

## **PET THERAPY PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

St. Christopher's Hospital for Children began our Pet Therapy Program in the fall of 2005 with a single team visiting our patients. Teams are made up of a dog and their owner, both of whom are volunteers. Teams visit at various times during the weekday, evening and weekend. These dogs are no ordinary pets – the docile and affectionate animals have participated in special training before qualifying as a Pet Therapy volunteer. All of them are certified therapy dogs by Pet Partners ([www.petpartners.org](http://www.petpartners.org)) or Therapy Dog International ([www.tdi-dog.com](http://www.tdi-dog.com)), which require dogs to be well-trained, good natured and enjoy attention. All of our Pet Therapy Dogs are vaccinated and have received the proper health clearance based on hospital policy.

We are always looking to expand and recruitment is on-going for additional therapy dogs. Pets can easily invoke feelings of comfort, joy and playfulness a natural connection between dogs and humans especially children. A volunteer pet visitation program greatly contributes to the emotional and physical healing process. Pet therapy is proven to:

- Reduce fears and anxieties associated with hospitalization
- Encourage social interaction
- Promotes laughter and play
- Enhance coping skills by providing a distraction from illness, medical testing and hospitalization
- Increased normalization of the hospital experience by making it more “like home”

### **“Volunteer Requirements”**

Our volunteers are trained to accompany our pet therapy dogs and have received the proper vaccinations and health clearances.

### **Requirements to become a Pet Therapy volunteer include:**

**Age:** Applicant must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate and dogs must be at least 1 year old.

**Time Commitment:** We ask pet therapy volunteers to commit to a minimum of one to two hour shifts per month.

**Application:** All applicants will be required to complete a St. Christopher's Hospital for Children application packet.

**Vaccinations/Health Clearances:** All applicants must provide current immunization records or documentation of having immunity for the following diseases: Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Varicella (Chicken Pox), Hepatitis B, Tetanus, Diphtheria, proof of PPD (tuberculosis) testing twice during the past twelve months and Influenza Vaccine during the present Flu season (September through April) is also required. Documentation of immunity will expedite the process.



**Interview/Screening:** All applicants will take part in a one on one in person interview and consent to a health screening to include a drug screening completed by Employee Health at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children.

**Background Checks:** All applicants will be required to undergo criminal background, child abuse check and FBI IdentGO Fingerprinting in order to be considered for this volunteer opportunity. FBI Finger printing and criminal background clearance will be facilitated by St. Christopher's Hospital for Children. For Child Abuse Clearance, free of charge, please go to: [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/publichome](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/publichome)

**Orientation and Training:** All applicants will be required to attend a four (4) hour Hospital Volunteer Orientation. Orientations are typically offered monthly at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children campus. This is a two (2) part training. All new pet therapy volunteers will shadow an experienced volunteer and their dog during their first visit and will work under the supervision of experienced volunteer.

**Pet Certification Requirements:** All dogs must be certified through Pet Partners ([www.petpartners.org](http://www.petpartners.org)) or Therapy Dog International ([www.tdi-dog.com](http://www.tdi-dog.com)).

**Annual Screening:** All dogs must be in good health and undergo annual screening by veterinarian and St. Christopher's Hospital for Children (clinical laboratories) to include: heart worms, stool pathogens, Campylobacter jejuni, Giardia sp., Shigella sp., and Salmonella sp. (the stool screening is done annually free of charge at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children).

**Immunizations:** All dogs must be up to date on immunizations to include: Rabies vaccine, Hepatitis A, Leptospirosis vaccine, parvovirus vaccine and must undergo annual heart worm screening. Documentation of results from veterinarian is required.

**Prior to Each Visit:** All dogs must be bathed prior to visiting the hospital and visually checked for ticks, fleas, open wounds and any other signs of illness. All dogs must wear t-shirt or other cover to reduce shedding of hair and dander.