

## **The Buddy Project: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q: What is The Buddy Project?**

A: The Buddy Project pairs youth who are at risk for school failure with homeless dogs from our Sanctuary. While learning how to train the dogs, the youth also learn how to engage with them in a positive manner that promotes empathy.

### **Q: Who can benefit from The Buddy Project?**

A: The Buddy Project works with youth with Asperger's, ADHD, learning disabilities, and significant emotional problems. Some of the youth have experienced trauma, are in the foster care system, or are experiencing other life challenges.

### **Q: How are youth referred to the program?**

A: Social workers, therapists, teachers and parents identify and refer youth who may benefit from this program.

### **Q: What are some of the basic goals of The Buddy Project?**

A: General program goals include providing the dogs with positive-based training and socialization experiences to aid in their rehabilitation and enhance their chances for successful adoptions. Goals for the students include providing them with a humane education experience that helps to develop a sense of achievement and feelings of empathy.

### **Q: What are some of the therapeutic benefits of The Buddy Project?**

A: The program provides the youth with an opportunity to engage in an activity outside of their school or traditional therapeutic environments. It can simulate a work experience for some, teaching them the importance of honoring commitments and fulfilling responsibilities. According to the literature on animal assisted interactions (AAs), engaging with animals can serve as a catalyst to help support the development of other social interactions. Involvement in positive-based dog training approaches can serve as a model for positive and appropriate interpersonal interactions outside of the training sessions.

### **Q: How are individual goals developed?**

A: The Buddy Project collaborates with referring partners to develop individualized, measurable goals for each student. Goals for the sanctuary dogs are developed in collaboration with Our Companions' Canine Operations Director. When one of "their" dogs is adopted, youth are encouraged to remain within the program to help another dog in need.

### **Q: Where do the Buddy Project dogs come from?**

A: Most of the dogs reside at our animal sanctuary in Ashford.

### **Q: How are dogs selected for the program?**

A: All dogs are temperament-tested by Our Companions' Canine Operations Director. Dogs that are selected have demonstrated high sociability and are considered highly trainable. Individual needs and goals are taken into consideration when pairing a student with one of our dogs.

### **Q: Where do The Buddy Project sessions take place?**

A: The Buddy Project sessions occur at our Valerie Friedman Program Center, centrally located in Manchester, Connecticut.

### **Q: How often do sessions occur?**

A: Sessions are offered on a once-a-week basis for approximately an hour.