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# How to Join V.I.Paws

## V.I.Paws Program Mission

The V.I.Paws mission is to positively impact people and improve human health through animal assisted activities. Trained handler and animal teams volunteer in the community with casual visits and goal oriented interactions to promote improvement in someone's physical, mental, emotional, social or cognitive functioning. Teams achieve this by expanding public awareness of the positive effects animals can have on human health, removing obstacles that prevent animal involvement in everyday life and expand the therapeutic role of animals in human health, development and education.

## History of V.I.Paws

Monroe County Humane Association is not an animal shelter but a direct provider for low-cost veterinary services, animal care resources, humane education and a leading animal welfare advocate for our community. V.I.Paws is an extension of MCHA's mission to share the support and success of the human-animal bond and share animal related activities in the community. V.I.Paws is a specialized group of volunteer handler and animal teams providing animal assisted services to the Monroe County area and surrounding communities.

## Animal and Handler Team Requirements

Volunteering for animal assisted activities can be challenging but very rewarding work that requires a specific personality. Individuals that enjoy the company of others, enjoy helping others smile, are empathetic but not too sensitive and want to volunteer in the community make a wonderful candidate for a registered V.I.Paws team. The companion dog or cat must be well mannered, overly tolerant but most importantly, the animal must genuinely seek out and enjoy human companionship.

## Program Benefits

- Weekly therapy prep classes to polish animal's skills
- Insurance coverage while on VIPaws volunteer visits
- One free vet exam per year
- Three free prep classes per year
- Camaraderie amongst like-minded teams
- Private Facebook Group (info, events, tips & demos)
- Therapy Vest customizable with your animal name
- Name Tags
- MCHA volunteer opportunities and support

## Step 1. V.I.Paws Handler Training (\$30)

If you and your pet meet all of the team requirements, email MCHA's Animal Programs Coordinator to sign up for V.I.Paws Handler Training. This 1.5 hour workshop is for handlers only. It prepares potential teams for team evaluation, team registration, volunteer work in the community, reviews team expectations and requirements of active V.I.Paws team members. Handlers who completed Handler Training may start participating in weekly prep classes (\$10 per class drop in).

## Step 2. V.I.Paws Team Evaluation (\$30)

Within 3-6 months of completing V.I.Paws Handler Training, potential V.I.Paws teams must complete V.I.Paws Team Evaluations. Teams are evaluated on all required skills without the use of training tools or treats. Teams with passing scores may complete V.I.Paws Team Registration, the final step to becoming a registered V.I.Paws Team.

## Step 3. V.I.Paws Team Registration (\$100)

V.I.Paws Team Registration includes paperwork and a background check. After team registration, teams become registered with Monroe County Humane Association's V.I.Paws Program, remain active for two years, and may start providing visits in the community.



# Requirements for Teams

## V.I.Paws Team Evaluation

V.I.Paws Team Evaluations are based on good manners, great social skills, teamwork, confident and considerate handling skills along with advanced level obedience skills for all canines. Cats are expected to be social, outgoing, tolerant with leash and harness handling, comfortable with being held and cuddled, along with being transported in a soft or hard carrier

## Program Contact

MCHA Animal Programs Coordinator, Sandra Groschwitz, 812.333.6242 ext 140, [sgroschwitz@monroehumane.org](mailto:sgroschwitz@monroehumane.org)

## Requirements for Canines and Felines

- At least one year old, healthy and well-groomed
- Vaccinated and free of infection, including fleas/parasites
- Attentive and responsive to handler
- Quiet and calm entering buildings
- Wait on leash or in carrier patiently and quietly
- Accept petting from a friendly stranger
- Tolerate collar or harness, vest or bandanna, and leash
- Accept stranger checking equipment
- Tolerate restraining hug or restraining hold
- Allow handling and grooming
- Take treats gentle
- Calm on short walk
- Accept a different person petting or holding
- No or very mild reaction to a neutral animal passing by
- Walking around a crowd of people (3 or more)
- Crowded and petted by several (3 or more) people at once
- Carried, held and passed to at least 3 or more people (small dogs and cats only)
- No or very mild reaction to visual distractions, which may include fast movements
- No or very mild reaction to auditory distractions, which may include loud sounds
- No or very mild reaction to being bumped or surprised, which may include clumsy petting
- Allow interactions with children or children being nearby
- Neutral with medical equipment, canes, walkers, elevators, slick surfaces

## Requirements for Handlers

- Must be at least 18 years old with valid driver's license
- Must show proof of responsible pet ownership by providing but not limited to proper veterinary care, grooming, humane handling of animal and training, including V.I.Paws Handler Training
- Must be friendly, social, reliable, trustworthy and have good verbal and written communication skills
- Must be attentive to animal while being considerate to others
- Must have a professional appearance, and knowledgeable of V.I.Paws team expectations

## Requirements for Canines Only

- Wait at doorways
- Sit and down on command
- Stay in place for 30 seconds or more with handler at other end of leash
- Come when called while attached to a 20ft leash
- Leave-it in someone's hand and leave-it as a dropped walk by
- Loose leash walk near handler with tight turns and accurate speeds
- Sit or settle for greeting and petting
- No jumping, no excessive licking
- Leash held by someone else with handler out of sight

