

UW Health Kids: Seeks dogs to visit pediatric patients

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MADISON, Wis. – If you think your dog has what it takes to help patients, UW Health Kids is encouraging dog owners to apply for the newly launched Caring Canines program.

The program is for volunteers and their dogs to make bedside visits and provide a calming influence, cuddle time and a feeling of normalcy for patients and families during their stay at American Family Children's Hospital according to Katie Glass, child life education specialist, UW Health Kids.

"We are excited to launch this program and we need the community's help to get it off the ground," she said. "This program will allow us to expand our efforts to help patients and families cope with the stress and uncertainty of their time in the hospital."

This program is different from the Canine Health and Medical Pals (CHAMPs) facility dog program, where two specially trained dogs, work alongside staff 40 hours a week utilizing specific coping plans with patients in certain units in the hospital.

Caring Canines replaces UW Health's Pet Pals therapy program, which began in 1996, but ended during the pandemic. In that program, a group of volunteer dogs provided comfort and cuddles to patients in a group setting twice a week for a few hours. In the new program, the goal is to have daily visits in patient rooms.

Volunteers at American Family Children's Hospital must be at least 18 years of age, commit to at least one year of service and bring their dog to visit at least two times a month.

For dogs to participate they must be able to:

- Sit and lie down with only one command.
- Stay until you call him or her with only one command.
- Walk loosely on a leash and not pull, even when excited.
- Be friendly with other dogs.
- Be able to perform commands without treats as a reward.
- Not bark or whine too much.
- Be up to date on all vaccinations, including rabies.

Participating volunteer teams will need to successfully complete a four-step application process, which includes temperament testing prior to acceptance into the program.

To learn more and apply, please visit <https://uwhealth.org/caring-canines>.

Caring Canines is funded solely through philanthropic efforts.

A recorded interview with Glass is available. She is also available for interviews.