



# Loving Animals Providing Smiles

*Bringing acceptance, laughter and love into the lives of others.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is AAT?

Animal Assisted Therapy consists of skilled pets and volunteers working as a team to help others.

The value of interactions between pets and troubled individuals was noted as far back as the early 1800s. Early AAT programs involved dog trainers visiting elder care facilities and has grown to include hospitals, schools, mental health facilities and more. AAT is not just for dogs. Many types of domesticated animals can be therapy animals including cats, rabbits, parrots, donkeys, horses, potbellied pigs, chickens and llamas.

### What is LAPS?

LAPS is an independent, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Our membership consists of trained handler/pet teams and associate members who do not have a working therapy pet, but who support the organization.

We are centered in Napa, CA, but have members and programs in Solano and Sonoma counties as well. All of our pet/handler teams are trained and evaluated to LAPS high standards. Following a successful evaluation, a new team is registered with LAPS or [Pet Partners®](#)

### What is "Pet Partners®"?

The Delta Society was founded in 1977. Its mission is to improve the human/animal bond. Delta Society founded the [Pet Partners®](#) program to provide training and registration for therapy teams. In 2011, Delta Society re-named itself [Pet Partners®](#). There are currently about 8,000 therapy teams registered with [Pet Partners®](#).

### How is LAPS different from other AAT groups?

LAPS teams attend regularly-scheduled programs with multiple teams. The "multiple team" concept has proven highly effective in providing ongoing service to clients in a wide range of facilities: assisted-living and memory care units, elementary schools, juvenile detention, hospitals, and libraries.

LAPS also maintains the highest standards of skills and performance for all its teams. Our safety record is second-to-none. Our teams are re-evaluated every 2 years to assure that both volunteer and pet are continually suitable for therapy work. We screen our teams during initial training for appropriate behavior with all client populations, especially children.

## What do volunteers get?

**Volunteers find great satisfaction in helping others. They are sharing the joy their well-trained pets bring to their own lives.**

**Volunteers receive training, group support and shared experiences with other members. They receive liability insurance coverage through registration with LAPS or Pet Partners.**

**Members can participate in advanced training classes, practice sessions, and “fun days” when LAPS participates in public events such as Bark for Life and the Humane Society dog walks.**

## What does it take?

- Training
- Testing
- Registration with **Pet Partners®** or LAPS
- Regular participation in our programs (minimum 2 per month, year-round)
- Helping with fundraising, PR events, administration, and training

## What makes a quality therapy team?

### Keys to a Quality Therapy Team include

- Animal's Temperament
- Combined abilities of handler and animal
- Willingness of handler to learn new skills with their pet for use in AAT

**See our “What makes a Good Therapy Team” downloadable handout for full information**

## What do my pet and I need to do to prepare for AAT?

- Basic Obedience
- Pet must be reliable with people and animals
- Pet must be healthy
- Participation in the LAPS Team Handling Skills training class
- Evaluation/Testing

## What do new LAPS new members do?

New volunteers start by observing one or more LAPS therapy programs without their pet to find a program that fits their interests and skills. Following the training class and successful evaluation, a new team will work with a mentor for three months. As a general rule, we visit in groups of two to six teams, so new teams receive plenty of support from more experienced volunteers.

## Are therapy pets allowed in places where regular pets aren't allowed?

In a word, NO. Therapy pets must follow the same rules as all pets. Only service animals are allowed in places where pets are not normally welcome.

## How long does the process take?

As long as you have the basics covered (solid obedience skills for dogs, pet is socialized and healthy), then the time required is 6-8 weeks for the class and evaluation, another few weeks for vet checks and submitting paperwork and receiving your registration badge. If you are registering with [Pet Partners®](#), you must submit a copy of your acceptance to LAPS with the LAPS membership paperwork. Finally, there is a 3-month probation/training period. From beginning to end, plan on 6 or 7 months until you are a fully-certified team.

## What sort of training do I need to join?

Dogs need to have solid basic obedience skills. Cats, mini-horses and other pets must be socialized and calm with strangers in public settings. Then, successful completion of the LAPS Team Handling Skills Class is required for all pets.

Younger dogs especially might need more time to develop the patience and skills to be successful.

We encourage all our teams to continue regular, positive reward training for skills-building and enjoyment. Canine freestyle ("dog dancing"), agility, rally obedience all contribute to team building and confidence.

## Want to know more?

Please take the time to peruse our website. If you have further questions, you can email us, come to a meeting, observe a program visit (contact us first) without your pet, or attend a public event with LAPS members (also without your pet! Sorry!)