



Delta Society with Llamas

By: Niki Kuklenski

Doing Volunteer Pet Therapy Work can be one of the most rewarding ways to give your time to others! Making a small and important difference in the life of someone not as fortunate as you can be a tremendous gift to not only yourself. When I first started working with llamas, I began to realize that I wanted to find ways to spend time with my animals, while at the same time, sharing them with others.

For many years, I have visited local nursing homes, schools, parades and other Public Relations events. Whenever doing these events, taking into consideration which llama I could trust to behave and be safe around people who don't always use "good sense" was VERY important. One negative experience could not only land you into litigation, but also create all kinds of negative press for llamas. In order to protect yourself and your llamas, you have to always be one step ahead of what could happen.

This last year I finally took the giant step and certified two of my breeding males through Delta Society Pet

Therapy Partners (<http://www.deltasociety.org>). My personal choice to do two was based on the fact I think it is unfair (to the llama) to always take the same llama to these things repeatedly. If something were to happen to one of my boys (open wound, injury, sickness or death) I would have a replacement to do therapy work. Missing a scheduled appointment can have a huge impact on some of the people you choose to spend time with. Remember to always keep this in mind. I also selected these two males as I know 100% of the time they would NEVER kick, move when asked to stand, or hurt anybody. This is extremely important when you are visiting facilities that have patients who are frail.

The actual testing process involves written and physical demands. The written portion can be taken by going to classes or through a home study course book. The physical testing involves various realistic scenarios set up to see how your llama behaves. In my personal testing we were exposed to wheelchairs, constant touching all over, walkers, slippery floors and stairs, brushing,

treats, leading by other handlers and much more. My llamas passed allowing them to be certified as complex (meaning we as a team can be trusted to work in stressful situations with little supervision). The final step is to setup a complete physical exam complete with shots (rabies and TB are two of them) done by your veterinarian. Once this is all completed you mail the three items to Delta Society with your fees.

When volunteering there are many things you need to do before you actually go visit. Your animal needs to be really clean, which in the Winter can be challenging. I brush and blow mine out during that time of year, then I lightly coat them with a fiber lubricant like Showsheen. During the Summer they receive baths, shearing and brushing. Toenails must be trimmed, and routine fecals should be done. Your llama should look like it is well cared for and groomed. I personally have halters and leads I use for ONLY my Delta work. They stay in the house in a clean spot to assure they will be nice every time I go to use them. I also keep their Delta Society Tags on them to show they are certified in case there should ever be a question. There is a Delta vest you can purchase that was originally designed for a miniature horse. Because the strap in the front did not fit right, I removed it and put it on the belly portion of the vest creating two girth straps instead of one. I keep treats in it and for holidays put candy inside for kids and adults to take out. This helps to get people over their fears and myths about llamas.

Once you have heard about your certification status and know you are good to volunteer, you should consider your options. I did a lot of Internet research in my area before finally settling on volunteering at a local home for HIV positive men. There was no particular reason I chose this facility, other than simply based on my research I thought it would be interesting to give my time to. This facility has proven to be a wonderful place to go and I have gotten to know several of the men there through my weekly visits. While we visit, they walk my llama and we talk a lot about life and what they are currently doing. All the while I keep my eyes out for potential issues that may arise and compromise the safety of everyone involved. It really is a balancing act while you are doing this sort of work.

You should NEVER use an animal that is not 100% healthy. You should make sure your animal is up to date



on all vaccination, worming and routine health care items. Remember to keep in mind that if you do violate any of the Delta policies in place, you will not be protected by their insurance. One small problem could create an even bigger problem in the delicate balance some people live day to day with. If in doubt, do NOT take them until you feel completely comfortable. You could also potentially compromise the status of other camelids that want to volunteer in the future.

Should you have questions or want more information, please go to:

*Delta Society
875 124th Ave NE, Ste 101
Bellevue, WA 98005-2531
U.S.A.*

*Main Line: (425) 679-5500 (8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. PST,
Monday - Friday)
Fax: (425) 679-5539
info@deltasociety.org
<http://www.deltasociety.org/home.htm>*

*For Certification Classes & Testing:
Diane Rich
Dog Training
P.O. Box 2872
Kirkland, Wa 98083
Fax: 425-576-1145
askdiane@aol.com*

<http://www.spokesdog.com/Therapy.html>

Biography-

Niki Kuklenski and her husband Jeff are very involved with all aspects of owning llamas. She is a 4-H leader, high school substitute teacher, ILR Classic Focus Group member and VP for Llama Rescuenet. Niki and Jeff drive, show, pack and educate with their llamas. Niki's passion is llama history and memorabilia. She spends most of her free time tracking down old pictures and llama owners to help preserve our industry's history.

***<http://www.nas.com/~jnklamas>
jnklamas@nas.com 360-592-2603***