Support Dogs, Inc.
Opening Doors To Independence

Thank you for your interest in the TOUCH (Therapy of Unique Canine Helpers) and/or PAWS for Reading Programs, offered through Support Dogs, Inc. Enclosed is the information you requested. It contains criteria for participation, answers to frequently asked questions, and an application. If you are interested in participation, please complete the application and return to Support Dogs, Inc. as soon as possible. Your application will be held for the next scheduled evaluation.

Scheduling for the temperament/obedience evaluations are sent out approximately two weeks prior to the evaluation date. The evaluations will test your dog's reaction to noise and sound stimuli often encountered in facilities, your dog's willingness to be touched, your level of obedience skills as well as how you and your dog work together. The dog's overall temperament and obedience will be considered.

Dogs that display the following traits will be considered inappropriate for the program and will be immediately dismissed:

- Any aggressive behavior, toward people or another dog, which includes lunging, growling, snarling, biting, and/or excessive barking
- Reactions of extreme fear or physical dominance
- Submissive urination, marking behavior of any kind, or defecation

You must be able to attend classes on a weekly basis for the entire session. Should you be unable to attend the classes, your name will be held for the next scheduled class. Evaluations are good for one year from the date performed.

To be evaluated for participation, your dog must meet the following criteria.

***NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE*.**

- Must have completed a 6 wk formal *adult* basic obedience course with you – ***submit proof of completion with application*** (a copy is fine)
- Must have been in the care and possession of the owner for at least one year
- Must be between 2 and 10-years of age at the time of evaluation
- Must have received ***no protection training*** or other types of training designed to illicit aggressive behavior

Should you have any questions, please call me at (314) 997-2325 or email me at cblanke@supportdogs.org.

Sincerely,

Cindi Blanke
Programs Coordinator
cblanke@supportdogs.org

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Program Descriptions, Criteria, and Information

For your information, the guidelines of the program have been established for the well-being and safety of the dog, handler, and all those that receive visits. In addition, by having these guidelines in place, each team will have more confidence, success, and fun while participating in the program.

What is the TOUCH Program?

TOUCH (Therapy of Unique Canine Helpers) is a volunteer-based program, which involves people and their personal canine pets (dogs). After receiving training and certification through Support Dogs, Inc., TOUCH teams are able to visit hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation units, day programs, special schools, and various other types of healthcare facilities.

Started in 1989, the TOUCH Program reaches thousands of patients/residents each month in multiple sites in the St. Louis Metropolitan area (including Illinois). While Support Dogs has over 240 active teams, there is always a need for more.

Only dogs that are accepting of people and other dogs, that are calm and stable, and have predictable behavior in a variety of circumstances can participate.

All dogs must have completed a formal adult basic obedience course with you (puppy classes do NOT satisfy this requirement). Dogs benefit from the experience of the formal class setting because not only do they learn how to work effectively with their handler, they receive the experience of being around other dogs in a formal (non recreational) setting. This experience is necessary since TOUCH teams work with each other in a limited space in class, as well as in certain facilities.

The program is not breed, size, or gender specific. Dogs are chosen based on their temperament, personality, obedience skills and willingness to work with their handlers in sometimes awkward and stressful situations.

The temperament/obedience evaluation

Not all dogs are suited to work in animal assisted therapy. Support Dogs, Inc. administers an evaluation to determine the dog's suitability for the TOUCH Program.

To participate in the evaluation, the handler will be required to provide proof of vaccinations, pertinent health information, and proof of adult obedience training – please submit with application. The staff will review this information to ensure the dog is medically sound before they begin the evaluation. The evaluation is done in two parts. The first will gauge how well the handler and dog work together as a team. The level of obedience skills are also being considered. The dog will be tested for its reactions to sight and sound distractions, as well as the dog's acceptance of being handled from head to tail. The second part of the evaluation involves the same routine, but with the handler out of sight of the dog. This is done to gauge the dog's confidence level without the handler in the room. The evaluation is designed to test the dog's reactions in situations that could sometimes be stressful and uncomfortable. It is acceptable for the dog to react, but the dog needs to recover from the stimuli and not completely shut down. Once the dog passes, the handler and dog will be scheduled for the next class.

<u>The Instructional Course, Funding and Expenses</u>- See "Course Breakdown and Fees" page

Classes are held at the Support Dogs, Inc. facility and are held at specific times of the year. During each session, an evening class and a morning class are offered. Additional classes may be added to accommodate larger class sizes. Handlers choose which class best suits their schedule. Class size will be limited, filled on a first come first served basis.

Handlers will receive instruction on visitation policies and procedures, dog handling guidelines, infection control, grooming requirements, and canine stress identification and management. The segmented course also includes advanced obedience skills, distraction training, management and control skills, food aversion, patient scenarios, and exposure and techniques in working around certain medical equipment. The handler will be required to make observation visits and hand in weekly homework during the course. The entirety of the course is designed to prepare the dog and handler for as many different situations and facilities as possible so they will be comfortable once they start visiting on their own.

At the end of the class, the handler will be required to pass a written test, as well as final performance evaluation for the handler and dog. Handlers must complete all requirements of the class to graduate.

Support Dogs, Inc. asks for a program fee per segment/class, which covers the cost of the training, materials, and equipment needed for each class. Funding for the program comes from private and corporate donations, as well as the United Way of Greater St. Louis.

<u>Handler Requirements</u>

All handlers must be over 18-years-of-age and willing to abide by the rules and guidelines established to provide a safe and pleasant visiting experience for everyone involved.

Handlers must agree to participate in at least two visits per month to retain active status. Handlers must agree to the Volunteer Code of Ethics, Confidentiality, and Visitation Guidelines to be considered for the program. Some facilities require additional training or have special requests of volunteers. Volunteers will be notified of these if they plan on visiting that particular facility.

Successful completion of each segment determines the facilities and types of patients/residents that a team will be able to visit. *All certified handlers must realize that any damage or harm caused by the dog during a visit or other scheduled event for Support Dogs, Inc. is the responsibility of the handler, not Support Dogs, Inc.*

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<u>The Paws for Reading Program</u>

Many applicants to the TOUCH Program and to Support Dogs, Inc. are interested in participating in the Paws for Reading Program – a program that places dogs in the classrooms to help children read, increasing their reading levels, their interest in reading, and overall self esteem.

To be certified for the Paws for Reading Program, applicants will need to successfully complete that segment of the classes. Once the team is certified, they will be eligible to take the dog into select schools in the area where this program has been established.

- Volunteers take their dogs into the schools once a week or once every other week, depending on the needs of the school. Dogs typically spend an hour in the classroom, having the children read to the dog, journal about the dog, or participate in other activities under the guidance of the teacher. The schools in the program typically have a population that strongly benefits from the program because of student demographics. There may be opportunities for participation in area libraries and in facilities other than schools throughout the year.

Volunteers need to have daytime availability, as well as flexibility to travel within 25 miles from their home to participate in the Paws for Reading Program. This program typically runs from September through May, to coincide with most school schedules.

TOUCH and Paws For Reading Program Course Breakdown and Fees

TOUCH and Paws For Reading Courses		
Course	**Time Requirement**	**Fee**
TOUCH and Paws For Reading Prep *Required for all TOUCH and Paws For Reading certifications*	4 weeks	$50
Paws For Reading	1 wk class +	$20
Adult Certification *Required for all participants for initial TOUCH certification*	5 weeks	$75
Child Certification	4 weeks	$50
Acute Care Certification	2 weeks	$40

Required for all Program participants

TOUCH and Paws For Reading Prep – 4 weeks

- Review and polish existing obedience skills
- Advanced obedience skills pertinent to program

Courses specific to TOUCH Program Certification

Adult Certification Course – 5 weeks

Required for all participants for initial TOUCH certification

- Skills pertinent to program
- Greetings
- Distractions
- Role Playing
- Testing

Children Certification Course (Optional) – 4 weeks

- Review all existing skills
- New skills pertinent to working with children
- Discussion/resolve of scenarios specific to target population
- On-site observations
- Testing

Acute Care Certification Course (Optional) – 2 weeks

- Extensive role playing
- Discussion/resolve of scenarios specific to target population
- On-site observations
- Testing

Course specific to Paws For Reading Certification

Paws For Reading Certification – 1 week class +

- Class instruction
- On-site observations and limited supervised visits

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PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE ADDRESS ABOVE

IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS FOR THE TOUCH PROGRAM AND PAWS FOR READING PROGRAMS

- Dogs at least 2 years of age and less than 10 years of age may apply to be evaluated for entry into the TOUCH or PAWS for Reading Programs.
- The dog must have been in your home under your care for at least one year. Handler's for dogs in either program must be 18 years of age or older.
- All applicants for the TOUCH/PAWS Training Programs are required to have completed at least six weeks of basic adult obedience training with their dog (Puppy classes/STAR puppy do not count toward this requirement**) ATTACH copy of certification of completion to this** application.
- Dogs must be current on the following inoculations: Rabies, Distemper/Parvo combo and Bordetella – **ATTACH proof of vaccination to this application**

If you do not currently meet these requirements, we ask that you wait to apply until such time as the requirements are satisfied.

All dogs are required to pass a Temperament/Obedience Evaluation, conducted by Support Dogs, Inc. prior to acceptance into any class. This evaluation screens for appropriate personality and temperament traits as well as level of obedience and how well the handler/dog work together.

We strive to make this program safe for the dog, the handler and the client that will be visited.

Date: _____

Owner/Handler Name (person attending class)_____ DOB:_____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Home phone _____ Cell/other phone _____ Email: _____

Employer: _____ Occupation: _____

Do you have any medical/physical limitations which might be a concern during class? _____

Dog name: _____ Breed: _____ Dog's DOB: _____ Sex: M or F

Dog acquired from: _____ How long dog has lived with you: _____

Is your dog currently being treated or on medication? YES NO If yes, please explain and list medication: _____

_____

Does your dog have any allergies or special needs or limitations that we would need to know about for classes and/or visits?

_____

List any obedience classes, titles or other type of training you have taken with your dog, please include month/year of completion:

_____

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Is your dog completely housebroken? YES NO Is your dog allowed in the house? YES NO On the furniture? YES NO

Can you take food/toys away from your dog? YES NO Does your dog object to grooming or having nails trimmed? YES NO

How does your dog react to the following?:

Loud noises like fireworks or thunderstorms: _____ A group of children approaching: _____

Other animals in yard or house: _____ Strangers in yard or house: _____

Has your dog ever nipped, bitten or attempted to bite anyone? YES NO If yes, please describe what happened: _____

_____

Do you or your dog have experience around medical equipment? YES NO What type?: _____

Do you have experience working with children, elderly, ill or other special needs OUTSIDE of your own home? YES NO

Please describe: _____

Has your dog been exposed to children, elderly, ill or other special needs OUTSIDE of your own home? YES NO

Please describe: _____

Do you have difficulty speaking with someone who is very young, elderly and/or disabled? YES NO

What age group would you prefer to work with? ___ All ages __ Seniors ___ Adults ___ Adolescents ___ Young Children

Why do you think your dog would be good for this program? _____

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your dog? _____

_____

Which program are you interested in? _____ TOUCH Therapy _____ PAWS for Reading _____ Both

How did you hear about Support Dogs, Inc.? _____

Note: The visits at any given facility are set by the facility.

TOUCH Therapy program: Multiple classes may be required depending on the facility that you may want to visit. These visits are generally once or twice a month depending on the facility that we have an agreement with.

PAWS for Reading: These are primarily performed at schools (during the school year) the visits are about an hour long during the school day and happen weekly.

>> Please remember to submit proof of vaccinations and obedience completion to this form <<