

Steps Toward Becoming a LAPS Therapy Team

LAPS wants all our volunteers and pets to feel comfortable and secure in the therapy setting. While the steps toward active membership may seem extensive, they are designed to benefit the handler, each pet and the facilities we serve. LAPS offers ongoing support so the time and activities should pass quickly.

If a volunteer wishes to complete registration requirements with the national Pet Partners® organization (formerly Delta Society/Pet Partners) in addition to LAPS membership, we can help you with information on the required steps, but the volunteer will be responsible for completing the Pet Partners® Home Study Course online prior to taking the Skills and Aptitude Evaluation and submitting paperwork to Pet Partners® in a timely fashion.

1. **Complete and submit:** a) an Application to LAPS for Membership (download PDF from LAPS website), and b) a copy of pet's vaccination record.
2. Upon receiving the above paperwork, **a LAPS Volunteer will call the potential team and conduct a phone interview.** This helps LAPS understand the team's skills and abilities, as well as the handler's interests.
3. **The handler must attend a minimum of one LAPS group therapy session without his / her pet.** This helps the new volunteer see how pets are utilized in animal-assisted therapy and how handlers respond to conditions. This also allows the opportunity for the new handler to consider the best way to prepare his/her own pet for therapy sessions.
4. **The handler & pet will attend the Animal-Assisted Therapy Team Training Class.** LAPS members generously give their time to educate new teams in the best practices of AAT, and provide training scenarios for the pet and handler to acquire the skills needed to be successful in a variety of therapeutic situations. This class is generally offered in the Spring and the Fall each year and meets once per week for 6 or 7 weeks. The class may include a field trip to allow our new teams to practice their skills in the real world.
5. **After successfully completing the Team Training Class, the handler & pet will take the LAPS Skills & Aptitude Team Evaluation.** This practical test closely simulates situations a team may experience in an actual therapy setting. It is designed to assess the animal's aptitude plus the ability of the handler and pet to work consistently together in multiple-team settings. Upon passing the Team Evaluation, the handler will receive a package of LAPS materials to review PRIOR to the New Team Orientation.
6. **LAPS Trainees will attend the New Team Orientation session BEFORE starting therapy programs.** This session will occur a week or two after testing, and will include reviewing, signing and submitting the forms given earlier, plus the Evaluation Results and Animal Health Screening Form. Handlers will receive the LAPS Membership Handbook and a supply bag.

Additional Training Session(s) may be required for teams needing to polish skills, work through specific concerns, &/or for teams wishing to work with special-needs populations. The Training Director or Vice President will let the handler know if these sessions are needed.

IMPORTANT:

As a new handler, you are encouraged to attend LAPS therapy sessions without your pet until you receive your official acceptance from LAPS.

7. **When LAPS has received and reviewed all of the required paperwork, LAPS Trainees will enter a Probation Period where they work directly with their Mentor and other seasoned handlers.** This is a time for new handlers to ask questions, learn by example, and train their pet partners to perform quality animal-assisted therapy in a group setting. The Mentor or seasoned handlers will accompany each new team to therapy sessions and provide aid throughout the Probation Period. **This period lasts for a MINIMUM of three months.**
- **A new team must attend a minimum of four (4) group therapy sessions within three months to complete probation.** Each team is different and some teams may need more time and experience to acquire the necessary skills. Teams that do not complete the minimum probation requirements within the given time may be dropped from membership consideration and would have to reapply.
 - New teams are not allowed to visit LAPS facilities independently until they complete probation.
 - When starting therapy programs please call the Program Coordinator several days in advance to say you will be coming so the Coordinator can plan for a successful session.
 - Probationary Periods may be extended for one of two reasons. Only one extension is granted per team with the Probationary Period extended a maximum of three months. *Either:* The team needs more experience before an accurate assessment can be completed by the Membership Committee; *Or:* The team requests an extension in writing due to extenuating circumstances, such as illness, a family emergency, etc.
 - **A “LAPS Trainee Report” will be given to each new handler.** This form is to be signed by the Mentor, Program Coordinator or senior handler at the end of each group therapy session the new team attends.
 - **When three months have passed AND your probation form is completed,** return the form to the Membership Committee.
8. **Upon successful completion of all of the above,** the Membership Committee will review the LAPS Trainee Report for each individual team and assess their skills and appropriate placement. **When the committee determines that a team has successfully completed the probationary period and possesses satisfactory skills, the team will be accepted into membership** as an active LAPS team. Each newly-certified team will receive a pet scarf and certificate.