



Therapy Dog Manual

Animal Assisted Activities and Therapy



Giving Love - Sharing Company - Providing Motivation





Vancouver ecoVillage

Therapy Dog Manual



The Vancouver ecoVillage Therapy Dog Program is dedicated to those volunteers who generously give of their time to make a difference in the lives of others by sharing the genuine affection of their dog. You are our ambassador in your community. Through your efforts, you are educating the public about the value of the human-animal bond and setting an example for volunteer service. You are not only doing therapy work with your dog, you are making the world a better place - one person at a time.

Thank you for sharing your passion, your heart, and yourself. This program is dedicated to you.

Vancouver ecoVillage
Therapy Dog Program

Cover Design by Samantha Walton



Therapy Dog Manual

CONTENTS

Preface	3
1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Eligibility for Dog Handlers	5
1.2 Eligibility for Vancouver ecoVillage Dogs	6
1.3 Professional Conduct	6
2.0 AAA vs. AAT - Animal Assisted Activities vs. Therapy	7
2.1 Benefits You May Receive	8
2.2 Your Dog’s Role as a Team-Mate	8
3.0 Vancouver ecoVillage AAA/AAT Code of Ethics	8
4.0 Tips for Success	9
5.0 Screening and Testing	10
5.1 Skills Testing	10
5.2 Reaction Testing	11
6.0 Approaching a Client	13
6.1 Creating Conversation	14
7.0 Considerations When Visiting	15
8.0 Situations that Prevent a Visit	17
9.0 Vancouver ecoVillage Policies and Procedures	18
10.0 Vancouver ecoVillage Therapy Dog Team Agreement	19

ANNEXES

Health Screening Form	20
Incident Report	22
Insurance	23



Preface

From Reading Education Assistance Dogs, Autism Support Dogs and Canine Support Dogs to Crisis Comfort Dogs, we are seeing more and more animals serving humans in need. A good therapy dog and handler team does a lot more than just make people feel fleetingly happy. Therapy dogs who participate in structured programs designed by health care professionals (Animal Assisted Therapy, or AAT) - can decrease pain, improve mobility, speed up post-surgery healing and even calm autistic children as well as increasing their social interactions. A larger number of dogs and handlers participate in what are called Animal Assisted Activities (AAA), in which teams visit hospitalized children and senior-center residents. The petting, tricks and furry companionship can greatly stimulate the release of the “feel-good” neurohormone oxytocin. It can be equally rewarding for the handler to talk about their dog and enjoy seeing it petted and appreciated. However, not everyone during a visit will want to meet the dog, and it is good to be aware that a dog may actually dislike the work. In addition, a dog may pick up an antibiotic-resistant bacteria like MRSA which is commonly found in health-care facilities. Therefore, there is a lot to learn about doing this work that is helpful to others, safe for everyone involved and more importantly, enjoyable for the dog.

One of the most important ethical considerations to make before starting Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) is to ensure your dog thoroughly enjoys the work rather than simply tolerating it. Even with the existence of such great need and human suffering, when animals are used in service of humans, the animal’s suitability and preparation for the work, as well as the handler’s ability to advocate for their AAI partner, deserves our serious consideration. With the heightened awareness of this type of therapeutic interaction, many pet owners are convinced that their dog has a “special gift” that will make him a brilliant “therapist.” Many of us, who may unknowingly lack the requisite knowledge and experience to do so, make the decision to draft our companion animals into the role of working animal. Often times it is the owner who loves the work but not the animal that may not enjoy being embraced and cuddled but simply tolerate it. The truth is that human needs, human wishes, human hopes and desires often cloud judgment and get in the way of our ability to truly see the animal. It is here, in the space between “a human in need” and “an animal to serve” where the possibility exists that animals can be exploited.

If we are truly to provide high quality services to humans with Animal Assisted Interventions, we need to protect and respect our animal partners in the process. This means that we have an obligation to engage in ethical and responsible decision-making in our selection of working animals. The questions are relatively simple: what are the unique characteristics of this particular animal? Can we reasonably (fairly and humanely) expect that this particular animal can do this particular job? Certainly there are significant benefits that can occur when there is a goodness of fit between a client’s needs and a therapy animal’s skills and affinities. But when the fit is not right, it can be an unhappy mismatch or worse if the animal is anxious, afraid or even potentially dangerous. Here are 2 examples:

- i. the “therapy dog” who greets clients in the waiting room with growls and air snaps. His handler - a mental health clinician - fails to see this as problem behavior because the dog is not “directly” working with clients;

- ii. The “Canine Comfort” dog who travels with his handler to disaster sites, but who is so overwhelmed by the experience and anxious about the demands of the role, that he is unable to regularly eliminate or defecate and won’t even touch his food while on the road.

Therapy dog work can be tiring and stressful for many dogs and most dogs are unfortunately unsuited to visit “vulnerable populations”. The most important job qualification is that your dog

- adores complete strangers
- voluntarily approaches them
- makes eye contact with them
- makes an effort to get close to them

Other characteristics must be physical and emotional calmness and non-reactivity to unexpected situations. These and other necessary traits will be examined and discussed further in this manual.

1.0 Introduction

The **Vancouver ecoVillage Therapy Dog Program** is a collective charitable effort of pet owners, volunteers, therapists, educators, veterinarians and other health professionals.

Our goals are to

- a. Expand awareness of the positive effects animals can have on human health and happiness
- b. Reduce barriers that present involvement of animals
- c. Expand the therapeutic and service role of animals in community education
- d. Train handlers and their dogs and register Therapy Dog teams across the Greater Vancouver Region

The Vancouver ecoVillage screening process evaluates how the handler and dog work together as a team to determine its skills and aptitudes for therapy work. It helps the handler learn where the dog might benefit from additional training, where it will best perform and where it is the most comfortable.

Evaluating teams helps avoid problems related to liability for both you and your dog. A complete evaluation of teams that will be involved in AAA/AAT ensures that the team and the people being visited will have a satisfactory experience.

We evaluate visiting dogs to make sure they are

- a. People oriented/sociable
- b. Comfortable being touched, sometimes awkwardly
- c. Comfortable being crowded by a group of people
- d. Able to enjoy visiting
- e. Reliable and predictable in a given situation
- f. Controllable at all times
- g. Able to cope with stressful situations

This manual will help you to

- a. Identify your responsibilities as a volunteer
- b. Learn important clients rights and considerations
- c. Know the Code of Ethics for AAA and AAT
- d. Know Vancouver ecoVillage policies and procedures

1.1 ELIGIBILITY FOR DOG HANDLERS

- a. Must be empathetic, kind, friendly and relaxed. (Making eye contact, smiling - must not be nervous, irritable, depressed or aloof.)
- b. Be aware of possible animal responses and behaviours, and reassures with cues and commands but without using food or toys.
- c. Demonstrate consistently gentle interaction with the dog without yelling or jerking leash

- d. Must display impeccable hygiene and be well-dressed covering shoulders and knees. Wear low-heeled shoes covering toes/heels. Hands, fingernails and hair must be clean.
- e. A handler under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or who smells of alcohol, will not be evaluated and may not re-test for certification.
- f. Multiple handlers may test for certification with written permission from the owner.
- g. Handlers with Service Dogs or Service-Dogs-in-Training must bring written permission from their certifying agency giving approval for participation in a therapy dog program.
- h. Handlers younger than 16 years of age must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

1.2 ELIGIBILITY FOR VANCOUVER ECOVILLAGE DOGS

- a. Must be at least 1 year old and in good health.
- b. Must have lived with owner for at least 6 months and reliably house trained.
- c. Must have updated vaccines (rabies, distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, fecal test), free of parasites (must have seasonal flea/tick protection) and annual vet check-ups.
- d. Have no history of aggression or biting.
- e. Must demonstrate good basic obedience skills, i.e. walking on a loose leash, and responding reliably to common commands such as **Sit, Down, Stay, Come, Leave It**.
- f. Welcome, not just tolerate, interactions with strangers (ie. friendly manner, wagging).
- g. Must not show signs of shyness, aggression or fear.
- h. Must not jump on people or equipment.
- i. Minimal whining/barking (however even a single aggressive bark is unacceptable).

1.3 PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The following inappropriate conduct will result in termination from the Vancouver ecoVillage program:

- a. Breach of client confidentiality.
- b. Abuse or harassment of any client or animal, or conduct detrimental to Vancouver ecoVillage.
- c. Theft or removal from the premises any property of the facility, client, staff or another volunteer.
- d. Being under the influence of or even smelling of alcohol, use or possession of alcohol, narcotics or other intoxicants while volunteering.
- e. Using the Vancouver ecoVillage ID badges to gain public access or misrepresenting your dog as a service dog.
- f. Giving medical advice or suggesting cures to clients.

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS EXTRACT. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THE FULL THERAPY DOG COURSE PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION.