

## 4-H PetPALS FAQs

### 1. What is 4-H PetPALS?

4-H PetPALS (People and Animals Linking Successfully) began as an intergenerational 4-H project connecting youth and their pets with senior adults in various types of healthcare facilities through animal-assisted activities visits. The core curriculum relies on trained adult volunteers, called Master 4-H PetPALS Volunteer leaders, who teach youth skills needed to interact with residents of healthcare facilities, specifically assisted living and skilled nursing environments. 4-H members learn to select, socialize, and train appropriate pets to participate in animal-assisted activities as youth-pet teams. Young people also learn about the physical changes associated with aging, as well as medical conditions they may encounter while visiting, by engaging in sensitivity simulation activities. 4-H'ers apply everything they learn to expand their capacities to develop leadership and citizenship skills in an intergenerational environment.

### 2. Do 4-H PetPALS only visit senior adults?

Initially, the 4-H PetPALS project was designed for youth to only visit senior adults in various types of healthcare facilities. Because of its popularity and success, and the diversified interests of Master 4-H PetPALS Volunteer Leaders and youth, 4-H PetPALS visit schools, hospitals, hospices, 4-H and other camps, stress-reduction events, at-risk youth, reading/literacy programs, and other venues appropriate for their visits. 4-H PetPALS follow each respective facility's protocols for animal-assisted activities.

### 3. What training do 4-H members and their pets have prior to visiting?

Master 4-H PetPALS volunteer leaders conduct a minimum 10 hours of experiential learning (equating to 10 training classes or meetings) to teach members the skills needed for socializing and training their pets, and learning the procedures and protocols of visiting various populations. After one or two initial classes with only 4-H'ers, pets become a part of their meetings. All dogs must have passed their American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test, and be retested every-other-year to visit. Other animals must have passed a Socialized 4-H PetPALS test, which is very similar to the CGC test, and be retested yearly. Animals must be people-oriented, predictable, and inspire confidence in those whom the 4-H PetPALS teams visit.

### 4. Are these pets certified as therapy animals?

No, they are not certified. They have completed the training, passed either the CGC or SPP test, and have been deemed appropriate for visiting. Some facilities allow only animals that have been certified by existing "pet therapy" organizations such as Pet Partners®, Therapy Dogs International®, etc. Organizations like Pet Partners and TDI have a membership fee and offer a secondary insurance policy. As a part of Ohio State University, we are unable to do that. The American Kennel Club does recognize youth with 4-H PetPALS dogs for their Therapy Dog Titles. However, most facilities welcome 4-H PetPALS teams.



#### **4. What are the benefits of 4-H PetPALS animal-assisted activities visits?**

The benefits of 4-H PetPALS visits markedly outweigh any associated potential risks. Selected benefits include:

1. Lower blood pressure
2. Decrease stress
3. Reduce loneliness
4. Increase feelings of comfort, happiness, security and self-worth
5. Ease times of adversity or stressful transitions
6. Contribute to a general sense of well-being
7. Provide opportunities to nurture
8. Facilitate exercise
9. Facilitate relaxation
10. Offer compassion
11. Facilitate temporary escape from adversity, stress, trauma
12. Provide non-judgmental affection
13. Facilitate healthful activities
14. Icebreaker for interaction with youth
15. Brighten someone's day

#### **5. What associated potential risks are involved with youth and pets visiting people?**

As with anything involving contact with animals, there is an associated potential risk. There is also an associated potential risk to the animals who visit with their humans. Strategies put in place to reduce the potentials risks include:

1. Establishing a year-round wellness program for pets with a veterinarian that includes required vaccinations, and staff indicating if a resident/camper, etc. has a potentially zoonotic disease;
2. Socializing and familiarizing the animal to the scenarios that parallel what a 4-H PetPALS team might encounter while visiting;
3. Keeping the animal on a leash or contained in such a manner that it does not get loose in the facility;
4. Maintaining a high-quality diet for pets, as well as initiating proper exercise to help reduce stress;
5. Establishing an area where pets can be taken to relax between room-to-room visits and group visits;
6. Getting the animal used to potential reactions by residents, youth, or others, such as clumsy and aggressive petting, angry yelling, poking, and grabbing the animal anywhere on its body. Every effort is made by the 4-H member to make sure the animal is not exposed to these behaviors.

#### **6. Have there been any incidents reported as a result of 4-H PetPALS visits?**

Ohio State University Extension and 4-H Youth Development have not received notification of any incidents occurring while 4-H members and their pets are conducting 4-H PetPALS visits, as of April 1, 2023. Visits have taken place since 2002.

#### **7. Who do I contact if I have questions?**

Contact Renee Clark, Ohio State University Extension, Ohio State 4-H Dog Program Coordinator, [clark.471@osu.edu](mailto:clark.471@osu.edu) or 330-339-2337.

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