



Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services' mission is to consistently facilitate the delivery of the love and affection of our volunteers and their pets. We enhance the lives and touch the hearts of people with special needs.

## **We're Licking Loneliness!**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

June, 2006

#### **What Does Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services Do?**

Our volunteers work as teams to bring Furry Friends on visits to people who live in various kinds of institutions, e.g. nursing homes, facilities for disabled or seriously ill children, hospital rehabilitation wards, the Children's Shelter, psychiatric facilities, etc. Currently our visits to facilities are in Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties, California.

#### **Is There any Science Behind Pet Therapy?**

Anyone who has ever owned a pet knows of the tremendous love and acceptance pets bring. Pets don't care how we look or even how we act; they love us unconditionally. For people who are in difficult life situations, pets can be of special benefit. Petting a dog, for instance, has been shown to lower blood pressure. Animals can often reach people when human relationships may be difficult. Scientific research has shown that interaction with animals can significantly improve humans' physical and emotional health. Put as simply as possible, pets make people feel good and they help healing happen.

Animal therapy isn't a new concept. As early as the 1790s, the Quakers at a retreat for the mentally ill in England had patients commune with farm animals, which they felt would be more helpful than the harsh treatment often used on those with psychiatric problems.

Recent research corroborates what the Quakers already knew. For example, a study in 1992 of 8,000 Australians reported that pet owners were less likely to get heart disease than their pet-less counterparts. Even though the owners in the study ate more meat and fast-food than non-pet owners, they had lower blood pressure, plasma cholesterol, and triglycerides, and got more exercise. A St. Louis University study of 92 patients hospitalized in coronary care units for angina or heart attack found that those who owned pets were more likely to be alive a year later than those who did not. The study found that only 6 percent of patients who owned pets died within one year compared with 28 percent of those who did not own pets. In a study conducted at City Hospital in New York, it was found that heart patients who owned the pets were significantly more likely to be alive a year after they were discharged from the hospital than those who didn't own pets. The presence of a pet was found to give a higher boost to survival rate than either a spouse or friends.

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Pet visitation has also been found to produce measurable benefits by fostering socialization, increasing responsiveness, facilitating mental alertness and enhancing an outward focus on the environment

The therapeutic use of pets as companions has gained increasing attention in recent years for a wide variety of patients -- people with AIDS or cancer, the elderly, and the mentally ill. Unlike people, with whom interactions may be quite complex and unpredictable, animals provide a constant source of comfort and focus for attention.

### **How Did Furry Friends Get Started?**

Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services was begun in 1983 by Judy Kell, whose nine year-old daughter came down with a rare and aggressive form of cancer that eventually took her life. Judy noticed that one of the very few things that lifted her daughter's spirits was the interaction with her cat.

Judy, a veterinary technician by profession, consulted with Dr. John Quick, a veterinarian in Morgan Hill and together with Dr. Cecil Agee, a pediatric physician, approached Lucille Packard Children's Hospital with the idea of bringing animals to the hospital. This was the first visitation of Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services.

Furry Friends is an independent, local organization. However it is based on the principles of pet facilitated therapy, a recognized and researched therapeutic technique.

### **How Many Visits Does Furry Friends Make?**

We provide monthly visits at over 60 facilities through Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties. We have over 300 active volunteers, sharing the love of their animals with people in need.

### **Where Do Furry Friends Come From?**

The pets belong to the volunteers who go on visits. All pets must pass a physical and behavioral evaluation before attending visits.

### **What Kind of Time Commitment Do Volunteers Make?**

Our visits are generally either one or one-and-a-half hours per month. Volunteers can choose from our participating sites to ensure they are on the team that best suits their schedule, location, preferences and animal's temperament.

Members can belong to as many teams as they wish, so the decision of how much time to commit is really yours.

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## **What's The Screening Process?**

We don't require any special training or certifications. We're looking for animals that naturally seek and enjoy human companionship.

We require a veterinarian pet assessment of the animal's health, vaccination records and temperament. This assessment is free at dozens of vets around the south bay.

The last step is for the new volunteer and their pet to attend an etiquette class held every month by our staff behaviorist. That's it.

## **My Animal Isn't "Furry." Can I Still Join?**

Certainly. We currently have members with birds, lizards, snakes, as well as guinea pigs, llamas, miniature horses, cats, pigs, rabbits, and mice. We haven't had any fish volunteer yet, but would be willing to consider them!

## **I Want to Visit A Specific Site. Can I?**

We are always looking for more sites that need our special type of therapy. If you have a loved one in a facility that is willing to work with us, please let us know.

However, Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services works in a team format. We don't authorize individuals to visit alone at a site. There must be a team captain and at least 3 team members for Furry Friends to approve a visit.

## **How Does Furry Friends Operate?**

Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services is a registered nonprofit corporation and governed by its Board of Directors. All Board meetings are open to the public. We are a volunteer organization. Our volunteers help administer, manage and deliver our services.

## **Who Supports Furry Friends?**

We have received contributions from over 400 local donors and have received grants from major foundations and corporations, including Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Network General, the Community Foundation, the Valley Foundation, and others. In order for any nonprofit organization to survive, its primary source of support must be its individual donors. We do not receive any city, county, state or federal funding.

Another major source of funding is the companies that employ our volunteers. Many companies provide matching funds to encourage community involvement by their employees. Check with your company to see if they have such a program.

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## What Can I Help With?

Furry Friends is an all-volunteer organization. In addition to visiting at sites, we also need volunteers to help us with clerical tasks, fundraising, events and marketing. If you have some spare time and would like to support a great cause, please contact us at [admin@furryfriends.org](mailto:admin@furryfriends.org) or call us at 877-4FF-PATS.

## I Don't Live In Santa Cruz, Santa Clara or San Mateo. Can I Still Volunteer?

We suggest you contact your local animal shelter, veterinarian or hospitals for recommendations of local organizations that do pet visitations. You can also investigate Therapy Dogs International <http://www.tdi-dog.org/> or Delta Society <http://www.deltasociety.org/>.

## Can I Adopt or Turn in a Rescued Pet to Furry Friends?

Furry Friends Rescue is a separate organization from Furry Friends Pet Assisted Therapy Services. For more information about pet rescue, you can check out their web site at <http://www.furryfriendsrescue.org/>

## How do I contact Furry Friends?

- Our web site is [www.furryfriends.org](http://www.furryfriends.org)
- Phone messages can be left at 1-877-4FF-PATS.
- Inquiries can be sent to [info@furryfriends.org](mailto:info@furryfriends.org)
- Press requests can be sent to Elan Winkler, Vice President at [elan@furryfriends.org](mailto:elan@furryfriends.org)

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