

who we are

Hand in Paw is Alabama's premier Animal-Assisted Therapy provider and a national leader in this growing field.

At Hand in Paw, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we train qualified animals and their owners to work as a team in therapeutic settings. HIP teams become heroes to people of all ages dealing with emotional and physical life challenges. These Therapy Teams deliver positive distraction, motivation, empathy and compassion in several facilities across Central Alabama and Tuscaloosa.

our mission

To improve human health and well-being through Animal-Assisted Therapy.

where we serve

Medical centers, schools, and human service organizations throughout North Central Alabama and Tuscaloosa.

our vision

A healthier, brighter, kinder community

HOW FAR WE'VE COME

92 Program Partners
102 Therapy Teams
60 Visit Assistants



YOUR SUPPORT HAS AN IMPACT

In 2019, Hand in Paw made over...

159,910

Therapeutic Interactions

2,351

Visits

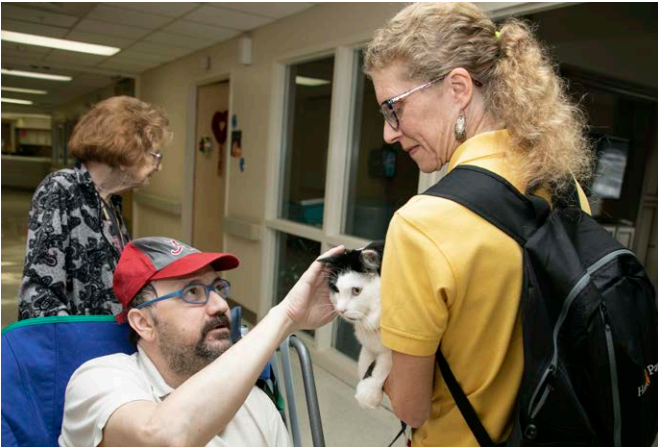
5,810

Volunteer Hours



[check out our annual report>>>](#)

PROGRAM AREAS



HEALTH

Our Petscription program provides positive distraction from pain and worry for patients in hospitals and motivation for meeting therapeutic goals in rehabilitation units and early intervention programs.



EDUCATION

Our Therapy Teams are powerful motivators for students in need. We help children make strides in K-12 schools, group homes, special needs classrooms, and after-school programs. We deliver Animal-Assisted Education via two programs, School's Best Friend and Sit, Stay, Read!.



VIOLENCE PREVENTION

We deliver goal-directed programs for at-risk children and youth, teaching anger management, relationship-building, empathy and compassion through our Pawsitive Living™ and No More Bullying! program.



TRAUMA & GRIEF RESPONSE

Therapy animals can serve as a conduit for person-to-person communication, giving on-site counselors highly effective tools for breaking barriers, building rapport, and making progress towards healing in difficult circumstances.

ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY RESEARCH

PHYSICAL BENEFITS



- Animal-Assisted Therapy helps release endorphins that manipulate perceptions of pain and stress
- Petting a dog can be relaxing, which is measured by a slower heart rate and a drop in blood pressure
- Playing with animals emits important hormones and neurotransmitters in the brain that promote proper body function and rebuild strength
- Owning a dog can help reduce the risk of asthma
- Dog owners are more likely to survive heart attacks than non-pet owners
- The presence of a dog can ease the effects of Alzheimer's disease
- People with dogs have been found to have lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels when compared to people who do not

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS



- Animal-Assisted Therapy increases the body's level of oxytocin, which boost happiness, improves empathy and promotes a happier life
- Animal companionship can lower the level of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress, in the body and increase serotonin, a chemical associated with well-being
- Elderly people with dogs are better able than non-pet-owning elderly people to cope with daily activities
- A bond between a pet and human is one of unconditional love, which can teach and support feelings of self worth and value, especially in children
- For those who may feel like detaching from normal social activity, Animal-Assisted Therapy can relieve feelings of social isolation
- Especially in children, Animal-Assisted Therapy is a great way to release excess energy for better concentration
- Children who have dogs tend to be more self-reliant, sociable, and less selfish than children without pets
- Owning a dog gives isolated people a routine, a sense of purpose, and a sense of fulfillment that helps prevent depression and loneliness



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can you train my pet to be a therapy animal?

We do not offer basic obedience training at Hand in Paw. Rather, our workshops train potential teams how to provide Animal-Assisted therapy in nursing homes, schools, and healthcare settings. We are happy to work with you on basic obedience commands to prepare for the final evaluation for Hand in Paw registration.

Does Hand in Paw provide or train service animals?

No, Hand in Paw is a human service organization that provides training and evaluations for therapy animals and their handlers; we do not have any association with service animals. For a guide to different service animal organizations, please visit handinpaw.org/service dogs

What are the pre-requisites to being a Hand in Paw Therapy Team?

Your pet must be at least 18 months old. You must have owned your pet for at least six months. If volunteering with your dog, you and your dog must have completed a basic group obedience class.

Where should I take my dog for basic obedience?

Anywhere you'd like! Hand in Paw does not endorse any particular trainers, we only ask that your dog be trained for general obedience: sit, down, stay, and come. They must also walk politely on a loose leash, even in a crowded environment with other animals.

What other animals can be therapy animals?

Hand in Paw registers dogs and cats as well as other domesticated animals such as rabbits, miniature horses, llamas, birds, etc.

How old does someone have to be to volunteer?

Hand in Paw volunteers are required to be at least 18 years old.

I have a wonderful pet that I would love to give or loan to your organization so that you can take him to places in the community. How does that work?

Our Therapy Teams are just that – teams. Pets and their handlers work together to improve the health and well-being of the community. If your pet is part of our organization, you would be, too!



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