



**Puppies Behind Bars** (P.B.B.) is a non-profit organization that trains incarcerated individuals to raise service dogs for wounded war veterans and first responders, as well as explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. Puppies enter prison at the age of 8 weeks and live with their inmate puppy-raisers for approximately 24 months. As the puppies mature into well-loved, well-behaved dogs, their raisers learn what it means to contribute to society rather than take from it.

The *Paws & Reflect* (P&R) program matches homebound seniors with dedicated volunteers who bring a puppy to visit them in their home. This program offers excellent socialization for our service dogs-in-training, as well as companionship and friendship to seniors living alone. P.B.B. collaborates with *Encore Community Services* to bring this initiative to homebound seniors in the Midtown Manhattan area.

Socialization is the process whereby a dog becomes familiar with all kinds of animals, people, places, and things, through which it learns how to behave in society. To expose our dogs to stimuli beyond the prison walls, P.B.B. drives a small group of dogs into Manhattan every weekend, where trained *Weekend Sitter volunteers* pick them up and host a dog overnight. As a *P&R volunteer*, your responsibility will be to meet up with one of our *Weekend Sitter volunteers* to swap a dog to visit a senior.

*It is important that our prospective volunteers understand that this is a serious commitment and should be physically active to be able to handle our dogs. Many of our puppies are energetic and very strong. They pull on lead, they may bark at someone or something in the streets, they could have an "accident" in the senior's home, etc.—it is not always easy!*

### **What does a Paws & Reflect visit consist of?**

P&R visits are designed as socialization sessions, during which the P&R volunteer and the senior acclimate the dogs to new environments, review basic commands and encourage the dogs to develop good house manners. In effect, we are involving the seniors as co-volunteers in helping to prepare our dogs for their future careers. Not only does it help our dogs, but this contributes to the seniors' self-esteem, and reminds them that they can still positively contribute back to our society. The human interaction between the elderly and the P&R volunteer is a critical component of this program.

All P&R visits take place on weekends and last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. We will match you with a senior. Since you will always visit the same senior, you will get to know him/her better, allowing for a special bond to form. Most of the seniors in our program reside on Manhattan's Westside. This will make it easier for you to travel with our dogs to/from our pick-up/drop-off site.

As mentioned above, our dogs come into the city via a shuttle van, which arrives and parks in Manhattan's Midtown Westside. You have the option to make your P&R visit on a Saturday morning or on a Sunday afternoon (around the shuttle van's schedule).

#### Saturday P&R visits

If you decide to visit your senior on a Saturday morning, you will meet the shuttle van at a specific time to pick up your puppy and travel by car or by foot to your senior's home. Once the visit is over, you must travel by car or by foot to a designated location nearby to meet-up the Weekend Sitter volunteer and hand-off the puppy. You don't have to worry about returning the puppy to the shuttle.

#### Sunday P&R visits

If you decide to visit your senior on a Sunday afternoon, you will meet-up the Weekend Sitter volunteer at an agreed-upon time and location, so he/she can hand-off the puppy to you. You will visit your senior. After, you will travel with the puppy, by car or by foot, to drop him/her off to the shuttle van location, so the dog can go back to prison.

## Requirements for all P&R Volunteers:

- You must be at least 18 years old and must live in New York City to participate as a P&R visitor.
- Must pass a background check.
- You must be fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine. Must submit proof. Seniors are the most vulnerable in our population and we require this for their safety.
- You must wear a face mask when visiting the senior in an indoor setting, as per CDC guidelines.
- The commitment for a P&R volunteer is **one in-person visit per month and a weekly phone call, for one year** (*people that do not adhere to this will be dismissed—no exceptions*). This rule is not to be punitive but to look after the dogs-in-training and the seniors. We feel that if volunteers regularly handle our dogs, they will develop better skills and work more effectively with our dogs. Also, a weekly phone call and regular in-person visits can go a long way to helping homebound seniors feel safe and connected to the world.
- Complete an online application, submit three reference letters and attend and pass the required training classes at our Midtown office.
- Submit puppy feedback after every P&R visit. The feedback is for the puppy raisers, which allows them to determine where the puppy needs extra training to succeed as a service dog.

## Please note the following considerations:

As you can imagine, logistics play a major role in your success as a P&R volunteer and our program. Once you have been accepted to our program, we will put you in contact with our *scheduler*. You will be responsible for contacting and scheduling a P&R visit with your senior and then informing our scheduler about it. We require that you request a dog from us, at least 10 days in advance, to have a dog readily available for your P&R visit. Therefore, we encourage that all our volunteers arrange meetings with their seniors in advance.

Our dogs may not be taken on the subway, so New York City volunteers who do not live within walking distance of the Midtown shuttle must be able to ride a city bus with our pup or drive to/from the shuttle location (our dogs are permitted to ride in buses, taxis, or private vehicles).

We have not scheduled any training sessions for this year; trainings are scheduled whenever we need to train more volunteers to provide socialization outings for our pups or if Encore accepts a new senior in their program.

Please contact Anais Zafra at: [anais@puppiesbehindbars.com](mailto:anais@puppiesbehindbars.com) or at (212) 680-9562 for further questions.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a P.B.B. volunteer!