



So you want to become a Therapy-Dog Team?

Do you have a dog that just LOVES children? Do you have a cat that is obedient and patient with people?

Are you interested in becoming a Therapy Animal Handler? Find out HOW your dream can come true! In my personal experience I have worked with Intermountain Therapy Animals, whose mission statement is, “Enhancing quality of life through the human-animal bond.” One might think, “Yeah...I think I should take Fido/Fluffy to the local nursing home to meet with residents.” WHOA! Hold on there! Here are a few steps to consider before you do this!

Trained in some basic obedience, dogs can. The wiggly tail, the welcome-home dance played out as the owner comes in, the soulful look in their eyes makes you know they are grateful. There is no judgment, no pouting (well, generally)!

It is that type of acceptance that children feel when experiencing time with a Therapy and/or a R.E.A.D. dog. Stories of children who have had a major blow-out in the classroom, who simply do not respond well to human intervention, can feel the soft muzzle of a therapy dog. In a few minutes, their tear stained face is nestled into the scruff of one of the therapy dogs. And after a period of child-dog intimacy, the child is ready to work on steps to rejoin society. Of course, this does not happen all at once. This type of relationship is built with time—volunteer time of the dog and handler.

So how does one become a Therapy Dog Team? And what about a R.E.A.D. dog? Therapy Dogs, Inc. is the organization with which I am most familiar. We are a group that has “registered” dogs, indicating a background of evaluation, continued membership, and a guarantee of liability insurance as the handler commits to the expectations of the TD-Inc. Policies. This is very important to schools, libraries, or other public venues where our dogs are volunteering.

A good dog candidate will be at least 1 year old, have good manners and perhaps some basic obedience training. The membership process involves the handler/dog team passing the handling portion of the test, of 3 successful supervised visits in the field. At this point, the handler sends in the membership packet with appropriate fees to the office. Upon acceptance, the newly registered team receives a membership card, a certificate and a heart shaped tag for the dog's collar, to be worn when representing Therapy Dogs Inc. The team may only begin visiting after receiving this packet.

Now, the handler may want to consider becoming a R.E.A.D. Dog/Team! Intermountain Therapy Animals is a non-profit organization committed to enhancing quality of life through the human-animal bond. “The mission of the R.E.A.D. program is to improve the literacy skills of children through the assistance of registered therapy teams as literacy mentors.” This process has more to do with the handler's understanding of meeting with children to enhance their literacy skills. It involves reading and taking an open-book test (35 questions) about policies and procedures in the R.E.A.D. environment.

“The Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) program improves children's reading and communication skills by employing a powerful method: reading to an animal. Today, thousands of registered R.E.A.D. teams work throughout the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Italy, Finland, France, Sweden, South Africa, Slovenia, Spain, Netherlands, Norway and beyond. R.E.A.D. is one of those ideas that, in the words of Bill Moyers, "pierces the mundane to arrive at the marvelous.” (http://www.therapyanimals.org/Read_Team_Steps.html)

Here’s Poppy and Bailey at one of their After-School programs!



(parents/guardians of all the children have signed a release to allow their child’s photo in a publication)

