

Keeping Energized and Enthusiastic for Canine-Assisted Therapy Work

At PFH training's, the staff is always reminding people to watch for signs of burnout in their canines. Now, after some of our humans have been volunteering for more than a year, it is time for a few tips on keeping the two-legged teammates fresh. To contact our volunteer staff, email them at info@pawsforhealing.com.

Holiday Themes: Talk to the staff where you visit to see what kinds of holiday themes are used to brighten up and change the environment and think about how you might tie into that with costumes, stories or paper mementos (see next suggestion). If you're computer savvy, printing up simple stickers or cards with a holiday message or that displays your teammate.

Do you have a holiday-themed story about your companion that you can print up or read?

Look for special stories or articles that are tied to pets and the holidays. For example, a moving article about dogs who accompanied soldiers into battles from the First World War through Vietnam appeared in *Country Living*. Would your patients/clients enjoy seeing similar articles or hearing about them?

Vacation Themes: If you are going on vacation, why not bring a map or photograph of your destination. What is the history of the town or region you are visiting? While you don't have to give out personal information, you can be a "tour guide" and let others tag along vicariously. (And Fido can write a postcard if he is so inclined when the time comes.)

Brush Up Training: Perhaps you and Fifi would like to learn a few new behaviors but haven't taken the time for extra training. Shannon Coyner, PFH Dog Evaluator and Certified Pet Dog Trainer gives classes, consults and can recommend other classes. When you are with patients, ask them to "help" you reinforce what your companion (and you) are learning.

Dog Stories: There are a number of upbeat books and collected short pieces about the special things dogs (and all pets) do for us. Check your local library for *Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul*, for example, or *My Dog Skip* (Willie Morris), or *A Dogs' Life* (by Peter Mayle who write about the dog he found in Provence, France).

Consider reading some short passages or selections from these books to the folks you visit.

Visiting Other Sites: If you would like to accompany another seasoned volunteer or mentor who visits other sites or patient populations, contact PFH's chief mentor at info@pawsforhealing.org