

THE PET CONNECTION

By Deb Waldron

THERAPY PETS, YOURS COULD BE ONE!

Oh our wonderful pets! They give us so much joy and comfort. And it's a proven fact, pets are good for our health. They can lower our blood pressure, stimulate the flow of serotonin to the brain, and release those happy endorphins into our blood stream. Wouldn't it be great if you could share some of the healing joy and comfort your pet is so capable of giving with someone who does not have the benefit of an animal friend when they could use one most? You might have the perfect therapy dog, cat or bird sitting right next to you at this very moment!

Assisted living and nursing homes are especially receptive to having therapy animals come to visit their residents. You should check with each facility to see what requirements your pet needs to meet before making a visit. I can tell you from experience that few things are more rewarding than watching your furry friend bring a smile to a lonely face. Therapy animals do wonderful work at hospitals as well, bringing courage and relaxation to patients who are facing great challenges with their health. The requirements for participation in such programs are more stringent, but the rewards are well worth the extra work.

Schools are another place where therapy animals are welcome. Apparently it is much easier for some children to read to a dog than to a person, and many autistic children are able to focus and communicate better in the quiet presence of a canine friend. Check with your local schools to see if they have animal therapy programs, and request guidelines for you and your pet to participate.

Sometimes you don't have to go very far to meet a need. Touching someone's life with an animal can be as simple as bringing your pet to visit a shut in neighbor or friend. I want to encourage pet owners with animals other than dogs and cats to realize that their bird, turtle, rabbit, guinea pig or other special animal friend can make a great therapy pet. All that's really necessary is a desire to share your pet's love with another person, your pet will take it from there!

Here are some fabulous websites to help you better understand pet therapy and how you and your pet can get started. Please visit one of these websites, if for no other reason than to view the touching photos of therapy animals as they love and help people in the most beautiful ways.

[Therapy Dogs Inc.](#)

<http://www.therapydogs.com/>

Therapy Dogs International

<http://www.tdi-dog.org/OurPrograms.aspx?Page=Nursing+Homes>

Pet Partners (Formerly known as The Delta Society)

<http://www.deltasociety.org/>

PAWS FOR REFLECTION

“The world is hugged by the faithful arms of volunteers.” - Terri Guillemets