



# Paws for Wellness

Animal Assisted Therapy  
Interventions at Reading Hospital



# Description of the iBb program

## Mission of PAWS

- To provide clinically validated, therapeutic interventions for patients, their family and employees of the Reading Health System
- To promote healing and well-being
- To guarantee the safety, privacy and integrity of the patient experience at all levels of healthcare

# The Evolution of PAWS

- In the 1990's, Reading Hospital recognized the significance animals play in people's physical and emotional wellbeing. They began providing supportive services to people in the behavioral health, pediatrics, and cancer units. Certified therapy animals helped to alleviate the physical pain, anxiety, and loneliness of a hospitalization while supporting hope and healing.

- Beginning in 2001, PAWS for Wellness, a volunteer supported program, under the direction of MaryJo Brown, MA,LPC, was established.
- Since its beginning, PAWS has logged ten thousand and more hours supporting patients in the behavioral health, medical, surgical, and physical medicine units with the Reading Health System.

- The PAWS program enlists the cold noses and warm hearts of 18 certified therapy dogs, 1 devoted therapy cat, and their owners.
- Services include:
  - Animal Assisted Therapy
  - Animal Assisted Activities
  - 20 Minute Mascot

**PAWS FOR WELLNESS**



PAWS for Wellness- Reading Health System

# **SUMMARY OF BUSINESS EXPERIENCE**



**Animal Assisted Therapy** occurs when a certified and skilled therapy animal is integrated into someone's treatment. These interventions promote improvement in physical functioning and mental well-being.



# Animal Assisted Therapy

## One PAWS Experience

- A man recovering from head trauma has limited standing tolerance and cognitive impairment. A recreational therapist uses a therapy dog and its owner to motivate the patient by placing the dog on a raised table and having the patient stand while stroking the dog. To build memory, the owner talks about the dog and engages the patient in conversation about his own experiences with dogs. Later in the session, the therapist “quizzed” the patient about what he had learned about the animal.



The purpose of **Animal Assisted Activities** is to enhance the quality of life. These are “meet and greet” activities that involve pets visiting people. These activities are often performed by a volunteer visiting a facility with a therapy animal.

# Animal Assisted Activities

## One PAWS Experience

- Two certified therapy dogs and their owners visit the behavioral health unit. Patients pet and hold the animals while engaging in conversation about the dogs. The dogs were a calming influence that generated smiles and sincere thanks from the patients. (There were no treatment goals set for this visit.)

# 20 Minute Mascot

This service, offered in conjunction with the hospital's employee wellness committee, provides a break in the day for hospital employees. This supports self-care on the job.



# 20 Minute Mascot One PAWS Experience

Care of cancer patients can be a source of considerable stress. Each week, before the scheduled visit to the Reading Hospital Cancer Center, therapy dogs and their owners visit with the staff. Most everyone takes some time to pet and hug the dogs. Conversations about “Koby” and “Angel” bring staff together for a supportive break. Some even have treats ready for these special dogs.

## Educational Skill Requirements

This program within the Reading Health System relies mostly on volunteers and their certified therapy dogs. The director is a licensed professional counselor.

Fields that also incorporate animal assisted therapy and activities are:

Counselor

Recreational therapist

Physical Therapist

Occupational therapist

Psychologist

Teacher

Speech and Language Pathologist

Guidance Counselor

Teacher

Minister



## Salary Ranges and Benefits

This program within the Reading Health System relies mostly on volunteers and their certified therapy dogs. The director is a licensed professional counselor.

Median Salary for a licensed professional counselor is \$36,500.





## **Host Company's Greatest Asset- Director**

Clearly, MaryJo Brown, director of the PAWS program, is the greatest asset. Her vision, research, continued education, and dedication have made and will continue to make this program the success that it is.



Within the PAWS program, technology is utilized through the hospital's computer stations. As therapies and activities are completed, the director logs pertinent information about the session and emails appropriate personnel. Hospital staff also communicate with the director about patients who may benefit from the PAWS program. Finally, the director keeps in contact with volunteers and their therapy animals through email.

## **TECHNOLOGY UTILIZED**



## CHALLENGES

Currently the PAWS program is funded through the behavioral health department of the Reading Hospital. Since much of the program is implemented by volunteers, the budget is relatively small. The program continues to grow.

As interest in the field of animal assisted therapy continues, the challenge is to communicate with the Reading Health System and the community about the importance of the program. There may be greater need for employees to coordinate the program and train volunteers.



# Skills

- Effective communication Skills
- Listening skills
- Understanding of human and animal behavior
- Problem solving skills
- Empathy
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Knowledge in a content or discipline, such as medical, behavioral, education

# Research to Support using animal assisted activities within a school setting

- Children improve emotional recognition by relating to dogs, thus improving interpersonal interaction and emotional competencies with other people. (Stetina, 2011)
- Interactions with animals contribute to stress reduction, trauma recovery, and positive brain development in children. (York2, 2010)
- Children with disabilities show improvement in emotional, motor, cognitive, and social behaviors after animal assisted therapy. (Pawlik-Popielarska, 2010)
- Children exposed to humane education programs display enhanced empathy for humans compared with children not exposed to such programs. (Ascione, 1992)
- Contact with animals develops nurturing behavior in children who may grow to be more nurturing adults. (Melson, 1990)
- Children's cognitive development can be enhanced by interacting with a pet. (Poresky, 1988)

# Summary of Project #1

## **13.1 Career Awareness and Preparation**

**Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every students to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to: A. Recognize that individuals have unique interests.**

**D. Identify the range of jobs available in the community.**

**E. Describe the work done by school personnel and other individuals in the community.**

**G. Explain why education and training plans are important.**

## **CC 1.2 Reading Informational Text**

**Students read, understand, and respond to informational text—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence.**

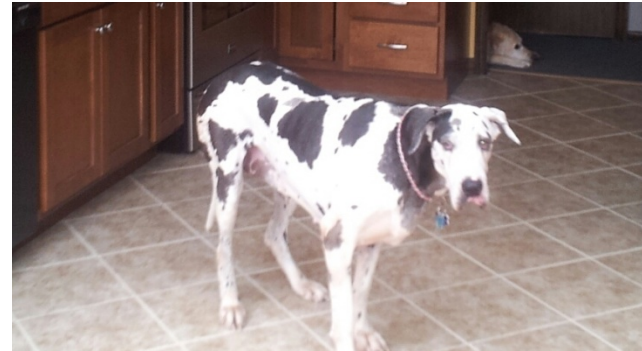
## **CC 1.4 Writing**

**Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.**

# Project #1 (cont.)

**Title: All Things DOG**

Subject: Career Education;  
English Language Arts



To introduce Career Month, DOG (my harlequin Great Dane) will visit reading support classes to motivate a discussion about jobs relating to animals. Using books, magazines, and the internet, students will generate a list of careers that work with animals. Students will respond to the following prompt-

An interesting career would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

# Summary of Project #2

## **13.1 Career Awareness and Preparation**

**Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every students to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to:** A. Recognize that individuals

have unique interests.

**D. Identify the range of jobs available in the community.**

**E. Describe the work done by school personnel and other individuals in the community.**

**G. Explain why education and training plans are important.**

## **CC 1.2 Reading Informational Text**

**Students read, understand, and respond to informational text—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence.**

## **CC 1.3 Reading Literature**

**Students read and respond to works of literature—with emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.**

# Project #2 (cont.)

**Title: PAWS for Reading**

Subject: Career Education;  
English Language Arts



Once a month, DOG will visit reading support students for one-on-one reading time to help improve skills, confidence, and motivation for reading. In addition, students learn to appreciate and interact with dogs in a positive supportive situation.



Summer 2014

**SANDY HAWKINS**  
**INTERVENTION SPECIALIST**  
**FLEETWOOD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**