

# LORT SMITH PET THERAPY

## FACILITY INFORMATION SHEET

Lort Smith is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve the health and happiness of animals and the people who care for them. We work towards this mission across three areas of work – our **Hospital**, where we provide quality veterinary care regardless of a person’s circumstances, our **Adoption Centre**, where we rehabilitate and find new homes for animals in need, and in our **Community Outreach** programs, where we promote and nurture the bond between humans and animals.

### LORT SMITH PET THERAPY

Lort Smith Pet Therapy involves volunteers taking their own pet dogs to visit people in hospitals, aged care facilities and a variety of other health and wellbeing settings in Melbourne. The positive interaction with visiting volunteers and their dogs brings comfort, happiness and relief to people experiencing illness, pain, adversity and loneliness. Whether through sitting with a patient and sharing some affection, placing a gentle head on the lap of someone in distress or by having a bit of fun or showing off their special talents during a visit, the positive impact dogs have on people in facilities can be profound.

Interacting with therapy dogs has been found to:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Alleviate pain
- Improve motivation for recovery
- Improve cardiovascular health
- Reduce loneliness
- Build trust and socialisation
- Improve confidence and self-esteem
- Improve verbal communication
- Improve empathy and social skills



### HOW PET THERAPY VISITS WORK

- Each Pet Therapy Team (1 volunteer + 1 dog) makes regular visits to their matched facility at a set time, either weekly or fortnightly
- Lort Smith works with facilities to determine optimal volunteer numbers and visit frequencies and how visits might best work at your facility
- Visits vary between facilities but pet therapy teams generally interact with clients in communal areas and/or individual rooms.
- Visits last between 1-2 hours, however most dogs start out doing shorter visits until they get used to the environment
- Volunteers need to sign in and out and check in with their appointed supervisor upon arrival

### FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

Partner facilities must be willing and able to collaborate with Lort Smith to plan and deliver pet therapy visits in a manner that is safe, effective and supportive for clients, volunteers, dogs and staff. In addition, you will need to:

- Appoint an appropriate contact person/people to provide support and supervision
- Complete a comprehensive facility induction with each referred volunteer
- Participate in an annual supervision meeting with each visiting volunteer
- Participate in an annual review meeting with a Lort Smith staff member

## FACILITY INTAKE PROCESS

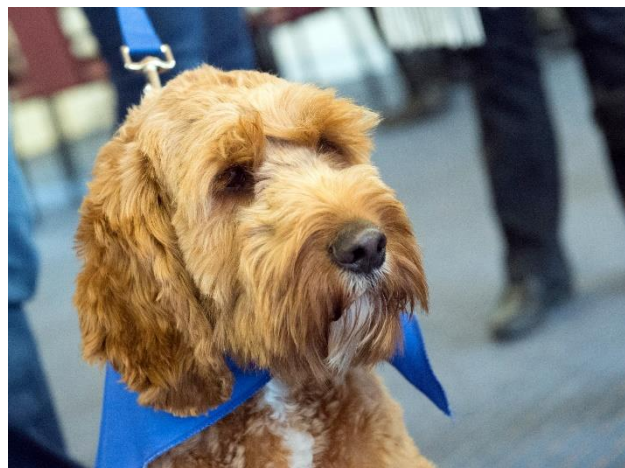
We currently have a lengthy **waiting list** of facilities wanting to be involved in the program. As such, you will likely be waiting some time before getting involved. The application process involves:

- Submission of an Expression of Interest Form
- *(If invited to apply)* Completion of a Facility Application Form and Service Agreement
- Participate in a Planning Meeting with a Lort Smith staff member
- Liaise with Lort Smith to finalise paperwork and processes

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### HOW DOES LORT SMITH SELECT VOLUNTEERS AND DOGS?

- While we accept dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes, dogs must be in good health, display genuine interest in socialising with new people, be responsive to their handler and be calm and approachable around new environments, people and other dogs.
- Lort Smith Pet Therapy volunteers are selected according to their communication skills, empathy, resilience, self-awareness and ability to monitor and react to their dog's behaviour.
- Pet Therapy volunteer-dog teams go through the following process:
  1. Attend a **Volunteer Information Session**
  2. Complete and return Application Form and Volunteer Agreement
  3. Attend a **Group Assessment and Interview**
  4. Complete and return Dog Health Screening Form, National Police Check, Stat Dec and Working With Children Check
  5. Attend **Volunteer Training**
  6. *(Where relevant)* attend a **Facility Assessment** at matched facility



### HOW DOES LORT SMITH SELECT FACILITIES?

Facilities are selected according to:

- The impact pet therapy visits are likely to have on clients (Lort Smith prioritises facilities that support people affected by illness, loneliness, mental illness, homelessness and family violence).
- Willingness/ability to collaborate with Lort Smith to plan and support visits
- Availability of alternative sources of animal companionship (e.g., resident pets, etc.)

### HOW ARE PET THERAPY TEAMS MATCHED WITH FACILITIES?

Volunteers are matched with facilities according to current need within facilities, volunteer preferences, dog temperament and the past experiences of both volunteers and their dogs. Once a Pet Therapy team is matched to your facility, you will receive a volunteer registration form with all their details.

### WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED?

The program is provided as a community service and as such there is no cost to facilities, apart from the time involved in the planning and ongoing support of pet therapy visits.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To register your interest or find out more, please contact Lort Smith Pet Therapy via **(03) 9287 6423** or [pettherapy@lortsmith.com](mailto:pettherapy@lortsmith.com)