses volunteer dogs and their owners to assist in healing. We have been motivating recovery and enhancing the health of our clients since 1991, free of charge. Our volunteers help people learn to live life to the fullest, whatever their injury, illness or challenge.

Working inside the city’s most esteemed medical and human service facilities, dedicated human volunteers and their certified therapy dogs work closely with medical professionals. Together they deliver highly interactive, goal-directed therapy. Interactive means the client is the person working directly with the dog, giving commands and praise. Goal-directed means the program focuses on the client’s current challenges. For a spinal cord injured person, this may be relearning balance. For a person in addiction recovery, this may be managing anger.

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Fetch Therapy

Canine Therapy Corps volunteer teams work with clients in speech, recreational, occupational, physical and psychosocial therapies.

Our innovative programs focus on measurable and attainable goals. For children on the autism spectrum, teens struggling with substance abuse, recovery, or adults with emotional challenges, our volunteer teams provide a non-threatening way to improve communication skills, face fears and gain self-confidence. For survivors of stroke, traumatic brain injury, or spinal cord damage—whether from a car accident, a sports injury or a violent crime—our dogs make physical therapy and group interactions more effective.

In many cases, the simple act of grooming a dog can increase mobility in a hand. Throwing a ball can enhance a patient’s strength and flexibility. Giving verbal commands can help restore speech after a stroke or head injury. By adding the unique element of a warm nose and wagging tail to a difficult and repetitive routine, our volunteer teams help clients try harder, work longer and stay motivated to continue the hard work of rehabilitation.

The Right Stuff

It takes a special animal to be a Canine Therapy Corps certified therapy dog. Before dogs can serve in our programs, they must pass a rigorous exam. In addition to following basic commands, dogs must possess a calm, non-aggressive temperament and be comfortable and focused around other dogs, people, and medical equipment.

Canine Therapy Corps dogs are assigned to a program that fits their owners’ schedule and interests. Every dog has a specialty: some are pros at sitting still, and others excel at fetching or hurdle jumping. But all work diligently and tirelessly to help increase mobility, dexterity and independence in our clients. And they do it for no reward other than a smile, a pat on the head and a biscuit.

Help Wanted

Both dog owners and individuals without dogs are vital to Canine Therapy Corps’ success. If you own a dog, we invite you to explore this vital way to work together in a healing setting. We also welcome volunteers without dogs to share energy and expertise on fundraising, media relations, research, outreach, and more. Canine Therapy Corps provides solid training, flexible schedule options, and the many intangible rewards that volunteering to help others heal can offer.

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Dogs Who Heal

We are proud of our volunteers and their working dogs. These dogs are not mere visitors, there to bring distraction and cheer. They are working participants in interactive work sessions designed to meet each client’s needs.

Goal Directed Therapy

And we are proud of our partnerships with respected institutions such as Advocate Lutheran General Children’s Hospital, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Easter Seals Therapeutic School and Center for Autism Research. Within the facilities, our teams work in group settings, using one or more of the unique programs developed by Canine Therapy Corps. We design programs as living laboratories, document the striking progress we see in our clients, and share tested and proven therapy curricula with other healthcare providers. One of Canine Therapy Corps’ goals is to provide the expertise to help more facilities embrace the power of animal-assisted therapy.