

	SAN MARCOS POLICE DEPARTMENT	
	Policy 7.20 Therapy Dog Program	
	Effective Date: May 3, 2019	Replaces:
	Approved:	
	 _____ Chief of Police	
Reference:		

I. POLICY

It is the policy of this therapy dog program to serve those who are in need of comfort and a sense of well-being, victims and some witnesses of criminal incidents and those who have endured emotional tragedy. The program will attempt to maintain reasonable availability for anyone who either seeks its assistance or who is otherwise identified as having a need for it. Additionally, the program may be used to encourage and cultivate positive relationships with the public through attendance at community events.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI): Goal oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness.
- B. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT): Overseen by a health and human service (QMHP), is planned and goal-directed and is documented.
- C. Animal Assisted Education (AAE): Directed by a general education or special education professional. Focus is on academic goals, prosocial skills and cognitive functioning with student progress being both measured and documented.
- D. Animal Assisted Activities (AAA): Provide opportunities for motivational, educational and/or recreational benefits to enhance quality of life.
- E. Therapy Dog: A therapy dog is a dog that might be trained to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, hospices, disaster areas, and to people with autism. Therapy dogs are usually not assistance or service dogs, but can be one or both with some organizations.
- F. Therapy Dog Handler: A person who has received training with the dog to provide animal assisted interactions. This person is responsible for the handling and care of the therapy dog during interactions with the public or at its residence.
- G. Scheib Center/Hill Country Mental Health Developmentally Disabled (MHDD): An out-patient clinic in San Marcos providing Hays and Blanco Counties with mental health services including intellectual developmental disability, substance abuse and early childhood intervention services. It is operated by Hill Country MHDD, houses the Hays and Blanco County MCOT team and is the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) for Hays County.
- H. Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT): A team employed by Hill Country MHDD, staffed by qualified clinicians that provides screening to individuals experiencing a Mental Health

Crisis.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Therapy Dog Selection

1. Criteria for prospective therapy animals:
 - a. Be at least 1 year old at the time of evaluation.
 - b. Must be house trained.
 - c. Must be properly groomed and bathed.
 - d. Must be current on required vaccinations and have an annual Vet exam.
 - e. Have no history of aggression or seriously injuring either people or other animals.
 - f. Must be able to demonstrate good basic obedience skills, such as walking on a loose leash, and responding reliably to common commands such as:
 - i. Sit.
 - ii. Down.
 - iii. Stay.
 - iv. Come.
 - v. Leave it.
2. Be able to welcome, not just tolerate, interactions with strangers to include tolerating being hugged by children and adults.
3. Is calm around new odors, noises and environments.
4. Must be able to remain calm and focus on its handler when other animals are around.
5. The dog may be acquired from a breeder, shelter, or other reputable resource.
6. In the event that a dog does not complete or pass the required training, a selected handler will have the option to purchase the dog, the dog may be adopted by an approved department member, or it may be adopted by an approved suitable family in the community. The dog's current handler will be the determining factor as to what happens to the therapy dog.

B. Handler

1. Criteria for Prospective Handlers
 - a. Be able to read their animal's particular body language and recognize when their animal is stressed, anxious, concerned, overstimulated or fatigued.
 - b. Be able to demonstrate positive interactions with their animal by praising, cueing, encouraging and reassuring the animal as needed.
 - c. Be able to cue or redirect their animal without raising their voice, forcefully jerking on the leash or offering the animal food or toys.
 - d. Be able to make casual conversation with those they interact with while still being attentive to their animal.
 - e. Advocate for the safety and well-being of their animal at all times.

- f. Must attend and complete successfully the Canine Good Citizen certification with their therapy dog.
- g. Must take and complete a Handler Course either in person or on line.
- h. Must take and complete successfully the Pet Therapy Class – Level 1 or a similar pet therapy class.

C. Handler Selection

1. Handler selection will be determined through the chief of police or current division commander that is requesting a therapy dog to be assigned to that division.
2. The prospective handler's residence must be capable of housing and caring for the therapy dog. In the event the prospective handler does not own the property, the handler shall receive written permission from the property owner or management to house the therapy dog.

D. Therapy Dog Uses

1. The handler's primary job function shall take priority.
2. The handler will determine when the therapy dog will be utilized.
3. The Therapy Dog Program can be utilized in activities to include but not be limited to the following:
 - a. Work alongside clinicians at the Scheib Clinic or MCOT to assist in rapport with clients.
 - b. Home visits and proactive follow ups to bridge socialization and communication between citizens and Law Enforcement/Mental Health Officers.
 - c. Calls for service as needed, such as those involving children or with known Mental Health Clients that are in crisis, if deemed safe by the handler.
 - d. Assist the criminal investigation division as requested.
 - e. Assist victim services as requested.
 - f. During and after critical incidents to help boost morale and relieve stress among the employees of the police department and other city departments.
 - g. School demonstrations.
 - h. Reading programs for the schools and library.
 - i. Community events.

E. Incidents

1. The handler is responsible for reporting any incidents, caused by the therapy dog, involving injury or property damage to their direct supervisor.
2. In the event that a person is injured by the therapy dog the handler shall:
 - a. Ensure that proper medical treatment is administered to the person as soon as practical.
 - b. Photograph the injured person and their injuries.
 - c. The handler will notify the supervisor on duty.
 - d. Ensure all required dog bite reporting requirements are met.

F. Vehicles

1. The handler has the option of transporting the therapy dog in their assigned vehicle while on duty or their personally owned vehicle (POV) while off duty.
2. The handler's assigned city vehicle may be equipped with a kennel for transport. If the city vehicle is not equipped with a kennel then the following will occur:
 - a. When the handler is assigned to a call:
 - i. The dog will remain in the back seat of the vehicle during the call.
 - ii. If the handler has to make a short transport to CTMC ER, Austin Oaks, Laurel Ridge, they will place the dog in the front seat secured by a safety harness, if deemed appropriate by the handler.
 - iii. If a long transport is needed for example to the CSU Kerrville, the handler will transport the dog to the PD where it will be kenneled in a predesignated location during that time, or the handler's residence.
 - b. When the handler is not assigned to a call:
 - i. The dog will ride in the back passenger area with the seats folded down, or in approved kennel.
 - ii. The dog will be with the handler at their side, or in approved kennel, when at the PD, off-site primary work location, clinic, CTMC ER during meetings or while completing paperwork.
 - iii. If the city vehicle is equipped with a kennel, then the handler has the option to transport subjects while transporting the therapy dog, while it is properly secured in a kennel, if they deem it safe for the therapy dog and subject. The handler can request another unit to transport the subject if they deem it unsafe to do so themselves.
3. The handler's assigned city vehicle used to transport the therapy dog shall also be equipped with a working heat sensor that shall be utilized while performing normal job duties. The sensor should be designed to alert the handler in the event the vehicle interior temperature increases. The therapy dog is not to be unsupervised in a vehicle that is not equipped with a working heat sensor.

G. Care of Therapy Dog

1. The handler will be responsible for the care of the therapy dog to include but limited to the following:
 - a. Feeding and watering.
 - b. Scheduling annual wellness appointments at the vet.
 - c. Grooming.
 - d. Any other normal daily care the therapy dog may need
2. During the tenure of the dog being assigned to the program the San Marcos Police Department will be responsible for any financial needs of the therapy dog to include but limited to the following:
 - a. Food.
 - b. Vet care (The handler will determine the veterinarian to be used).
 - c. Equipment.

3. The therapy dog can be kenneled in a designated area of the police department or primary off-site work location when the handler deems it necessary for other job duties.
4. The handler will obtain approval for a designated area that the therapy dog will be kenneled in the police department or off-site work location.
5. If the therapy dog will be kenneled in the designated area of the police department or off-site work location longer than normal, only a designated employee, will be allowed to break the therapy dog unless exigent circumstances exist. The handler will designate employees, in advance, for contingency.