

How Therapy Dogs Help People



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Animals, especially companion animals hold an important and much-loved place in modern society. It seems only natural that the benefits brought to an individual or family as pet owners should extend to other settings. However, in Australia pet therapy is a relatively new concept. As it stands, there are no governing or peak bodies regulating the pet therapy industry. Despite this, companion animals, specifically dogs are now helping people to lead full, healthy, and happy lives regardless of their circumstance. For these reasons, there is a growing interest in Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) amongst professionals eager to embrace the many benefits of pet therapy.

Pet therapy can be applied in a wide variety of settings: aged care, hospitals, schools, universities, libraries, mental health facilities and more. Here are a few examples:

- Dogs in aged care provide opportunity for clients to engage in social interactions, they encourage reminiscence and combat loneliness.
- Dogs in the court system provide comfort ranging from helping to alleviate anxiety to more complex interactions with trauma and abuse survivors.
- In the treatment of cancer, dogs in chemotherapy units help to lower pain perception, reduce stress and blood pressure and provide welcome distraction from medical procedures.
- As part of a regime of treatment a physiotherapist may utilise a dog to not only encourage participation in activities by a client but to also create structured programming around interactions such as throwing a ball or brushing a dog to build strength or regain flexibility.
- In a mental health setting a social worker may use pet therapy to encourage group participation, break down barriers and encourage communication amongst group participants.
- In the school setting therapy dogs can increase school attendance and improve learning outcomes for struggling students.
- Therapy dogs have a strong history in supporting survivors as immediate responders of traumatic events and disasters.

These are of course a limited set of examples. Improvement in mood and the release of the feel-good hormones Serotonin and Oxytocin brought about by patting a dog can be of benefit in almost any situation and with any age group. Being part of a pet therapy team can also bring wonderful benefits to pet owners and the animal themselves. Along with the enjoyment achieved through working with your best furry friend owners often report improvements in their own health and wellbeing. Helping others and seeing the joy that your dog can bring is extremely rewarding.

The Fact Sheet: ***Become a Paws Pet Therapy Team*** looks at one way you can become a pet therapy team.

The information provided in this Fact Sheet is for general informational purposes only. Please consider your personal circumstances and always do your own research to ensure the right outcome for you.