



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

91 Program Partners
92 Therapy Teams
18 Visit Assistants



YOUR SUPPORT HAS AN IMPACT

In 2023, Hand in Paw made over...

99,346

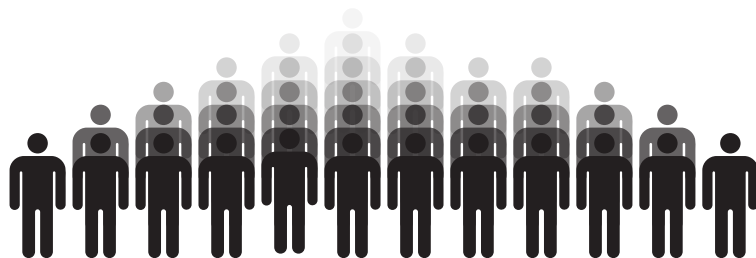
Therapeutic Interactions

4,803

Visits

5,769

Volunteer Hours



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

PROGRAM AREAS



HIP Therapy Teams provide therapeutic visits in a variety of settings including hospitals, nursing homes, universities, police departments, school counselors and stress relief visits. Animal-Assisted Therapy and Animal-Assisted Activities are two methods HIP teams utilize to enhance health and wellness and reduce stress.



Animal-Assisted Education helps students achieve academic and educational goals in the classroom. HIP Teams help children build reading skills, gain confidence, and foster pro-social behaviors. We deliver Animal-Assisted Education with a focus on literacy through Sit, Stay, Read!.



HIP's School's Best Friend program serves children in special classrooms and early intervention programs like The Bell Center. HIP also visits The Exceptional Foundation providing support to children and adults with disabilities. HIP encourages Animal Advocacy with our partnership with the Greater Birmingham Humane Society. In 2023, HIP launched Paws in the Court to support the Family Court System in Jefferson County.

LEARN MORE
ABOUT OUR
PROGRAMS

[read more on our website](#)

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.

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!



617 38th Street South | Bham AL, 35222
(205) 322-5144

Media Contact

Michael Hansen | michael@handinpaw.org



@HandInPawAL