



Who Let The Dogs In?

Therapy Dogs In Schools





Welcome



- Why therapy dogs?
- Getting started in Mesa Public Schools
- Paws & Peers
- Connection with Arizona State University
- Q & A

"Until one has loved an animal,
a part of one's soul remains
unawakened."

—ANATOLE FRANCE



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Therapy Dogs in the USA



- ★ Hospital / Nursing home comfort
- ★ Crisis intervention
- ★ College destressor
- ★ Airport comfort
- ★ Courtroom companion

Canine companions in the courtroom

Will dogs in court soon become common practice?

February 3, 2022 by Tom Jarvis-NH Bar News



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March For Our Lives



"School safety is about more than fencing, cameras, bulletproof glass, and more security officers. Add mental and emotional health to the conversations."



Comfort dogs descend on Florida community after deadly school shooting

Some of the canines have also been to Vegas, Orlando and Sandy Hook.

By ENPOLI FRANCES, ERIC NOLL, and SAMHA PEZENIK

February 20, 2018, 5:03 PM • 4 min read



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Why Therapy Dogs?



Research shows positive interactions with a dog reduces **cortisol** levels (stress hormone). It lowers blood pressure, relaxes muscles, and regulates breathing (Beetz et al., 2012).

Canines specifically increase responses that trigger **oxytocin** (happiness, bonding, trust, love hormone; Beetz et al., 2012).





Getting Started



Ella Wallace and Elaine Miner founded Paws & Peers in 2019 with the goal of meeting these needs.

They began this journey by visiting New York City Public Schools (1.5 million students) to view their program in action. We selected 5 pilot schools at the time.



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Did you know?



 A 2019 survey of students in 9-12th grades showed that 40% of Arizona teenagers admitted to feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped participating in usual activities. (*Arizona Department of Health Services*)

 The number of people with anxiety, depression, loneliness and suicidal thoughts has skyrocketed since 2019. (*2021 report by Mental Health America*)

 According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is one of the top five leading causes of death for individuals between ages 10-44.

 Research studies indicate positive interactions with dogs increase oxytocin levels and feelings of well-being, and decrease blood pressure, cortisol levels, stress and anxiety.

 Universities, schools, airports, hospitals and nursing homes increasingly use therapy dogs to address the effects of trauma, boost mood, and decrease anxiety and stress.

 As of 2024, Paws & Peers is the largest school therapy dog program in the United States with over 90 dogs.

 Paws & Peers partners with North Shore Animal League America using *Mutt-i-grees*, an award-winning social and emotional learning curriculum written by Yale University, that incorporates humane education in lessons on resilience, empathy and self and social awareness.

 Mesa Public Schools partners with researchers from Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College to examine the use of Paws & Peers therapy dogs to promote social and emotional support for students and staff.



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Meet Nelly



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87 Paws & Peers Therapy Dogs
36 Rescue Dogs
85 Participating MPS Staff
50 Participating Sites





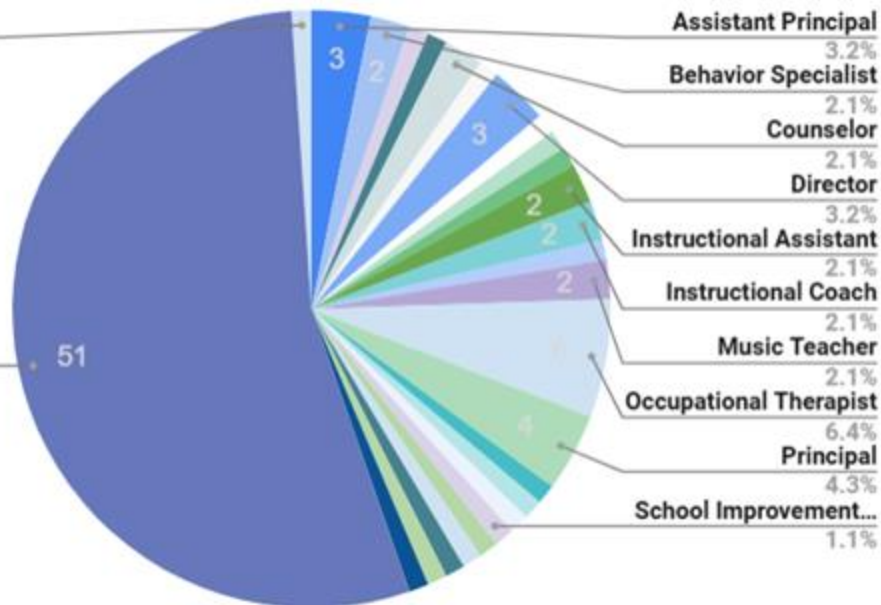
Participants



Therapy Dog Handlers

Title | Specialist
1.1%

Teacher
54.3%



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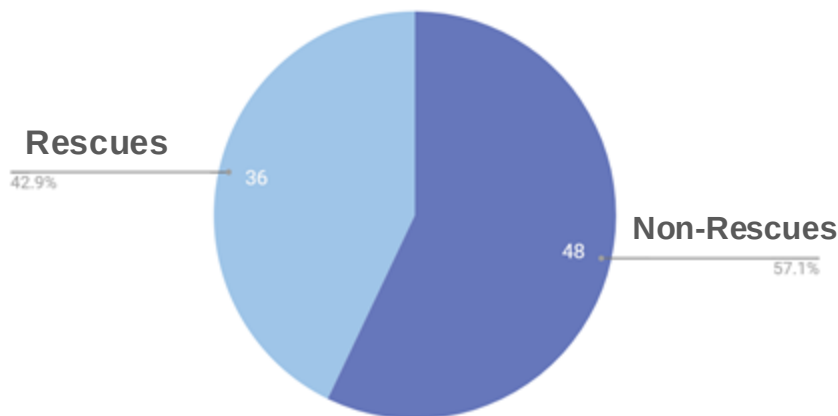


Our Dogs



Rescue Dogs

Paws & Peers



No Breed Restrictions

Chihuahuas

Boxers

Hounds

Golden/Lab Retrievers

Poodles

Bulldogs

Terriers

Pitbulls

Mixed



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What Classrooms?



Subjects Taught by Paws Participants

Administration

1.6%

ELP

1.6%

GUS Program

1.6%

Resource/SPED...

1.6%

Athletics/ Sport...

3.2%

French

3.2%

Science

3.2%

Music

6.3%

Gen Ed

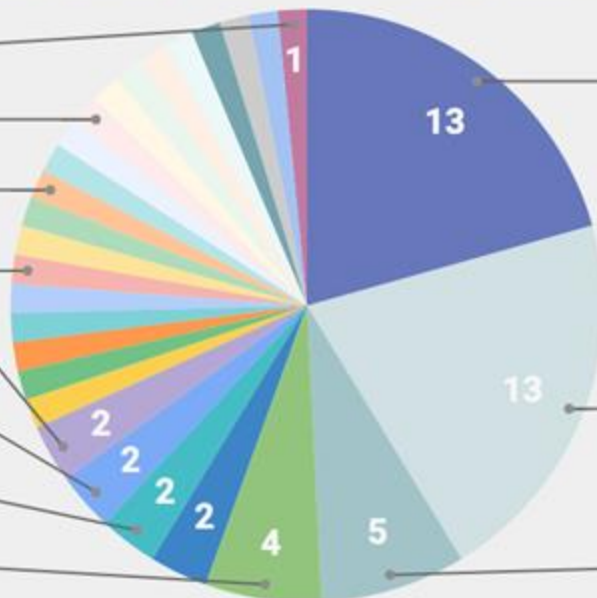
20.6%

Resource/SPED

20.6%

Math

7.9%



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Our Training



We partnered with **East Valley K9** trainers to create a tailored therapy training program. Angel Dogs ensures our dogs are prepared for classroom life.

The program consists of:

- ★ 6 weeks of Basic Obedience training
- ★ 8 weeks of Therapy Prep training
- ★ Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) final evaluation



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Assistance Animal Types



Service Dog

Specially trained to perform tasks that mitigate a handler's disability



Emotional Support Animal

Provides Support and emotional comfort to a handler with a mental illness



Therapy Dog

Trained to bring comfort and joy to those in a hospital, school or other group care environments



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Implementing on Campus



- Mutt-i-grees® curriculum
- Counselors: 1-1 or small group interventions
- Crisis situations
- Nurses office support
- Classroom visits
- School events
- Resource teachers: student IEP needs
- Walk campus



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Mutt-i-grees®



The Mutt-i-grees® curriculum, written by Yale University in partnership with North Shore Animal League America, bridges social and emotional learning and humane education and the plight of shelter dogs to develop confident, caring, connected kids.



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Supporting Shelters



Walk to Save Animals

We raised over \$210
for Arizona Animal Welfare League!



Shelter Donation

Interact Club visited Almost There Rescue & Arizona Animal Welfare League (AAWL) to donate their hand-made toys.



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Dogs in Teams



Therapy dog & handler



Smile Break

Educational leader

Leaders of teams, schools or systems



Community educators

Prepared members of the community



Professional educators

Pre-service, novice, experienced and specialist teachers



Paraeducator

Complement the work of professional educators



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Admin Testimony



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Goals & Early Childhood



- Companionship
- Petting, Motor skills
- Learning responsibility
- Reading practice
- Developing empathy
- Incentive and motivation
- Behavior
- Attendance



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Dogs in Education



- Social Emotional Learning
 - Student engagement & learning (Harris & Binfet, 2022)
 - Self-advocate & emotional awareness (Maricevic, 2022)
- Reading and Literacy
 - Increased confidence & comfort (Shaw, 2013)
 - Focus & engagement (Henderson et al., 2020)
 - Increased reading scores (Kirnan et al., 2016; Kirnan et al., 2018)





Positive Wellbeing



- ★ Community
- ★ Stress Relief
- ★ Happy/Emotional Wellbeing
- ★ Self-Efficacy
- ★ Self-Regulation/
Behavior De-escalation
- ★ Responsibility
- ★ Empathy/Compassion
(Farrand, 2025)



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Stakeholder Feedback



- ★ **Wellbeing**
 - Community
 - Self-Regulation
 - Self-Efficacy
 - Environment
 - Peer Relationships
 - Joy/Happiness
 - Belongingness
 - Emotional Support
- ★ **Teaching and Learning**
(Farrand & Jung, 2025)



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Be a Paws Supporter



- ★ Advocate for rescue animals and support local shelters and adoption
- ★ Contribute to Foundation
- ★ Share our fundraising efforts
- ★ Donate on our Amazon Wishlist
- ★ Support school service clubs
- ★ Volunteer at training sessions



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Making A BIG Impact



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Thank you





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