WELCOME TO BRIGHT SPOT THERAPY DOGS

Our Mission:

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to placing well-trained certified therapy dog teams in meaningful programs that provide comfort and caring through the human-canine bond. Our special volunteers serve in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, nursing homes, hospice care, schools, libraries and other facilities where therapy dogs are needed.

This Handbook serves as a reference to the policies and procedures that govern the organization. To remain certified through Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc., certification must be renewed annually in June.
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Cynthia Hinckley, founder of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc., has had dogs in her life since childhood. She learned early on that dogs are an important part of our lives and are very special companions.

Ms. Hinckley has worked in the field of education since 1969 and has been working with therapy dogs since 1992. She has evaluated and mentored hundreds of therapy dog teams throughout New England. Seven of her own dogs have been therapy dogs and together they have made over 30,000 visits to patients in psychiatric facilities, hospitals, nursing homes, Alzheimer’s units, on hospice care, and have worked in special reading programs for elementary school age children. Hinckley has witnessed over and over again the magical connection between humans and canines.

In August 2004, Hinckley founded Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. with the hope of involving more people in this meaningful work. Today, Bright Spot stands as the premier Therapy Dog organization in the state of Massachusetts with an active volunteer force of 140 Therapy Dog Teams making an estimated 1,500 visits a week, 6,000 visits a month, resulting in 72,000 people of all ages being touched by gentle, loving Bright Spot Therapy Dogs each year.

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. has grown significantly over the years due to the hard work of our Board of Directors and our dedicated volunteers. Support from a growing number of donors, foundations, and sponsors has enabled Bright Spot to develop and implement special programs that provide comfort and caring through the human-canine bond in both healthcare and educational settings.
DISTINCTION BETWEEN THERAPY AND SERVICE DOGS

Therapy dogs are dogs who go with their owners to volunteer in settings such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes.

From working with a child who is learning to read to visiting a senior in assisted living, therapy dogs and their owners work together as a team to improve the lives of other people.

Therapy dogs are not service dogs. Service dogs are dogs that are specially trained to perform specific tasks to help a person who has a disability. An example of a service dog is a dog who guides an owner who is blind, or a dog who assists someone who has a physical disability. Service dogs stay with their person and have special access privileges in public places such as on planes, restaurants, etc. Therapy dogs do not have the same special access as service dogs.

It is unethical to attempt to pass off a therapy dog as a service dog for purposes such as flying on a plane or being admitted to a restaurant.

-From the American Kennel Club "What is a Therapy Dog"
QUALIFICATIONS OF A BRIGHT SPOT THERAPY DOG

Successful therapy dogs excel in temperament and manners. They need to know more than the basic commands of sit, stay, heel, and come. They require additional socialization to work despite constant distractions. They must appear receptive, confident, and steady in settings where most dogs never venture. A successful Therapy Dog must enjoy visiting.

A Therapy Dog must be clean, well groomed, and free of parasites at all times. Above all, a successful therapy dog must be non-aggressive, controllable, and predictable at all times.

Therapy Dogs must be at least one year of age. We require that a rescue dog live with you at least one full year prior to applying for certification with Bright Spot.

There can be times when a dog’s temperament changes and he/she no longer possesses the qualities necessary to perform Therapy Dog work. If you sense this has happened, please contact us.
EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF A BRIGHT SPOT VOLUNTEER

Bright Spot is looking for dedicated volunteers willing to participate in a program at least once every-other-week, if possible. The facility or program is counting on you to come at an agreed upon time. Volunteers are expected to contact their program director if they are unable to fulfill their commitment on a particular day.

Volunteers must keep their certification active in order to continue participating in a Bright Spot Therapy Dog program. Certification is renewed annually in June.

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining a file containing:

- Bright Spot Certificate of Certification
- proof of Bright Spot volunteer liability insurance coverage
- Bright Spot Veterinary Health form
- rabies certificate
- Bright Spot Location(s) of Volunteer Visit(s) form

The program you participate in may ask you for this information. Although we maintain complete files on all our volunteers, it is your responsibility to provide this information to the program director, if requested.

When visiting as a Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team, your dog must wear the Bright Spot Therapy Dog vest and your team is required to wear your official Bright Spot identification badges on all visits. In addition, when participating in a group Bright Spot Therapy Dog event, the handler must wear the Bright Spot t-shirt or other “Bright Spot” blue garment embroidered or screened with our Bright Spot logo. Volunteers must follow the rules and expectations set forth by the facilities, and must also be respectful of other handlers and dogs.

Only the certified Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team is allowed to visit. No non-certified friend or family member may accompany the Team while visiting.

Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and able to provide their own transportation to and from a facility.
BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

Today, most facilities and programs require that visiting dogs be certified by a therapy dog organization approved by the American Kennel Club.

Certification with Bright Spot offers:

- **Certificate of Certification.** Your Certificate states that you and your dog have been trained, evaluated, and certified as a Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team. *Certification must be renewed annually.*

- **Volunteer liability insurance.** Insurance is renewed annually as part of certification renewal.

- **Official Bright Spot ID badges for you and your dog.** Wearing your badges shows people that you are an official therapy dog team. Your badges are dated and must be worn at all times while visiting.

- **Official Bright Spot vest for your dog.** Your dog must wear the vest at all times while visiting.

- **Bright Spot T-Shirt.** Wear your t-shirt whenever and wherever you like. Spread the word about Bright Spot. Your t-shirt must be worn when participating in a group Bright Spot event, such as our Therapy Dog stress-relief events on college campuses and our monthly group visit at the Soldiers Home in Holyoke.

- **Bright Spot Monthly Member E-Newsletter.** The e-newsletter welcomes new members and highlights special visiting opportunities, member events, news about our teams “on the job,” and community outreach events.

- **Bright Spot News.** This is our annual print publication. It is published in February and highlights the meaningful work carried out by our dedicated Therapy Dog Teams over the past year.

FEES:

- *New Membership (first year) - $45 – includes vest, t-shirt, ID badges, certificate of certification, and liability insurance
- Annual Renewal - $25 per person (regardless of number of dogs)

Replacement Costs:

- Vest - $45
- T-Shirt - $15
- Badge - $5/per badge

*Actual cost to Bright Spot - $70. We are grateful to our sponsors, donors, and foundations that help to defray our membership costs. For additional or replacement membership items, contact Patti Tibbetts at pattibbetts@comcast.net*
CERTIFICATION RENEWAL

A Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team must renew its certification annually to remain on the membership list and continue active involvement as a certified therapy dog team. The fee for renewal is $25.00.

June is renewal month. At this time, all members are sent a renewal notice along with the following forms to be completed: Veterinary Health form and Location(s) of Volunteer Visits form. These forms must be filled out and returned along with a copy of your dog’s current rabies certificate and the $25.00 renewal fee.

When Bright Spot has received your renewal materials, you will be issued your Bright Spot renewal certificate, proof of volunteer liability insurance, and dated renewal stickers to place over the current date on your ID badges.
VISITING OPPORTUNITIES

Bright Spot certified Therapy Dog Teams visit anywhere therapy dogs can be of help to others. We make volunteer visits to:

- hospitals
- specialized children’s programs
- libraries
- schools
- Bright Spot Reading Buddy Programs
- college campus stress-relief events
- mental health facilities
- nursing homes
- rehabilitation facilities
- senior centers
- hospice
- more

As a Bright Spot volunteer, you will receive online access to our official list of Visiting Opportunities that includes a variety of programs and populations. We ask that you look through the list and choose from one (or more) of the facilities listed. These places are eagerly waiting for our Bright Spot Teams to visit. On the far right column of the list, you will find the names of volunteers who are visiting a particular facility. Many places have no one visiting. If possible, please choose one of these facilities.

We often add new opportunities to our list as requests for Therapy Dogs come in. Please visit www.bright-spot.org/members frequently to check on additions to our online list.

You may decide that you and your dog need a change in the type of visiting you are currently doing, or that you would like to add an additional facility to your visiting routine. You can do this at anytime by updating your Location(s) of Volunteer Visits form. Please download the form from www.bright-spot.org/members and mail it in to us.

Please contact us if you have any questions.

Contact: Patti Tibbetts, Membership Coordinator at: pattibbetts@comcast.net
BRIGHT SPOT READING BUDDY PROGRAM

Reading is the key to knowledge and success in school. When children learn to enjoy reading at a young age, they have a lifetime to explore the world of books and academic adventures.

The Bright Spot Reading Buddy Program is all-inclusive. It is designed to help readers on all levels. All students benefit from reading aloud to practice their fluency and further strengthen their confidence in reading. Children read one-on-one to their canine Reading Buddy. The Reading Buddy provides a gentle, non-threatening, comforting listener. School situations will vary in the way they set up the Reading Buddy Program, but in any case, the dog serves to build a child’s confidence and self-esteem.

Dogs participating in our school Reading Buddy Program must enjoy interacting with children and be capable of sitting or lying down for the duration of the reading period. In addition, participants must be available to volunteer during regular school hours. If a volunteer has more than one dog certified as a Reading Buddy, only one dog can be used at a time.

A volunteer interested in participating in our Reading Buddy Program should contact Executive Director Cynthia Hinckley by email at cynthia@bright-spot.org to arrange an observation of a veteran team working one-on-one with several children. This observation will familiarize the volunteer with the running of a Reading Buddy session and help him/her decide if this type of work is right for his/her dog.
Students, exams, and therapy dogs make a great combination. College students across the country are enjoying the companionship and comfort of therapy dogs on campus during exams.

These are one-time group events. They are organized in collaboration between the college and Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. Participation in one of our Bright Spot Stress-Relief Events is by sign-up. The number of therapy dogs participating in a single event is determined by the needs and size of the event.

Many volunteers who find a regular visiting schedule challenging due to work or personal commitments, enjoy participating in these one-time, fun events with college students.

For details, and to place your name on the “college” list, please contact executive director Cynthia Hinckley at cynthia@bright-spot.org.

Volunteers participating in our therapy dog group events, either at colleges or other venues, must keep their dogs in heel position - by their side, not out at the end of the leash. A group event is not playtime for the dogs. They are there to do a job. Failure to do so often disrupts other dogs that are settled down and doing the job they are there to do.
THIRD-SATURDAY-OF-THE-MONTH GROUP VISITS TO THE SOLDIERS HOME

Every third Saturday of the month at 1:00 PM a group of about 15 Bright Spot Teams meet in the lobby of The Soldiers Home in Holyoke, MA to spend time visiting with the soldiers and their families.

The fun is contagious: the soldiers love the dogs, the dogs love the soldiers; the families love the dogs, and the dogs love the families; the staff gets involved, too, and spends time petting the dogs. The volunteers? Well, they keep coming back, month-after-month because watching their dogs make so many people happy brings a special feeling of joy that they don’t want to miss out on.

Soldiers Home Sign-up: If you would like to join this group and visit The Soldiers Home when you can, please email Bright Spot volunteer Dawn Kimball at doghouse06@yahoo.com to have your name added to the master Soldiers Home Email List.
INFORMATION FOR THE HANDLER

ATTENDANCE
Volunteers make visiting arrangements directly with the contact person at the facility. If you are unable to attend your regular scheduled visit, for any reason, please contact the point person at your facility directly.

ATTIRE
Volunteers are required to wear their Bright Spot ID badge while visiting. We recommend wearing light or layered clothing enabling you to adapt to the temperature of the facility. Please wear flat, closed-toed shoes for ease in maneuvering yourself and your dog through the facility. Fanny packs and/or clothing with pockets allow for hands-free visiting. Both hands are needed to work with your dog and hold his/her leash.

OBSERVERS
We ask that you do not bring friends or family members along during your visits. Your purpose in this program is to concentrate on the individuals you are visiting and the safety and control of your dog. Only the Bright Spot certified Therapy Dog Team is covered under our volunteer liability insurance.

CELL PHONES
As a courtesy to those you are visiting, please leave your cell phone turned off during visits.

PHOTOGRAPHS
You are not permitted to take photos during your visit unless you have been granted permission by the facility and a Bright Spot Permission to Release form is signed (available in our online member section). Please email the signed Permission to Release form, along with the photo(s), to Cynthia Hinckley, executive director, at cynthia@bright-spot.org.

FACILITY REQUIREMENTS
Many facilities have special requirements that teams must meet prior to the start of visits. CORI Checks, HIPPA Training and an introduction to facility regulations and procedures are often the case. You may need to work with the facility coordinator or administrator to satisfy their requirements.

HALLWAYS
When possible, have your dog walk between you and the wall. This avoids conflicts with wheelchairs, walkers, staff, and pedestrian or equipment traffic.

ELEVATORS
Before entering an elevator, ask the occupants if they mind having you and your dog sharing their elevator. Observe the body language of the occupants and decide whether anyone appears afraid of your dog. Err on the side of caution and wait for the next available elevator.
CONFIDENTIALITY
When visiting a facility, the information you receive about individuals is confidential. Please respect everyone’s privacy.

CONVERSATION
When conversing with individuals, refrain from discussing the person’s illness, religion, politics, your personal problems, and complaints about the hospital, facility, or staff. Please do not use sarcasm or adult humor. Some individuals are unable to understand what you are saying to them or they may think you are making fun of them if they do not “get it”. Be aware of cultural and generational differences that may affect word meaning and behavioral expectations.

MOVING PATIENTS
If visiting in a health care facility, never attempt to move or turn a patient, or assist a patient to get out of bed or chair. Always call staff.

HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT
If visiting in a health care facility, don’t tamper with hospital equipment (i.e. oxygen, IV’s, etc.) or loosen or remove a restraint on a patient.

SADNESS/STRESS
You will experience many moments of joy as you watch your dog bring comfort and companionship to those you visit. There may be times, though, that you experience feelings of sadness, stress, or frustration. Being placed in a strange situation with people you don’t know and dealing with patients who may have conditions with which you are unfamiliar can be somewhat unsettling. It is a normal reaction to have these feelings. If your visiting placement continues to feel uncomfortable to either you or your dog, perhaps a change in facility, population, or environment would be helpful. Please feel free to discuss your feelings with us.
INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOG

ILLNESS IN PARTICIPATING DOGS
Under no circumstances should a dog visit if he/she is ill, is on antibiotic treatment, or has an infectious disorder. This includes skin and ear infections, internal parasites and gastro-intestinal upsets of any kind. If an infectious disease is detected at any time, the handler must contact the point person at the facility immediately to cancel visits until treatment has been completed and approval to resume visitation has been given by the dog’s veterinarian. If your dog has or develops a medical condition (ex. seizures) that would affect his/her ability to do therapy visits, please contact us at info@bright-spot.org.

LEASH
Dogs must be on a regular 4-6 ft. leash at all times during visits and while on facility grounds. This will insure that your dog is under your control and the length of the leash will help avoid an individual tripping over the leash. No Flexi Leads or other type of leash should be used.

COLLAR
Dogs must be on well-fitting collars or harnesses. No pinch collars or head halters.

IDENTIFICATION/VEST
Dogs are required to wear their Bright Spot ID badges and vests while performing their volunteer duties.

PRE-VISIT EXERCISE
Please allow sufficient time to exercise your dog before the visit so that excess energy can be run off and “accidents” avoided. This should not be done on facility grounds. Be sure to pick up after your dog should an accident occur on facilities grounds.

DROOLERS
If your dog is a drooler, we recommend that you carry a towel with you while visiting.

CARE AND SAFETY OF YOUR DOG
Your first responsibility is the care and safety of your dog. The facility is a busy place. Be aware of the people and equipment around you. Keep your dog out of harm’s way. Keep a careful eye on your dog’s tail and feet. They can easily be run over by wheelchairs, walkers, gurneys, medicine carts, and other equipment.

STRESS
Visiting can be a stressful activity for a dog. If you notice signs of stress – yawning, shivering, whimpering – prepare to go home immediately, explaining that your dog has had enough for today. By all means, don’t overdo it. It is important that your dog enjoy the visits.

TREATS
If your dog responds well to treats, bring some with you in your pocket. Patients often enjoy giving a treat to your dog. Use your judgment wisely. Be certain your dog has a “soft” mouth when taking the treat from the patient’s flat hand.
WORKING WITH CHILDREN
Please remember at all times that children can be unpredictable. As sure of your dog as you may be, you never want to take chances with children. Always stay between your dog and a child. Never take your eyes off the situation. NEVER.

VISITING WITH STAFF
Be sure to extend visiting time to staff members, as well. Therapy dog visits are beneficial to all.
HELPFUL HINTS FOR VISITING

Always approach an individual you do not know slowly and head-on. Elderly people often have little or no peripheral vision. Never surprise them. Some people are frightened by dogs.

Never assume that a person new to you wants to pet your dog. Always ask first, “Would you like to visit with my dog?”

Always introduce yourself and your dog, and tell the individual a little about the dog. Try to promote conversation by asking the person if they ever had a dog.

People who may not be able to move their arms to pet your dog may still have the sense of touch and want to feel the fur. Be sure to move your dog in such a way to make this possible.

Try, as much as possible, to be on the same eye level as the person you are visiting. Sit down or kneel when visiting someone in a wheelchair. Lift your dog, if possible – this way the individual will not have to strain to see your face or talk to you, and will be able to reach your dog.

Avoid hugging people or making condescending touches such as pats on the head.

Watch out for open wounds or potentially sensitive areas.

Be aware of the person’s “personal space” by being sensitive to body language.

Avoid neglecting people who may be of little personal interest to you or, likewise, the person who shows indifference towards you. Also, just because someone may not want to visit with you and your dog on one visit, doesn’t mean they never will. It may take many efforts to bring a reaction, but persistence often pays off and these can be the most rewarding of all responses.

Never talk over a person as if he/she were not there.

Be aware of how you are communicating your reactions through your expression and body language.

Be prepared for an emotional response. Tears, or even anger, from a previously unresponsive person can be as beneficial as smiles or laughter.

Don’t bring another dog with you to visit. Visit only with the dog that has been certified by Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.

Remember – not everyone likes dogs or feels they should be visiting in a facility. It is important to respect their feelings and keep your distance.
THE AGING THERAPY DOG

It is very important to know when it is time for your dog to retire from volunteer service. As much as therapy dog visiting is meaningful and rewarding work, it is demanding and tiring for both members of the team. This can be particularly hard on a senior dog who has arthritis or other age-related ailments. If your dog starts showing signs of being unhappy or uncomfortable during visits, or loses the ability to remain engaged while visiting, perhaps the time has come to stop. Before stopping completely, try shortening your visiting time to see if that makes a difference.

If you are uncertain of what to do in this regard, please feel free to contact us. Many of us have been through this experience.

Contact: info@bright-spot.org.
DECEASED AND RETIRED BRIGHT SPOTS

This is a very difficult topic for all of us. Our beloved dogs are members of our family and bring us great joy and comfort in the time they are with us.

We wish to honor the memory of our Bright Spots who have brought immense happiness to countless numbers of folks they have visited through the years. We maintain the practice of placing a red rose on the photo of each Bright Spot dog on our web site who has passed on. In addition, we place a pink rose on the photo of each Bright Spot dog who has retired.

We respect your need for time in mourning the loss of your beloved canine family member. When you are able to do so, please let us know so we may honor the memory of your Bright Spot in this way. The same is true for those whose dog has retired.

If you prefer, for any reason, that your dog’s photo not remain up on our Bright Spot web site, please let us know this, as well.

Contact: info@bright-spot.org.
The American Kennel Club acknowledges the meaningful work performed by therapy dogs by offering the AKC Therapy Dog Title to dogs who fulfill specific requirements to earn this special title. The THD Title is open to all dogs (purebred or mixed breed) that are registered or listed with the AKC.

To earn the AKC Therapy Dog title, you and your dog must meet specific criteria. To learn all about the AKC Therapy Dog title program, click on the link taking you to the official AKC website: http://www.akc.org/akctherapydog/earn_title.cfm.
STATEMENT OF ADHERENCE TO POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Strict and careful adherence to the policies and regulations written in the Bright Spot Therapy Dogs Handbook is mandatory.

Bright Spot is proud of the reputation it has built throughout our local communities, the state of Massachusetts, and neighboring New England states. We rely on our dedicated volunteers to carry on our reputation of excellence.

As a registered member of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc., it is understood that the member has read the Bright Spot Handbook and will adhere to the policies and procedures stated herein when out visiting as a Bright Spot Therapy Dog Team. Failure to do so may result in revocation of Bright Spot certification and membership.
MAKE A DONATION

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. is a registered non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation. Volunteers provide all services offered by Bright Spot. We, therefore, rely on grants from foundations and gifts from donors who believe in the power of the human-canine bond and support the special programs offered by our Bright Spot Therapy Dog Teams. Your donation is greatly appreciated and is tax deductible.

Your gift will help fund our:

- training programs for new volunteers
- special programs in schools and other types of facilities, both health care and educational
- Bright Spot dog vests
- Bright Spot ID badges
- volunteer t-shirts
- annual print publication
- communications throughout the year

If you, or someone you know, would like to make a donation to help support the meaningful work performed by our therapy dog teams, please contact:

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413-320-7723

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