Planning a “De-Stress” Event with Pets and People

A Guide for the School-Based Organizer

The information below provides the steps and considerations to plan a successful “de-stress” event on your campus or workplace with Pets and People Foundation. There is never a charge for a de-stress event to the school or participants.

What is Pets and People?

Pets and People Foundation is a non-profit organization that screens, and matches to organizations, volunteers with dogs and cats who are interested in sharing their them with clients, residents, students of such who could benefit from contact for a few minutes on a one time or on-going basis with a friendly, calm and gentle furry friend. For a full description of what we are all about please go to our web site: www.petsandpeoplefoundation.org

What are the elements of a successful de-stress event?

Because of the well-established effects of petting and interacting with a gentle dog or cat, which include lowering anxiety, lowering blood pressure and increasing overall mood, coordinating “de-stress” events with institutions of higher education held on their campuses around the time of exams is one way that we provide pet therapy. If you are a staff member or student volunteer leader at a college that wishes to host a de-stress event with Pets and People dogs and cats, we will be delighted to work with you. Here are the key elements of making fun and worthwhile event for your students:

1. **SPACE** An accessible, comfortable open area of at least 600 square feet (outdoors during good weather is OK, but have a back-up location indoors) that is visible but not interfering with foot traffic. Sitting areas with furniture that can be moved to the perimeter of just off the lobby of a centrally located campus building are ideal, as there could be as many as 5 to 6 animals and their handlers in the area at one time. If you would like cats included in our visit, we may ask for a slightly separate area to accommodate them.

2. **TIME** A date just before the start of the exam or study period at a time when students are generally on campus and not at a major sports or other event works best. Boston-based schools will have more teams at their event if it is scheduled for a late afternoon/early evening on a weekday or on a weekend during the day. Central MA and Metrowest events can be at nearly any time of day. Events are usually 90 minutes in length, though longer ones are possible by staggering teams and times so that the animals don’t become overtired.

3. **PROMOTION** At least 2 weeks of promotion on student web portals, flyers on campus bulletin boards, etc., is necessary so that you have good awareness of the event. We would be happy to share photos of our teams.

4. **PRESENCE** The school-based coordinator (or a well-briefed alternate) of the event should be on-site throughout the event.
What are the steps for planning a de-stress event?

(Pets and People action items are in red)

1. **8 to 10 weeks before:** Contact the Pets and People Events Coordinator: events@petsandpeoplefoundation.org. This must be done at least 8 weeks in advance of the approximate date of the event. We will review these guidelines by email or phone and help you make decisions. If you already have a particular date in mind, make sure there isn’t an unresolvable conflict with another Pets and People event. More than one event on a date is possible but we have to plan these on case-by-case basis.

2. **7 to 8 weeks before:** Pick the date, time and location for the de-stress event. Be sure you have clearance from the appropriate administrative offices from your school for each of these decisions, and you reserve the space.

3. **7 weeks before:** Re-contact the Events Coordinator at Pets and People with the final date of the event and the description of the location. Let us know if you would like to include cats! We will send out the announcement about the event and recruit a Pets and People on-site event leader and provide this volunteers name and contact information

4. **3 to 4 weeks before:** Provide the following key pieces of information to your Pets and People site leader:
   a. Exact address of the location of the event
   b. Directions or MapQuest or Google-maps link
   c. Information about parking (making parking free will ensure a good return of volunteers next time)

5. **2 to 3 weeks before:** Get the word out! Campus community web portals, student activities news and events sites and blogs are the best ways of communicating. Facebook and Twitter feeds will also generate talk about the event. Paper flyers on bulletin boards in academic and dorm buildings are also effective, if old fashioned.

6. **1 to 2 weeks before:** Contact your Pets and People site leader to confirm that you or an alternate will be on-site for the event. Make sure that any room adjustments are scheduled with housekeeping or maintenance staff (e.g. does furniture need to be moved?) We will send you a final count of the teams with names of human and dog / cat volunteers, and if your school requires them, all the dogs’ rabies vaccine certifications. There are usually 3 to 6 teams who will on-site the whole time or spread-out in shifts during the event.

What are some additional considerations?

**Liability insurance:** Pets and People carries it’s own general liability coverage, which protects its volunteers and board members but not the organizations in which it provides events and therapy visits. A certificate of coverage is available upon request.

**Cancellations/Last minute changes:** Weather or other last minute factors that require you to cancel or change the location of the event should be communicated by cell phone (not email) to the Pets and People site leader and Events Coordinator as soon as possible. One of these people will contact the Pets and People volunteers.

**Water bowls:** Two or three large water bowls for the dogs (or accessibility to water) is requested, but not necessary.

More Questions? Contact events@petsandpeoplefoundation.org

Thank you for your interest in Pets and People!