

Purina Goes Back to School with Therapy Dog Visits to Help Manage Student Stress Before Final Exams

University visits throughout first week of May unleash power of pets to kickoff Mental Health Awareness Month

ST. LOUIS (May 1, 2023) – Purina is unleashing the power of pets to help manage stress for college students ahead of final exams in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month. A group of Purina employee-led Touch Therapy teams is visiting the campus of the University of Missouri—St. Louis (UMSL) this week to officially kickoff Mental Health Awareness Month and to help educate students on the mental and physical benefits of pet interactions. Four additional universities in the greater St. Louis area will host Touch Therapy visits throughout the first week of May.

The teams visiting UMSL's campus are comprised of Purina employees and family pets who have completed training and are certified by Duo Dogs, a national nonprofit organization that trains and connects dogs with people, to cultivate positive change in individuals, families, and communities. Additional campus visits during the first week of May will be conducted by Duo Dogs' Touch Therapy volunteer teams, and include area schools Harris-Stowe State University, Saint Louis University, Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville, and Webster University. Touch Therapy visits prove to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure, as well as reduced feeling of loneliness, increased feelings of social support and boost overall mood, according to the National Institutes of Health. Collectively, the Touch Therapy team visits are estimated to complete around 1,800 student interactions.

“At Purina, we know the positive impact pets have on our lives, and this week of university visits allows us to illustrate that and make more people aware of the tangible benefits of pet interactions,” said Dr. Julie Spears, a Purina scientist who recently completed the Purina Touch Therapy certification program with her dog, Graham. “Mental Health Awareness Month is the ideal time for us to unleash the power of pets and help college students manage their stress during the final exams crunch.”

These programs and the university visits come at a time when mental health awareness is more prevalent, and an increased demand for animal assisted therapy is leaving organizations like Duo Dogs in need of more volunteer Touch Therapy teams. Seven out of 10 young people say they are struggling with mental health issues, based on a recent study by the National 4-H Council. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 50 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime, and that one in five Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year.

Purina partnered with Duo Dogs to launch its first-ever employee-led Touch Therapy dog program last September in response to increasing demand for therapy dogs by organizations serving youth and families. Since launching, Purina has graduated two classes, and now sponsors 15 employee volunteer Touch teams, with another class of 16 slated to begin training this summer. Purina is also sponsoring a litter of puppies, all of which are being raised by Purina employees and trained to serve as certified Duo Dog facility, assistance or service dogs.

For more information on how Purina is leveraging pets to address mental health, visit

purina.com/mentalhealth.

About Purina

Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations.

Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Purina Cat Chow, Purina ONE, Pro Plan, Fancy Feast and Tidy Cats. Our more than 10,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. More than 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition. Purina promotes responsible pet care through our scientific research, our products and our support for pet-related organizations.

Over the past five years, Purina has contributed more than \$150 million towards organizations that bring, and keep, people and pets together, as well as those that help our communities and environment thrive. Purina is part of Nestlé, a global leader in Nutrition, Health and Wellness. For more information, visit purina.com or [subscribe here](#) to get the latest Purina news.

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