

PROTOCOL FOR MRC CANINE SUPPORT TEAM

This document attempts to outline some of the procedures and structures that would support certified therapy dogs and handler's participation in deployments where the healing effects of interacting with animals might be helpful. The service described here would be done under the auspices of the Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps (BMRC). The program is designed to include a feedback and evaluation component to determine if expansion of the program within the Western MA Region might be appropriate. Comments and questions are welcome – please contact CMCKEOWN@WMMRC.ORG

Purpose of program, needs to be addressed:

MRC is a national network of pre-credentialed and trained volunteers who work locally to strengthen public health, improve emergency response capabilities and build community resiliency. People who have been impacted by disaster/trauma can experience depression, extreme stress, generalized anxiety, and a host of other problems

Berkshire MRC has created this program to increase response capacity and community resilience in a meaningful way that may lessen the short and long terms effects impact on individuals and their communities. This program creates opportunities for Certified Therapy Dogs and their Handlers (Canine Response Teams/CRT's) to become trained in preparedness and contribute to local emergency response efforts. MRC leaders will communicate with the requesting agency to determine whether a situation is appropriate for Canine Support Team deployment.

The program recognizes that like people, individual dogs have different strengths. The following will be ascertained when determining appropriate service opportunities for Canines.

- Reactivity to other dogs
- Reactivity to chaotic, sometimes loud, circumstances
- Number of people expected onsite (e.g. classroom setting or large community event)
- Open setting vs. confined space

- Certification rating if applicable

MRC will provide the following:

Volunteers will be provided a specific time period for your shift and clear details about the parameters of service. (Handlers are trusted with ability to recognize the signs of stress in your dog and in yourself to determine if you can remain past the scheduled time period or if you have to end early).

Volunteers will be provided the name of someone onsite to report to upon arrival – and they should be expecting you. (Note: Because disasters are chaotic, this may not always be the case. If the person whose name you were given is not available, please ask who is in charge).

Volunteers will be provided contact information of an MRC leader who will be your point person during your shift for any questions that come up. Text messaging may be best means of communicating depending on location and type of service.

Volunteers will be provided simple scripts and reminders to refer to if asked any questions you do not know if you should answer or how to answer. (e.g. Volunteers do not speak with the press. If approached, refer to person in charge).

MRC Leader may be provided written talking points to give to the person in charge so they have correct information about the Medical Reserve Corps and the MRC Canine Support Program.

Handlers and canines will be provided with vests and patches respectively or some other MRC identifying element TBD.

MRC will attempt to arrange opportunities for handlers to bring their dogs to an event to test their tolerance of loud noise and crowds, etc. e.g. firefighter practice/training sessions.

Geographic Scope of Work

This program will initially be limited to Berkshire MRC, but may potentially expand to include Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties. BMRC Handlers can choose to

travel to another county or participate in recruitment efforts of handlers with therapy dogs within Western MA Region.

The program recognizes that Therapy Dog Certification Agencies have different requirements, certification schedules and policies.

MRC Canine Support Team members will provide the following:

Volunteers will provide copies of certification and statement about what is required in order to obtain it (e.g. health records) and how often recertification is conducted. (By email in a pdf or jpg file is the preferred way to receive this).

Volunteers will provide copies of vaccination records (if not required for certification). (By email in a pdf or jpg file is preferred way to receive this).

Volunteers will provide copies of confirmation of insurance coverage by certifying agency while deployed with MRC.

Volunteers will complete MA Responds registration (www.MAResponds.org), including background checks.

Volunteers will complete MRC training requirements (see section below).

Note: While the sections below relate to volunteering as a Canine Response Team member, individuals who register with MRC may participate in and contribute to other volunteer efforts, as coordinated by MRC unit leaders.

Handler training: Handlers who sign up to participate in this program will need to complete normal MRC volunteer training requirements. These free trainings, generally available online, include:

- Introduction to MRC
- Incident Command System
- Psychological First Aid
- Animal Body Language and Handling

- Pet First Aid/CPR

Additional training, including communication drills, will be organized periodically; handlers will be added to the training announcements list once they join MRC. Most MRC trainings are open to all unit members and the public. See additional details at <http://wmmrc.org/training/>.

Procedures for requesting Canine Support in emergency situations:

Volunteers will receive email and/or phone notifications from MA Responds whenever there is a service (or training) opportunity.

Volunteers will respond to that notice with information regarding their availability. If they have indicated that they can assist with the situation, then MRC team leaders will contact handlers to request assistance.

Volunteers understand and agree that they will not communicate about future service opportunities with a requesting authority (even if they have a relationship with that institution).

Volunteers will contact unit leader directly if they have a suggestion or information about a possible service opportunity.