

VOLUNTEER ROLE DESCRIPTION

Role Title	Volunteer - Hospice Therapy Dogs
Department/Shop	Patient & Family Services
Location	The Hospice, Myland Hall, Colchester
Reporting To	Complementary Therapy Team Lead

Volunteering at St Helena

We ask that all volunteers are sympathetic to and be able to project the philosophy, vision and values of St Helena.

The benefits of being a St Helena volunteer include:

- The opportunity to develop new and existing skills and gain experience in the workplace
- The opportunity to make new friends with your peers and local communities
- The satisfaction of knowing you are making a difference to people facing incurable illness or bereavement
- Full support of a specified line manager within a dedicated team
- Volunteering has been proven to help improve mental health and wellbeing and is therapeutic by keeping you active
- Regular news and updates about what's happening at St Helena so you feel part of the team
- Gives you a sense of purpose – the feel good factor!

Role summary

This is a rewarding opportunity to make a difference to patients in the Inpatient Unit and their families through pet therapy. By visiting with your dog, you can help enhance wellbeing and provide emotional support for those who find comfort with pets.

To be eligible for this role, your dog must be registered with a UK recognised pet therapy organisation. This ensures they have been assessed for suitability, demonstrating calmness, gentleness and appropriate behaviour in various environments. You must also hold the necessary assessment documentation as proof of their registration as a therapy dog.

The benefits of pet therapy for patients include:

- Reducing blood pressure and improving overall cardiovascular health
- Releasing “feel good” endorphins (serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin) that produce a calming effect
- Stimulating memories and encouraging communication
- Decreasing pain and enhancing the effectiveness of pain management
- Providing companionship and non-judgmental interactions
- Offering a fun distraction and uplifting presence
- Enabling soothing, tactile engagement through petting

As a volunteer and pet owner, you should be compassionate, approachable and able to communicate in a warm friendly manner.

This role requires an open-minded attitude, excellent listening skills and the ability to follow guidance while maintaining clinical and patient boundaries.

Applicants must be over 18 years of age and an enhanced adult & child DBS check will be carried out for this role.

Main duties of the role

As part of the volunteer therapy pet team, you and your dog will provide companionship, emotional support and a comforting presence for patients, families, visitors and staff. Your role will be to engage with patients based on their needs, offering a friendly ear and allowing your dog to interact in a safe and appropriate manner.

- Interact with the patients and their families to provide comfort and companionship.
- Have a calm, approachable, and patient manner at all times.
- Promote relaxation, emotional wellbeing and moments of joy through pet interaction.
- Ensure your dog remains harnessed, well-managed and comfortable throughout visits.
- Be attentive to your dogs needs and respond accordingly to maintain their welfare.
- Accurately complete any required paperwork and provide clear objective feedback to your line manager or clinical staff as required.

Training & supervision

- All volunteers are required to complete online mandatory training relevant to the area of this patient facing role; this will include safeguarding training.
- First day induction and invitation to the next staff and volunteer induction day.
- Regular reflective and supervision sessions with dedicated line manager.

Experience & qualifications required

- You must own a registered therapy dog with valid up to date certification.
- Evidence must be provided that your dog has successfully passed the required assessment criteria and is registered with a UK-recognised pet therapy organisation.
- Your dog must be trained in all basic commands and be able to respond reliably. They must be able to remain calm and not display negative reactivity towards other dogs or animals.

We accept therapy dogs from the following organisations:

- PAT – Pets As Therapy - <https://petsastherapy.org/>
- TDN - Therapy Dogs Nationwide - <https://tdn.org.uk/>
- Essex Therapy Dogs CIC - <https://essextherapydogs.co.uk/>

Personal attributes

- Passionate about St Helena
- Good communication skills
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
- Sensitivity to the diverse needs of hospice patients, families, and staff.
- Ability to work within boundaries, maintaining confidentiality and professionalism
- Reliable and trustworthy
- Team player with a friendly outlook

