

# SCCV Evaluation and Training

SCCV evaluators and trainers consider it their highest calling to help teams become confident, successful pet therapy participants. The greatest satisfaction we have is seeing our trainees move into the community with their dogs to bring joy to all. Remember that trainers and evaluators are here to help you be successful at pet therapy. They are passionately concerned for your safety, your canine's safety, and the safety and convenience of those you are visiting. Their comments and suggestions are offered only as help based on their extensive experience, not as criticism.

## Evaluation (Part 1)

Both dog and handler will be evaluated separately and together, because their success in pet therapy depends on their individual characteristics and the way they work together as a team.

Evaluation begins when a handler opens the vehicle door in the parking lot and lets the dog out. At that time and for the duration of evaluation, the dog must be calm, friendly, non-aggressive toward people and other dogs, and under the control of the handler.

Dogs must be clean, well-groomed, and on a four-foot or shorter leash with a collar. No harnesses are allowed unless permission has been obtained beforehand from the SCCV VP of Training.

Handlers must also be clean and well-groomed, wearing closed-toe shoes and conservative clothing. That means sandals, flip-flops, shorts, short-short skirts, low-cut or transparent blouses, visible underwear, excessive jewelry, etc. are not permitted. Chewing gum and scents such as perfume, cologne or aftershave are not allowed; and some facilities do not permit denim jeans or false fingernails.

The characteristics and behavior we are looking for can best be described as follows.

### Dogs

- Dogs must never display aggression by lunging, growling, snapping, or straining at the leash to get to another dog or a person.
- Staring at another dog is considered aggressive behavior.
- Dogs must not bark inside the building or bark repeatedly outside.
- Dogs must respond to handlers' commands the first time they are given. "Sit, Spot! Sit! Sit! I said sit!" is not acceptable.
- Dogs must demonstrate obedience to "heel, sit, down, stay, and come" commands. The demonstration will be performed at the evaluation session as follows:
  - On entering the evaluation room, handlers take seats with their dogs at their left sides. Dogs will assume a prone position in response to the down command.
  - Dogs will face forward and ignore other dogs. They may lie on their sides or stomachs. Napping (even snoring) is permissible for dogs but is frowned upon for handlers.

## Dogs: Obedience (continued)

- Handlers will be asked to take turns walking their dogs around the room, demonstrating that their dogs will walk on a loose leash, i.e. neither pulling ahead nor dragging behind, and stay beside their handlers even in a figure eight, where the dog must walk faster than the handler on the outside turn and slow down on the inside turn.
- Whenever the handler stops, the dog will sit or stand without moving, at the handler's side. If the handler is greeting another person with a dog, the handler's dog will remain sitting quietly and ignoring the other dog when the handler steps forward to greet the other person.
- When told to sit and stay, the dog will hold the sit position while the handler walks forward (i.e. does not back away facing the dog) to a maximum distance of 20 feet and turns to face the dog.
- When the dog is told to come ("come" or "here" or a variant command), the dog will come directly to the handler.
- While other dogs are walking with their handlers around the room, the remaining dogs will stay quietly by their handlers' sides in the down position. They will not stare, growl, lunge, or bark at other dogs when they come into close proximity. Casual interest is allowed, but you should quickly refocus the dog's attention on you.

## Handlers:

Handlers are likely to pass training and evaluation if they:

- are obviously in control of their dogs, i.e. give commands firmly and clearly in expectation of obedience and give corrections promptly and decisively if a command is not obeyed the first time it is given;
- demonstrate a good relationship with their dogs, i.e. show affection and encouragement to their dogs as well as appropriate corrections when necessary;
- are aware at all times of where their dogs are and what they are doing;
- learn and obey SCCV safety rules;
- accept suggestions and corrections with good grace, without giving excuses or acting defensively;
- are polite and considerate to trainers and other trainees;
- understand and take responsibility for meeting training requirements.

## Training (Parts 2 and 3)

**Part 2:** Teams passing evaluations attend two mandatory training classes at medical facilities, each ending with supervised visits to patients. Safety of patients, dogs and handlers is extremely important. You and your dog are observed carefully and given as much guidance and assistance as needed.

**Part 3:** After successfully passing Parts 1 and 2, teams begin a program of five supervised training visits at a variety of local health care facilities. Upon successful completion of these visits, you and your dog may become registered with SCCV as a pet therapy team. You will receive a Visiting Opportunities List (VOL) of the numerous facilities and opportunities available to SCCV members.