

Humane Society of Broward County  
Animal Assisted Therapy



## Facility Manual

2070 Griffin Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33328

[humanebroward.com](http://humanebroward.com)

## **Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Introduction**

The Humane Society of Broward County (HSBC) firmly believes that animals have positive impacts on the lives of humans. It is this belief that has led to the inception of the Animal Assisted Therapy program (AAT).

Through this initiative, the Humane Society utilizes volunteers and their companion animals for AAT programs strictly as social therapy. The goal of this program was to reach the elderly residents of nursing homes in Broward County. The program has expanded to serve not only the elderly but to help the abused, neglected, physically challenged and mentally ill patients of all ages and genders.

This includes but is not limited to, senior assisted living facilities, pediatric care units and hospitals, libraries, private and public schools, mental health facilities, hospice and many more facilities and organizations.

Our AAT volunteer teams, and their companion animals visit the residents of these types of facilities and give those individuals an opportunity to pet the animal, learn about the proper way to care for a pet, learn how to be safe around animals, socialize with one another and tell loving stories about their beloved animal friends.

Visits to a facility are conducted at least once a month and can be provided in either a group setting or room-to-room procedure. The AAT interventions can be as basic as “meeting and greeting” resident or as structured as working on specific goals with individuals under the supervision of a facility staff member.

Animal visits actively help and assist humans to live richer and fuller lives. Pets can help de-institutionalize a facility and provide a more natural home-like environment, which becomes less routine. This can improve a person’s recovery by helping people feel less lonely and depressed. In many cases, interventions with animals work for people who have not responded to other more traditional forms of treatment. In certain instances, with proper training, guidance and supervision, an animal and their handler can help relieve some mildly dysfunctional behaviors. AAT is contingent upon continual access to the uncomplicated relationship between an individual and the animal.

Beginning a program at your facility or organization requires advanced planning. Please consider what goals you would like the program to achieve and how you envision achieving these goals. Animal Assisted Therapy offers enormous benefits to people and ensures that they will live richer and fuller lives by just being a part of this program.

If you are interested in our AAT program and would like to be considered, please fill out the forms on our website. Once the forms are received, we will include your facility in our

database and begin our assessment for a qualified Animal Assisted Therapy team for your facility. The process of coordinating the matching of AAT volunteers to a facility may take some time. We ask that you be patient during this time.

We hope you are as excited as we are to have you join our program. In the interim, should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact Katie Tutt, Animal Assisted Therapy Manager at ktutt@hsbroward.com or 954.266.6875.

### **Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Benefits**

“Visiting Pets”, “Therapy Dogs” and “Pet Therapy” are just some names given to describe programs in which animals help people just by visiting them. Visiting with animals can help people feel less lonely and less depressed. Visits from animals can provide a welcome change from routine or the renewal of old friendships. People become more active and responsive both during and after visiting with animals.

An animal can offer entertainment or a welcome distraction from pain and infirmity. People often talk to the animals and share with them their thoughts, feelings and memories. Animal visits provide something to look forward to. The pet makes it easier for two strangers to talk. It gives people a common interest and provides a focus for conversation. Many people in hospitals or retirement homes have had to give up pet ownership and they miss the casual acceptance a pet gives them. An animal pays little attention to age or physical limitations, but accepts people as they are. The benefits continue even after the visit. The visit leaves behind memories not only of the visit but also of past experiences. It offers something for people to share.

Animal Assisted Therapy programs have been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, reduce a person’s blood pressure and lower cholesterol. Petting encourages use of hands and arms, stretching and turning. There is a tremendous range of skills that can be taught using a therapy animal.

Therapy animals can be used to motivate people and help to teach skills in a variety of areas such as:

#### **Cognitive/Knowledge:**

- Dog Breeds: characteristics and history
- Information pertaining to pet care
- Reading about pets from a book or magazine

**Gross Motor Skills (big muscles, arms and legs):**

- Walking the dog
- Throwing a ball for the dog
- Running with the dog

**Fine Motor Skills (hands):**

- Petting the dog (open fingers)
- Brushing or combing the dog
- Simple grooming tasks
- Holding a leash (for physically impaired clients)
- Filling a water dish
- Pouring food
- Feeding the dog a treat (handler decides if appropriate)

**Speech/communication:**

- Giving commands (saying words such as “sit”, “come”, “stay”, “heel”)
- Client telling about pets they have owned
- Socialization with others (AAT volunteer engaging client to speak with another client about their memories)
- Imitating/giving hand signals (nonverbal communication)
- Describing how pets make you feel
- Writing or dictating a story about the therapy animal

While science is not fully able to explain the mechanisms behind Animal Assisted Therapy, there are clues that are guiding us to the answer. We have long known that the body's immunity to disease is adversely affected by the loss of social contact. Pets are an important form of social contact, which leads us to believe the answer may lie in the positive influence on the immune system.

**Animal Assisted Therapy Program – Infection Control**

The proper selection and maintenance of the animals used in AAT programs is the first step toward the establishment of an appropriate infection control protocol. Age, health, cleanliness, and regular veterinary care of the animal are all important issues that need to be addressed to ensure a safe and successful program.

All animals used in our AAT program must be at least one year old to participate. Each animal certified with our AAT program must meet veterinary health requirements, receive a complete physical examination and receive all required Broward County vaccinations. Each animal participating in the AAT program must have a veterinarian certificate inclusive of proof of vaccinations and health status on file with us.

Hand washing is probably one of the most important methods of preventing the spread of infections, disease, or parasites. It is important for anyone who interacts with pets to wash their hands before and after visiting with the animals. It might be beneficial to have liquid hand sanitizer such as Purell available for staff, clients and volunteers to use.

It is equally important and the responsibility of the facility to be aware of those residents, clients, patients, staff members, etc. that are allergic to animals. Some people have reactions to the dander by touching an animal and others by inhaling it in the air. Many people with asthma are allergic to animal dander. Be sure that you know which residents, clients, patients, staff members, etc. at your facility might be allergic to animals and take proper precautions around those individuals.

It is imperative to alert the HSBC volunteer of any clients or patients that should not be visited due to potential contagion, autoimmune deficiencies, isolation orders, etc.

### **TERMS & CONDITIONS**

The Humane Society of Broward County provides the Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) Program as a service conducted by volunteers of the Humane Society without any written, expressed or implied promise of compensation.

The AAT volunteer and their companion animal is a representative of the Humane Society of Broward County. It is agreed that the AAT volunteer will conduct a minimum of one visit per month, unless fewer visits are decided upon by the facility / organization and assigned volunteer/s. While individual visits may be coordinated between the AAT volunteer and the facility / organization, any additional use of AAT visits outside of regular visitations must be approved by the Manager of the Animal Assisted Therapy Program.

The facility will assign a designated staff member to be the point of contact for the pet therapy program. The assigned staff member will be assist in scheduling visits and assisting during visits to ensure the pet therapy visits go smoothly. The assigned staff

member at the facility will designate a second point of contact for the animal assisted therapy volunteer/s in the chance they are not present during the scheduled visit.

***Additionally, a facility staff member must accompany AAT volunteers during any and all visits. AAT volunteers are not permitted to be left alone with residents, patients, clients, children, etc.***

The designated staff at the facility will inform the AAT volunteers of any unusual conditions, such as construction, chemical cleaning, waxing floors, painting, or activities that could impact the well-being of the therapy animals prior to any visit. If necessary, visits may be rescheduled to accommodate these conditions.

Failure to comply with obligations as expressed by this agreement and accompanying documents or should the facility be deemed unsuitable for pet therapy, may result in termination of the facility / organization or the AAT volunteer by the Humane Society at its sole discretion.

We, the above-mentioned facility / organization, agree to the terms of the AAT program agreement as defined by the Humane Society of Broward County. An organization infrastructure has been defined and the appropriate personnel have been assigned to oversee the AAT program at our facility.

Facility Coordinator's Signature:

Date Signed: