



# Pet therapy and service dogs

LEGS Neuro Café 21<sup>st</sup> June

# Different types of therapy animals

- **1. Therapeutic visits** is the most common type of pet therapy, in which owners take their personal pets to visit facilities. Many hospitalized patients miss the pets they left at home. A visit from a pet can improve mood and reduce anxiety.
- **2. Animal-assisted therapy** involves animals specially trained to assist physical and occupational therapists with their patients. Pets can improve limb mobility and fine motor skills in patients as they stroke their coats. Plus, therapy pets help patients relearn pet care skills so they can take care of their own pets when they return home. AAT is often goal-directed and progress is monitored.
- **3. Facility therapy** is a little different. These therapy pets often reside at the care center and are trained to monitor and engage patients with Alzheimer's disease or other mental illnesses. They learn the limitations and boundaries of the residents and help keep them safe.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)** are trained to provide therapeutic benefits through companionship. Are usually allowed in no pet housing facilities, unlike therapy animals/dogs.

# Benefits of pet therapy

Therapy dogs provide comfort to people who may have physical or emotional needs.

Therapy dogs can:

- Provide distraction from procedures or boredom in hospital.
- Bring comfort and companionship
- Increase socialization, engagement, and communication.
- Can lower blood pressure, improving cardiovascular health.
- Reduce anxiety, stress and fear amongst many other negative emotions.



# Different breeds?

- Lots of different dog breeds can be considered to be a therapy dog. They just need to possess the right temperament.
- Different from service dogs, therapy dogs are evaluated and certified enabling them to go with their handler into a variety of settings hospitals, hospices, schools, nursing homes and mental health facilities.
- They be calm, even in unfamiliar, busy environments and when surrounded by loud noises and movements.
- Additionally, due to the fact that a lot of people will want to pet them, they'll need to be fine with being handled by a variety of people!

## Top breeds of service dogs

### Labrador

Intelligent, gentle, calm and outgoing



### German Shepherd

Obedient, confident, courageous and loyal



### Bernese Mountain Dog

Calm, affectionate, outgoing and strong



### Siberian Husky

Strong, athletic, trustworthy and loyal



### Border Collie

Intelligent, energetic, athletic and responsive



### Cocker Spaniel

Energetic, outgoing, faithful and affectionate



### Springer Spaniel

Alert, attentive, active and intelligent



### Beagle

Intelligent, gentle, determined and focused



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# Not just dogs...

- **Cats**

- Can sense negative emotions and relieve stress and anxiety.
- Has to be the right temperament! Not an “aloof” cat.

- **Horses**

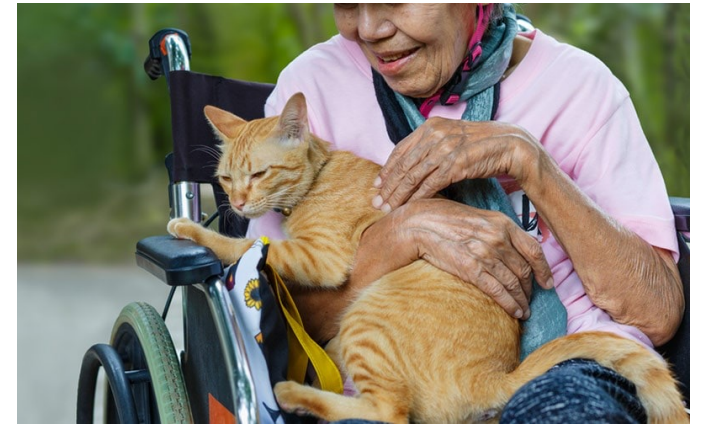
- Used in equine assisted therapy (like AAT) part of OT/PT programmes to be ridden.
- Or equine therapy, clients guided through activities with horses. Build trust, confidence, social skills, communication in wide range of disabilities and conditions.

- **Rabbits**

- Smaller, don't bark or meow and can be trained.
- Again has to have the right demeanor!

- **Birds**

- Can be in tune to their environment and are empathic towards people. Can sense stress, tension and distress.
- Certain breeds can be trained to do tricks, respond to their name and bond with owners and mimic speech, sounds or provide bird song.





Buddy at Royal Marsden hospital



Virtual pet therapy during covid pn dementia ward at Lewisham



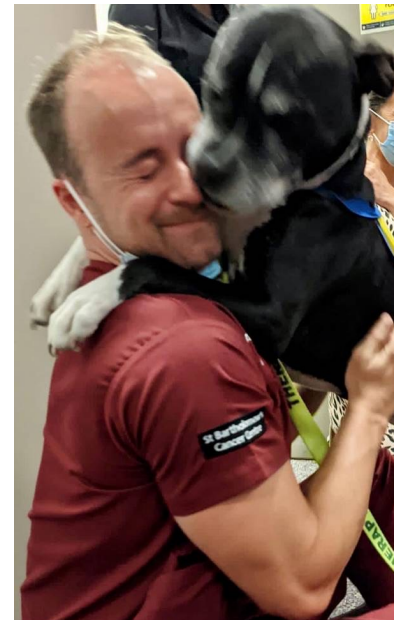
Molly at RFH



Memphis at RFH



Yazzy at Medway



# Assistant / Service dogs

- A dog trained to aid or assist an individual with a disability.
- Many are trained by an assistance dog organization, or by their handler, often with the help of a professional trainer.
- Service dogs are to not be confused with Emotional Support Animals, as Emotional Support Animals are not protected under the ADA laws and typically have little to no training in comparison to a service dog.
- Dogs must be trained to a high level not to be a nuisance in public, to be safe with members of the public and well-behaved, as well as being healthy and not posing a hygiene threat.
- Some assistance dogs wear [harnesses](#) that signify such in bold letters, but this is not required by law

# Guide dogs



<https://www.guidedogs.org.uk>



# What are Guide dogs and finding a match

- Guide dogs are assistance dogs trained to lead blind or visually impaired people around obstacles.
- Labradors, golden retrievers and crosses of these two breeds are usually used for guide dogs. Sometimes, different breeds can offer some different characteristics but every dog and every person is a complete individual. So a good match is important.
- Considerations for matching dogs and owners.
  - The speed the person and the dog naturally walks
  - The Environment the person lives and works in; e.g city centre or countryside.
  - Level of activity required.
  - The type and amount of transport a person uses, some dogs don't enjoy going on public transport.
  - Sometimes larger dogs may be matched to someone that would benefit from additional stability.



# How can Guide dogs help?

- The guide dog and owner are a partnership – they'll need each other to successfully navigate around. Owner is the navigator and the dog is the driver. While guide dogs can do all of the below, they need commands, direction and encouragement.
- Throughout training a guide dog learns to:
  - walk centrally along the pavement whilst avoiding obstacles on the route
  - not turn corners unless told to do so
  - stop at kerbs and steps
  - find doors, crossings and places which are visited regularly
  - judge height and width to avoid collisions.
  - keep to a straight path when crossing a road – but it is up to the owner to decide where and when to cross safely
  - Avoid obstacles that are on the pavement and at head height – such as over-hanging branches.
  - Some guide dogs are trained to find the box at a pelican crossing by jumping up and resting their paws on it. This is so the handler knows where the button is.



# Hearing dogs



- <https://www.hearingdogs.org.uk/helping-deaf-people/>

# Hearing dogs



- Hearing dogs and alert owners to

# Seizure alert dogs

- Seizure alert dogs are trained to provide a warning of up to 50 minutes prior to an oncoming seizure.
- This gives time for their owner to find a place of safety and privacy as they have their seizure.
- With the confidence that they will be alerted in advance of any seizure, owners are able to live more independently.
- Day-to-day tasks, including going to the shops, cooking, ironing and having a bath, which would previously have been hazardous, are now manageable on their own and in safety.
- Support Dogs is the only organisation in the UK to provide and train seizure alert dogs.

<https://www.supportdogs.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=2979329e-57d1-48ed-96af-f9dcd32025df>





<https://www.supportdogs.org.uk>

# Diabetic alert assistance dogs

- Hypo Hounds train dogs to detect and alert to the dangerous changes their Type 1 Diabetic owner's blood sugars. Hypos and result from low blood sugar levels.
- Hypo hounds focus on children, however do provide for adults if there is a clinical need.
- Dogs have a superior smelling ability can detect minute chemical changes in our bodies. A dog might recognise a drop in blood glucose levels or onset of a hypoglycaemic episode before you notice something wrong.
- By alerting owners and families to changes in blood sugars, hypoglycaemic attacks, can be prevented.
- Diabetic alert dogs can also be trained to detect potential episodes of hyperglycaemia (known as hypers)
- Other service dog use their smell to detect drugs, mines and more recently, a research trial in the UK found that bio-detection dogs could identify COVID-19 with an impressive 94% accuracy.[\[3\]](#)



Hypo Hounds  
Hounds improving lives

# Service dogs – Autism dogs

- <https://www.autismdogs.co.uk>
- Autism dogs can support individuals as they engage with the world around them:
  - 1.Helps to promote healthy sleep
  - 2.Can improve eating and exercise patterns
  - 3.Helps to reduce the frequency and severity of meltdowns
  - 4.Assist in the development of language
  - 5.Can help to improve motor skills and social skills





# Autism dogs - Skills

- “Meltdown Response”
  - Can occur with sensory overload, frustration, confusion/fear.
  - Can experience loss of control, self injury, destructive behavior.
  - Dog trained to remain calm and provide support, bespoke to the individual. Such as fetch sunglasses, ear defenders to reduced sensory stimulation.
- “Deep pressure therapy”
  - Provide pressure using body weight.
  - Can relieve feeling of distress, anxiety, restlessness and promote better sleep.
- Self-harm interruption
  - Stop behaviours such as scratching – using paws to block.
- Anti bolting – Only for children
  - Dog lays down and anchors a child to keep them safe using a harness.



# PTSD dogs <https://www.servicedogsuk.org>



# PTSD dog skills

- Specific skills

Waking up from nightmares

Medication reminders

Getting someone back to the present when suffering from disorientation.

Offering behaviors to combat panic, flashback and anxiety attacks



**SERVICE  
DOGS UK**  
for those with PTSD  
who have served



# LEGS participants own pets and experiences

- Has anyone received pet therapy?
- Or do you own a pet? Introduce them!  
How do they help you?

