

LIFE / PETS / DOGS

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EDIT ARTICLE

Why Therapy Team Retesting is so Important

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Love Dog Adventures therapy program is a Community Partner affiliate of the Pet Partner national animal therapy organization. As such we require every therapy team to pass a Renewal Evaluation every two years. This is the exact same evaluation test they took when they began their therapy career.

The requirement of re-testing is a very important differentiation between Pet Partners and other therapy programs. This retesting not only ensures that the animal and handler are still up to the task, safe, knowledgeable and reliable, but that they both still enjoy the volunteer activities and are suitable to work with the public.

As an animal ages and senses may be failing or other health issues occurring, it is important to know that the animal is still capable of the 22 elements Pet Partner tests for. It is also essential to know if the animal still enjoys meeting new people and being in new surroundings and being handled.

And it is as important, if not more, to see that the other end of the leash is still capable of managing their animal and engaging with the public.

An animal losing his sight or hearing may become fearful or react to handling in a negative way. And some animals thoroughly continue to enjoy interacting with people despite sensory loss.

An animal may have arthritis or other limitations in their movement or need to avoid slippery surfaces so these things are taken into consideration at renewal time.

The retesting process is actually quite fun as we get to see how a team has progressed over the years. It is such a great opportunity to see how teams become experienced and polished in their skills. We can celebrate what the team does in their volunteer activities and use those elements as part of the role playing scenarios. For example, if the team is in a reading program we want to see how the animal lies still on their blanket and is engaged in the reading process. If a dog is a hospital visiting dog, we want to make sure the animal still walks calmly on a loose leash.

It is also a good time to see that the team is still committed to volunteering and that their current assignments are appropriate as handler and dog change.

And sometimes it means a team can graduate to different assignments now that they are experienced, such as participate in large group events or try a new type of therapy work.

I know that as Petey ages I am cutting back on those facilities where he needs to be more active or physical and concentrating on those where he can be held quietly and just chill.

And as Benny grows up, I see how he thoroughly enjoys being more involved in therapy sessions and just loves doing rehabilitation work with adults and children or working with special kids.

Of course, over time it is critical to be honest in your assessment of your animal, and yourself. The toughest decision to make is when animal or handler is ready for retirement. When the handler or animal can no longer be effective and the work may be too stressful, it is time to consider retiring. This is why retesting is so important. Being able to objectively assess the team's ability to continue is the Evaluator's hardest job.



SG

At the forefront is always the welfare of the animal, the handler and the clients they work with. This is what makes a team reliable over time and ensures that everyone involved is well taken care of.

For more information about the Love Dog Adventures Therapy Program in Las Vegas, visit www.lovedsogadventures.com and to learn about Pet Partners, go to www.petpartners.org.



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