



Laura Mundy Therapy Dogs
Guidelines for prospective teams

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Who am I?

At Laura Mundy Therapy Dogs, my focus is tailoring the training support and education to you and your dog in preparation to become an accredited therapy dog and handler team. We are committed to force free training methods and focus our teachings on ensuring the welfare of your dog and those they interact with throughout the course of their work.

The power of choice and consent, enjoyment over tolerance, minimising stress for our dogs, and the modelling of positive relationships between people and our dogs are key to our practices.

Our goal is to help you achieve success with your dog as a therapy dog whether that may be in a role of a visiting therapy dog team on a volunteer basis or as a professional working team within your organisation, undertaking goal-based therapeutic interactions.

Located in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, we are able to help in-person for our practical training programs, or remotely via Zoom for our theory module.

Our background is in undergraduate and postgraduate human psychology with training in psychology and behavioural neuroscience as well as qualifications in dog training and behaviour. I am also currently a PhD candidate with the University of Queensland Animal Assisted Intervention research group undertaking a research program into the inclusion of therapy dogs within organisations. Training experience in the field of therapy dogs and assistance dogs has spanned almost 20 years and covered a vast range of dog types and roles. Across these years I have worked as a therapy dog handler in settings such as aged care, acquired brain injury centres, youth services and many others. I have been responsible for the training and assessment of all dogs included in these therapy dog roles. I also plan and deliver training and activities with a diverse range of people and their dogs to help create positive mental and/or physical health outcomes.

The following pages will help you understand what is required of you and your dog in order to achieve accreditation as a therapy dog and handler team. Applying to undertake training



with us and even undergoing training does NOT guarantee a successful outcome in becoming a therapy dog team.

Eligibility as a prospective therapy dog and handler team:

In order to undertake our therapy dog training program with us you must be aged over 18 years and have owned and lived with your dog for a minimum of 6 months. Your dog must be aged over 12 months and under 10 years of age at the time of the assessment. Once your dog reaches the age of 10 years they can continue to work if already qualified, as long as you get a 6-monthly vet clearance for your dog past this age. Your dog must be of good physical health, hygiene and grooming at all times. A vet clearance is required from your veterinarian saying they are able to work.

Your dog must not be of a restricted breed or have ever had any dangerous dog or menacing dog order placed on them by your local council or any other council. Breeds that are not allowed to take part in any training program are American Pit Bull Terriers (or Pit Bull Terriers), Perro de Presa Canarios, Dogo Argentinos, Japanese Tosas or Fila Brasileiros. Your dog cannot have ever bitten anyone causing injury, and must show a calm and social temperament where they genuinely enjoy social interactions with new people.

In order to be a successful therapy dog and handler team there are three key components:

- A dog with a suitable nature that enjoys engaging with others and does not display aggressive behaviour towards other people or other dogs.
- A dog with good manners and attained a high level of general manners and skills training.
- Handler training in principles of therapy dog practices including but not limited to zoonoses, human and animal welfare, the importance of participant consent, basic dog training and behaviour skills, canine body language, risk management, safety, best practice guidelines and much more.

Any prior training of your dog must **not** have been conducted using electronic collars (shock collars).

There are terms and conditions as part of your therapy dog handler team accreditation that will also be explained to you within your training but includes aspects such as always directly supervising your dog, reporting any injuries that make working your dog unsafe, not allowing others to handle your dog in a work capacity without you present to name a few.



Suitable dogs to become therapy dogs:

Breeds such as short statured dogs and dogs with flat noses will require more thorough vet assessment and restrictions on work. It is unethical to have a short-nosed breed work in higher temperatures and for longer periods, this could be potentially deadly. It is important that you consider your needs from a therapy dog and whether that would match the ability of the dog to do this with you.

You can purchase a puppy and start training from scratch and we can help you with selecting a breed and a breeder that may match your needs. The alternative is to rehome an adult dog or rescue a dog from a shelter. This is also something we can help with and there are advantages of rescuing older dogs as their adult temperament is a known entity by then. It's imperative you get a qualified force free training and behaviour professional to do an assessment of this dog first and whether they will match your needs, lifestyle and home environment as well as the work role and environment you want them to work in.

Time frame and process for training:

The process of training a dog to be a therapy dog will vary depending on whether you have a puppy or have a dog that you've owned for a while and have achieved a high level of training with already. Not only is there general skills training required but also proofing these behaviours in public areas. It's also imperative that your dog is developmentally mature. We will not accept enquiries that request we immediately assess dogs without undertaking the full training course. Each dog and handler team can expect to have done up to approximately 20 hours of training in total. This will include practical training as well as the compulsory theory workshop which is held online (two zooms of two and a half hours each).

What is involved in the training?

We can undertake a pre-enrolment assessment of suitability of your dog to give you some feedback on likely success of training and what pre-training may need to be done before going through the formal training. This is an optional additional to the overall training program. Please note though that doing this assessment does not guarantee that you will



pass the program. If you already attend another trainer, asking them their impression of suitability of your dog as a therapy dog would be a good option too. If you're unsure you can always give us a call or email to discuss this further. We want to avoid teams signing up for the full course when they aren't ready as it may stress your dog out and set you both up to fail. This may mean we begin with starting basic training foundations or even joining you up to basic group classes local to you that use the same training methods as us (positive only). Once your dog is fluent in the basic foundation skills, you will be ready to undertake the practical training course. You can complete the online theory course at any time if you're doing the theory training remotely.

If you start with a puppy we also want you to just relax and enjoy your puppy while focussing on doing normal puppy stuff (puppy school, toilet training, address nipping/biting and so on). Once your pup is a few months old we can then discuss more targeted training. It is important if you do have a puppy that we try to do some socialisation to environments they will likely experience so that they're robust and confident once ready to begin more formal training. We can provide socialisation checklists to help with this.

What's involved and what will it all cost?

It is expected that overall, each team will have undertaken approximately 20 hours of training (including practical, theory and assessment). This includes an expected minimum of a 5-hr foundation training course at our school or another force free training school.

Some teams may require some additional training before undertaking the practical training course. You may choose to work with a trainer near you that's positive only, or you can take part in one of our group training programs at Laura Mundy Dog Training, such as our Rookies 5-week foundation skills and manners course. You can also do our one day intensive for therapy teams which is a day full of training in the key skills needed for therapy dogs.

The practical training days involve applying everyday skills such as settling in a place such as a mat, stays, recalls, loose lead walking and much more, to the types of scenarios you will encounter as a therapy dog team. You will learn manners such as going through doors nicely, getting in and out of the car politely, greeting manners and many other skills. You will also work on these in high distraction scenarios set up for your assessment day. It's also expected that your dog has been conditioned to a marker such as 'yes' or a clicker. If you aren't sure on these then it's likely you'll still need to do this with your dog.

Assessment days will run on from the practical days. Teams can choose to do their assessment straight after their practical course or if they feel they may not be ready they



can attend another assessment day. If you undertake your assessment and do not pass, you are able to retake your assessment at another assessment day after some further training if required. If you do not pass due to any behavioural or temperament concerns this will be discussed with you. As much as we try to avoid this through doing assessments prior to training, behaviour can never be guaranteed, nor can how our dogs will respond to real-world set up training scenarios and fatigue.

An approximate breakdown of the costs are itemised below.

- ⇒ Theory workshop online: **\$295**
- ⇒ Practical group course (2-days): **\$595**
- ⇒ Assessment day (group): **\$95** or private assessment: **\$250**

Purchase of vest (if wanted): \$85 Purchase of bandana (if wanted): \$45

Pre-assessment of temperament and training: \$195 (note – optional)

Skills training intensive (1-day): \$245 (note – optional)

TOTAL: \$985 - \$1140

Note that your dogs MUST be identified by a bandana or vest while working. If you do not get one through us then you must explore getting your own.

What is required of you?

Our expectations of our teams are quite high.

This includes **commitment**. It's a huge undertaking deciding to become a therapy dog handler team. It's a lot of time involved in training, but also a huge responsibility to ensure your dog is safe as well as the members of the public you interact with. If you're introducing them to an organisation, you also have organisational responsibilities to ensure it doesn't impact negatively upon others.

Patience! It won't happen straight away and there may be delays in the process as we go along.

Professionalism. We expect our teams to represent the therapy dog vest well and to ensure high standards at all times. If there are any concerns regarding your dog's behaviour, we expect that you let us know immediately.

Kindness. We insist that the dogs are treated ethically and kindly. We won't tolerate force-based approaches or pushing dogs to work when they aren't up to it. It is ok for your dog to



say no some days and that's the reality of working with a living, breathing, sentient animal. We need our teams to know that if it is discovered that any force-based tools are used on your dog then you will immediately be removed from our program. This includes slip leads, correction chains, prong collars, shock collars, squirt bottles, compression cans etc.

Availability. If we need to schedule a follow-up reassessment, we hope that you're available to ensure you're still working well as a team and no concerns have arisen.

Understanding. We may withdraw your dog as a current therapy dog team if we have any complaints from the public or you do not pass your reassessment at any stage. We do not do this lightly and only do it for the safety of your dog, the public and the welfare of all concerned too. We will ask that you do not wear our logo any further in working your dog and will not provide an updated certificate of currency as a team or ID card.

What does the assessment involve?

The assessment is based on recommendations of Therapy Dogs International. It includes assessment of training such as sit, down, stay, mat, staying with a stranger, response to novel stimuli and touch, recalls, leave it and so much more. It's also assessed in set-ups to mimic real life therapy settings. It also includes assessing your dog's behaviour in their workplace briefly too. We also expect a follow-up assessment every 12 months. Prior to assessment we require a vet clearance too that your dog is safe to work with the general public and has no health concerns that would deem them working unsafe or unethical. After you have completed your initial assessment you will receive a vest that is yours to keep. Please allow 4-6 weeks for these to arrive to you.

Every 12 months we like to see a vet report for any dogs aged over 10 years. For those under 10 years a vet assessment is needed every 3 years however annual health checks and up to date vaccination are required.

Can you fail?

We want to prevent you signing up to our training and not being successful. We try to avoid this as much as possible through doing our pre-suitability assessment. This assessment enables us to give you feedback on whether you aren't ready just yet for training, or that your dog is unlikely to be suitable for therapy dog work.



One of the key reasons you might not be successful at completing training is that your dog is not suitable for therapy dog work (either right now or perhaps at all). If we feel it's just that they're not ready quite yet and may need some more socialisation to particular environments for example, we can help give you a plan for how to work on this. If we feel they aren't going to be suitable at all (e.g. head shy, handling sensitivity, shows aggression in any way, tries to avoid all interactions) we will unfortunately suggest that this pathway for your dog might not be suitable.

The other key reason you may not be successful is that your dog requires more training. If this is the case we can refer you to a trainer to work on the areas needing addressing and you can attend another assessment day with us when you feel you're ready.

Conditions:

- ✓ All teams must have completed an application form and a pre-suitability assessment prior to undertaking any training.
- ✓ All teams must have completed practical training.
- ✓ All teams must have successfully completed the assessment.
- ✓ All teams must have completed the theory workshop.
- ✓ All teams must also complete the terms and conditions form and have signed and dated it prior to the suitability assessment also.

Do I need to do a therapy course to do therapy dog work?

The short answer is no.

The therapy dog space, just like the dog training space, is entirely unregulated. It is up to those allowing you on-site with your dog whether they will or not. Unlike assistance dogs which are protected under law that they are provided public access, therapy dogs are not. There is no legislation to say that therapy dogs must be assessed under any particular criteria to undertake work or access public spaces.

You may have an employer or an organisation you wish to visit asking that you achieve a therapy dog 'accreditation'. This is vague as there technically is no real such thing. You could get a trainer to do a temperament assessment or you could attend a week-long course in therapy dog training and handling or anything in-between that the could be called an 'accreditation'. Many insurers now are asking for some level of training or accreditation



process. All of my teams so far have had no issues getting their dogs covered under their insurance after completing my training. If you wish to do visitation programs you may wish to volunteer with an organisation such as Delta and be tested by them instead. You do not need to complete this training to do that. You may want to attend an organisation that you have set an arrangement up with yourself or you may wish to sell a program that includes your dog to other organisations but you want to show that you've completed some level of training and assessment first. In these cases, our program would be suitable.

If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to reach out and ask. We can be contacted via our website contact form, email at info@lauramundydogtraining.com.au or via any of our socials.