



Therapy Dog Proposal



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Therapy dogs are being introduced into more and more schools.

A therapy dog is a dog that is trained to provide affection, comfort and support to people in many different environments including schools. Therapy dogs are subjected to several tests to ensure that they are fit for the job. These tests look at their ability to block out distractions, comfort level around a variety of people with many different disabilities and different environments and terrains.

Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems, promoting positive behaviour in students. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals than classrooms without animals. Students' behaviour improved toward teachers and students also showed more confidence and responsibility.

What are the benefits?

- *increased concentration, attention and listening*
- *increased play, participation and social interaction*
- *improved speech and other communication*
- *improved personal care*
- *sensory skills development*
- *motor skills development*
- *cognitive skills development*
- *responsibility and respect for others*
- *improved cardiovascular health*
- *improved school attendance*
- *motivation for learning*
- *improved social skills*
- *increased self confidence*
- *improved reading and comprehension skills*
- *supports anger management*
- *reduction in bullying tendencies*
- *helps calm children who are anxious and crying*
- *helps the child refocus and settle*
- *supports children with bereavement*

Contact with therapy dogs helps increase dopamine and serotonin levels which leads to more productivity, happiness and general wellbeing. Children also gain a better understanding of how to take responsibility for another living being. This potentially gives them better recognition of their own responsibilities.

Having a therapy dog also increases the children's knowledge of dogs and how to behave safely around them. Children learn how to approach and speak to them appropriately which can also reduce anxiety, possibly due to previous encounters.

Research shows that therapy dogs can reduce stress physiologically (cortisol levels) and increase attachment responses that trigger oxytocin - a hormone that increases trust in humans. This hormone release also has a calming effect. Medical science has shown that a therapy dog can reduce blood pressure, promote physical healing, reduce anxiety, fatigue and depression, as well as provide emotional support.

"The quickest and biggest hit that we can make to improve mental health in our schools and to make them feel safe for children, is to have at least one dog in every single school in the country." Sir Anthony Seldon, The University of Buckingham.

Therapy dogs have been used in classrooms, to help children with autism.

While therapy dogs have calming effects and reduced stress levels in most students, children with disabilities can present a unique challenge. Because of the wide range of intensity, behaviours can be unpredictable.

The classroom can be a stressful and overwhelming environment due to social challenges and peer pressure. Therapy dogs can reduce the effect of this allowing a child with autism to feel more at ease and open to social behaviour. Researchers have found that children with autism are more social when playing with therapy dogs as opposed to toys. New research offers further proof that animals can also have a therapeutic effect.

The kindness and the gentleness of therapy dogs help children with autism simply by being there. The child may not speak or may want to engage in compulsive behaviour and the therapy dog is by his/her side, ready to engage.

Social Media.

Facebook and Twitter can be used to raise the profile of the therapy dog and the school in general. Regular updates would be used to show activities, interaction and the positive outcomes that a therapy dog provides for learning, behaviour and mental wellbeing. Special events, such as sponsored walks, would also be promoted.

What are the risks and what should be in place?

Legal liability

- *the dog is owned by a member of staff*
- *risk assessments must be completed*
- *insurance cover must be purchased by the owner*
- *business insurance cover must be purchased by the school*
- *compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act*
- *training sessions are recommended*
- *the dog's owner or a member of staff should be with the dog, at all times*
- *sign at the main entrance, informing everyone that the therapy dog is in school*

Allergic reactions

- *a list of children with animal allergies must be available*
- *children's antihistamines must be available in school*
- *staff must be informed about children with allergies to animals*

Animal maintenance

- *the correct vaccinations / boosters must be administered by a registered vet*
- *the dog must have received required inoculations, from a registered vet*
- *annual checks and annual / 3 yearly boosters must be booked with a registered vet*
- *the dog must have worming and flea treatment*
- *health insurance is recommended to avoid costly bills*
- *micro chipping is recommended in case the dog goes missing*

Financial and Equipment

- *a member of staff should buy and own the dog, which is kept at home out of hours*
- *the owner should be financially responsible for worming / flea treatment, annual injections, an annual vet inspection and grooming every 6 weeks of school time*
- *school should purchase business insurance and any equipment to be used in school*
- *School Therapy Dog File in the office to include the dog's Microchip number, vet and emergency contact details plus a dog first aid kit and spare collar / lead*
- *a doggy bag to include a water bowl, bottle of water, treats, a '[name] our therapy dog is in the room' door sign, poo bags and disposable gloves and hand sanitiser*
- *dog beds in each of its bases around school with blankets and cooling pads*
- *water bowls, food bowls, lead and a crate for rest periods or emergencies*

Factors to consider.

The therapy dog should :

- *have low to medium energy levels*
- *have a placid and tolerant nature*
- *be a low shedding breed to reduce allergic reactions*
- *have received socialisation training as a puppy*
- *have time to familiarise itself with the school*
- *have time to familiarise itself with staff*
- *have a quiet, safe place to relax*
- *have a maximum 2 hours of organised activities in a day*

Therapy Dog training and certification is available from 12 months old

Socialisation

Socialisation is a key element of introducing a therapy dog into a school.

Socialisation is the process by which puppies learn to relate appropriately to people and other animals. It involves meeting and having pleasant encounters with as many adults, children, dogs and other animals as possible. It also involves becoming used to a wide range of events, environments and situations.

Experiences during the first year of a dog's life can make all the difference to their future temperament and character. Taking the time to socialise a puppy can result in a friendly, well-adjusted adult dog who enjoys the company of people, can be taken anywhere and lives life to the full!

A puppy who lacks experience with the world will find many things that we take for granted scary and is highly likely to grow up to be a worried dog. A frightened and anxious dog is more likely to develop behaviour problems than a dog who has had a rich, varied and positive puppyhood. Meeting adults and children should be the most important item on a socialisation programme as it is especially important that pet dogs enjoy their company. The more people a dog meets and plays with, the more friendly and sociable the dog will become.

Most puppies / young dogs will enjoy meeting new people, and most people will enjoy meeting a dog! However, it is important that the dog is not overwhelmed, so people should be asked to crouch down to meet them. It is much better for the dog if they are able to approach a new person, rather than the other way around – this way you can be sure that they are feeling confident enough to meet somebody unfamiliar. It is tempting for people to hug them, but it might frighten the dog (especially if they are shy), so best avoided until you know that the dog enjoys this sort of interaction.

Freud and Jofi.

Sigmund Freud often had his Chow Chow, Jofi, in his office with him during psychotherapy sessions. The dog was originally in the room as a comfort to the psychoanalyst, who claimed that he was more relaxed when the dog was nearby. However, Freud soon began to notice that the presence of the dog seemed to help patients during their therapy sessions as well. This difference was most marked when Freud was dealing with children or adolescents. It seemed to him that the patients seemed more willing to talk openly when the dog was in the room. They were also more willing to talk about painful issues.

Parents.

Parents would be informed about the therapy dog in school and any programmed individual therapy sessions with their child in advance. Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with the therapy dog, possible due to anxiety, fear or because of a previous incident, should inform the school so that this can be considered, when planning activities. A signed permission form may be used for individual sessions.

Evaluation.

Monthly progress reports would be completed and, shared with the Senior Leadership Team, to monitor and evaluate progress and allow changes to be made. An annual risk assessment would be carried out and the impact of a 'school therapy dog' will be evaluated by the Senior Leadership Team. Professional advice would be sought, as required, to ensure that the most effective level of provision is maintained.





Bassett Green Primary Nurture



Therapy Dog Monthly Report for May 2020

X, our therapy dog, is allocated a maximum of 2 hours of activities per day in 30 minutes sessions.

Our therapy dog programme aims to :

- *improve attendance, behaviour and confidence*
- *reduce anxiety and bullying tendencies*
- *provide timely emotional support*
- *raise attainment in reading across school*
- *raise the profile of reading in the community*

EXAMPLE

Sessions attended.

Classroom : 23

Playground : 7

Nurture Nest : 6

1:1 : 5

Small Group : 8

Nurture Intervention : 7

ELSA : 2

Walks : 18

Total : 76

What has been the impact this month?

Our 'Wagging Tales Programme' has been launched in school to increase reading participation.

X has visited every class in each year group this month, with a focus on supporting 1:1 reading.

As a result, the number of 1:1 reads has increased across the school by 8%.

6% more children have returned completed reading records this month than March.

X has worked alongside Tom in Y2 to support him in developing more confidence with his reading.

X has listened to Tom read 3 times a week. Tom has now moved from Red to Yellow.

Tom said that when he reads to X, he feels that he can relax and enjoy the book.

Y1 have hosted small group reading sessions, where children take it in turns to read a page.

X sat quietly listening to every word. The children used their decoding skills to read tricky words.

The children also tried using different types of intonation, to add mystery, suspense or excitement.

Recently, Katy in Y6 has suffered a bereavement in her family and has found attending school difficult.

Katy has spent time walking X and talking to him about how she feels.

Katy told her teacher that she is enjoying being back at school because X helps her to cope with her loss.

X supported the PTA with a fun family obstacle course on Saturday 18th April, which raised £216.

Follow what X is doing each week by connecting on Facebook.



<https://www.facebook.com/BassettGreenPS/>



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