Effect of the Human-Animal Bond on Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility Residents

A Senior Honors Project
In Partial Fulfillment of
Bachelor of Sciences
with University Honors in BCMB
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Erin Betts Foster
May 2, 2005

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Elizabeth Strand
Department of Comparative Medicine

Abstract

Research has suggested that the presence of animals can provide potential health benefits for people of all ages. For the elderly, who often have sensory deficit disorders, speech and mobility impairment, or altered thought processes, the human-animal bond is especially important. This project is an observational study of the effects of animals on elderly persons living in assisted living facilities.

For this project, residents of an assisted living facility were observed while being visited by a volunteer and an animal. Data about the responses of these visitations were collected through audiotaping and photographing. Participants were interviewed and audiotaped, and interviews lasted about five minutes each. Quotations from the audiotaped interviews were selected and included in the presentation of the final project. Photographs were taken of the elderly participants who were willing. These photographs were used in the final presentation of the project.

Generally, the residents seemed to enjoy the visits from the animal. Residents were eager to pet and feed the animal. Most residents responded that they anticipate the visits and they miss the animals when they do not visit. Additionally, most residents remembered the specific volunteers and animals who visited them, which suggests that animal-assisted therapy and activities do have a positive impact on the elderly in assisted living facilities.

Introduction

Recent studies have suggested that the presence of animals can be beneficial to human health. For example, animals can reduce minor health problems, improve well-

being, reduce depression, improve physical fitness and cardiovascular health, and provide social support. For the elderly in nursing homes or assisted living residences who are often lonely, depressed, in poor health, and have a feeling of uselessness, animals play a special role. Along with other benefits, animals provide comfort, acceptance, independence, social interaction, and communication, and they can give elderly people a sense of responsibility and a greater will to live.

History

The idea of the healing power of the bond between humans and animals is not new. There is evidence to suggest that people have known about the health benefits of the presence of animals for thousands of years. Reviewing some of the historical findings, events, and programs that demonstrate the human-animal bond is useful in understanding its healing presence. For instance, in 1976, a human skeleton thought to be twelve thousand years old was excavated in a tomb in northern Israel. In its arms, the skeleton was clutching the remains of a puppy (Cusack 1). This is thought to be one of the first archeological indicators of the human-animal bond (Cusack 1). Animals have been domesticated as pets or used to treat mentally and physically disabled people for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years.

Animal-Assisted Activities

Animal-assisted activities provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. Activities are delivered in a variety of environments by specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals, or

volunteers in association with animals that meet specific criteria (Delta Society). Animal-assisted activities are basically casual activities that involve pets visiting people. The same activity can be repeated with many people, unlike a therapy program that is tailored to a particular person or medical condition. With animal-assisted activities, specific treatment goals are not planned for each visit, volunteers and treatment providers are not required to take detailed notes, and visit content is spontaneous and visits last as long or as short as needed (Delta Society).

Animal-assisted activities have been used for hundreds of years. For example, in 1792, in York, England, the institution of York Retreat included animals as part of the living environment and encouraged patients to care for them (Cusack 2). Also, the Pawling Army Air Force Convalescent Hospital in Pauling, New York utilized farm animals and small reptiles and amphibians as therapeutic aids and encouraged patients recovering from fatigue and physical injury to interact with them (Cusack 2).

Animal-Assisted Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy is a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Therapy is directed or delivered by a health or human service professional with specialized expertise within the scope of his or her profession. Animal-assisted therapy is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. Therapy is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. This process is documented and evaluated. With animal-assisted therapy, there are specified goals and objectives for each individual and progress is measured (Delta Society).

Some examples of animal-assisted therapy physical goals are to improve fine motor skills, wheelchair skills, and standing balance. Examples of mental health goals are to increase verbal interactions between group members, increase attention skills, develop recreation skills, increase self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and reduce loneliness. Educational goals include increasing vocabulary, aiding in long or short-term memory, and improving knowledge of concepts such as size and color. Motivational goals are to improve willingness to be involved in a group activity, improve interactions with others, improve interactions with staff, and increase exercise (Delta Society).

Animal-assisted therapy is not a new concept. Evidence suggests that the early Greeks prescribed horseback riding to improve the morale of untreatable patients (Cusack 197). In the 1600's, riding was recommended for the treatment of gout, and in the seventeenth century, it was shown to alleviate the symptoms of tuberculosis (Cusack 197). In 1867, farm animals and a wild game park, as well as pet animals and an equestrian program, were used to treat people with epilepsy and other mental disorders in Bethel in Bielefield, West Germany (Cusack 2). In 1875, French neurologist Chassaignac found that the physical movement of the horse improved posture, balance, joint movement, muscle control, and morale of paraplegics and patients with neurological disorders (Cusack 199).

Animal-assisted therapy formally began in 1953, when psychiatrist Boris Levinson used dog therapy to treat a withdrawn and uncommunicative boy. The dog served as an intermediate between the boy and the doctor and allowed the boy to develop trust in Levinson (Cusack 2). Horseback riding has also been used medically since the 1950's for wheelchair bound patients or those with polio or cerebral palsy (Cusack 197).

In the 1970's, Sam and Elizabeth O'Leary Corson utilized animal-assisted therapy at Ohio State University Hospital and Castle Nursing Home in Millersburg, Ohio. Withdrawn patients who were allowed to interact with dogs were found to improve more than those with no contact with animals (Cusack 3). Marcel Heiman practiced "zoo therapy," prescribing pets to people who could not comfortably live alone (Cusack 4). Michael McCulloch, a psychiatrist and former vice president of the Delta Society, was one of the first professionals to formally study the influence of pets in the lives of people and one of the first psychiatrists to actually prescribe pets (Cusack 4).

Service Dogs

A service dog has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, which is defined as a mental or physical condition which substantially limits a major life activity. These include caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, or working. Some disabilities may not be visible, such as deafness, epilepsy, or psychiatric conditions. To be considered a service dog, the dog must be trained to perform tasks directly related to the person's disability (Delta Society National Service Dog Center).

Service dogs were first used to help people with physical disabilities, namely blindness, in Germany during World War I (Fine 304). In the 1960's, people expanded the use of guide dogs to include deaf patients (Fine 304). In the 1970's, guide dogs began to be used to aid people in wheelchairs (Fine 304).

Animal-Assisted Activities and Therapy Today

As further evidence for the benefits of the human-animal bond, veterinary colleges now include courses on relationships between pets and their owners, and veterinarians recognize the benefits of bond-centered practices (Granskog 8). There is now clinical evidence to support a connection between animals and human health (Granskog 9). Animal-assisted activity and therapy are now common in health care facilities of all types (Granskog 8). Programs have been started allowing prison inmates to train shelter dogs for disabled people, cats are prevalent in nursing homes, and rabbits are often seen in children's wards in hospitals (Granskog 8). Laws have been passed to protect the relationship between pets and their elderly or disabled owners or families in public housing (Granskog 8).

Influence of Pets on Children

Pets have a lasting impact on children (Bulcroft 14). A human-animal bond can develop within the first year of a child's life (Cusack 91). Very young children are strongly attracted to pets, and they are more self-expressive in the presence of pets (Hart 37). At six to twelve months, a baby will react to a family pet, and at eight to twelve months, the child will try to follow a pet (Cusack 91). It is through animals that children learn to decode non-verbal signals and show non-verbal communication (Melson 17). Interaction with pets helps children to interpret facial expressions (Hart 37). Further interaction with pets facilitates language acquisition and enhances verbal skills and sensorimotor learning (Stafford 344). Pets provide tactile and kinetic comfort (Hart 37). Children's cognitive development can be enhanced by owning a pet (Delta Society).

Imaginary playmates of gifted children are often animals (Cusack 92). Animals aid children in developing fantasy games and providing a safe outlet for their thoughts (Edney 705). Children with pets are generally more involved in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, hobbies, and doing household chores (Delta Society). Also, asthma and frequent diarrhea are more prevalent in children in homes without pets (Cusack 19).

Similarly, experience with animals may help children to grow up to be more nurturing adults (Melson 15). Pets help to provide knowledge of animals, empathy, and a humane attitude (Stafford 344). Children have a strong attachment to their pets, which is often associated with feelings of confidence (Melson 16). Children brought up in the presence of animals show higher self esteem and less fear (Edney 705). Pets serve as friends for children and can help them to make more human friends (Hart 37). Children with pets often become more popular and attractive to peers (Hart 33). Children with pets are chosen more often to be confidantes, companions, and partners (Hart 37). Pets help children to develop social skills and aid in greater activity and participation (Hart 37). Pets provide children with security, a sympathetic refuge, and a willing companion (Hart 37). Children turn to their pets in times of emotional need (Stafford 343). Acceptance by a pet is comforting to a child (Hart 37). Children can relate more easily to animals than to people because animals are non-threatening and their love is unconditional (Hart 37).

Finally, pets broaden a child's experience of the world (Hart 37). Pets expose children to biological facts (Hart 37). Pets are important in helping them to understand life, reproduction, birth, death, and illness (Edney 705). Children learn that an animal corrected for misconduct is still loved (Edney 705). Pets help children learn to cope with

grief, and taking care of pets gives children increased responsibility (Stafford 344). Pets are also an important part of a family. Pets bring a family closer by bridging age gaps and providing a common object of responsibility and a focus for mutual planning (Stafford 343). Pets are a focus for conversation of a family (Serpell 6). In most cases, pets are considered family members (Bulcroft 14). In fact, more people sleep with their pets than with their children (Cusack 14). Reasons to own a pet change as families change; when children are involoved, people are more likely to have pets, as the children initiate the acquisition (Bulcroft 14). Newlyweds, widowed, or people who have never been married have the highest level of attachment to their pets, possibly because of increased time or because the pets are a substitution for children (Bulcroft 14). Pets can serve as preparation for parenthood (Hart 39).

Influence of Pets on Adults

Animals provide benefits for otherwise healthy adults. Pet owners can experience beneficial psychological and physiological responses, as caring for others is good for health (Melson 16). Pet owners have fewer doctor visits (Stallones 18). In fact, pets have been linked to a fifty percent reduction in minor health problems (Serpell 5). Small increases in physical activity due to pet ownership can provide benefits to overall health (Stallones 18). Pets allow for longer survival after a heart attack or for coronary heart patients (Stallones 18). Pets allow for a beneficial change in HDL cholesterol (Serpell 5). Pets lower levels of triglycerides and systolic blood pressure (Edney 707). In the presence of friendly dogs, people experience a lowering of blood pressure even when under moderate stress (Edney 704). Anxiety and cardiovascular reactivity are also

decreased (Friedmann 8). Pets provide distraction and emotional support for owners recovering from illness and disability (Stafford 344).

Likewise, pets provide emotional rewards, personal fulfillment, and self-worth (Stafford 344). Pet owners have fewer emotional concerns (Stafford 344). Pet owners are better able to cope with stressful life events (Edney 704). Animals decrease responses to stressors (Friedmann 8). Less anxiety is felt in a stressful situation if an animal is present, as animals provide a feeling of safety (Friedmann, Thomas, and Eddy 130). If a strong attachment exists between an owner and a pet, the effects of traumatic events such as bereavement can be ameliorated, and the pet can have a positive impact on anxiety and depression (Serpell 1). Pet owners have improvements in self-esteem (Serpell 1). Dog owners are less afraid of being victims of crime (Serpell 1). Pets can help their owners meet new people and facilitate conversation (Stafford 344). People with pets are perceived to be friendlier, less threatening, and happier (Friedmann, Thomas, and Eddy 125). Pet owners are generally more nurturing, responsible, dependable, self-sufficient, independent, helpful, benevolent, optimistic, poised, productive, and self-confident, and less egotistical and self-centered (Cusack 147). A favorable attitude toward pets is an indicator of overall happiness (Cusack 148). Pet ownership is an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Influence of Pets on the Elderly

Animals can be especially important for elderly people. Elderly owners generally develop an intense emotional relationship with animals, as they confide in them (Stafford 347). Pets are objects to love, and elderly people can give them all the love they want

without fear of non-reciprocation or desertion (Cusack and Smith 37). Pets become more important as people age and for people who live alone, are disabled, or have no social support system (Connell 242). As quality of life deteriorates, health worsens, income lowers, and transportation ceases, attachment to pets increases (Stafford 347).

Many elderly people experience sensory deficits, speech and mobility impairment, and altered thought processes (Hoffmann 196). Elderly people lack motivation and a sense of usefulness and purpose, especially those who are institutionalized or frail (Hoffmann 196). For a solitary elderly person, a pet provides something to come home to, do things for, and do things with (Hart 40). Pet ownership increases self care (Cusack and Smith 35). Pets allow elderly persons to develop a daily routine (Hart 40). Pets stimulate recovery from illness and provide a reason for quick recovery (Cusack and Smith 33). Pet ownership buffers the effect of stress on the immune system (Hart 40). Stress from lack of companionship can lead to heart problems, as humans have a biological need to form loving relationships (Hoffmann 197). Touching an animal is a calming influence (Friedmann 14). Talking to and stroking animals lower blood pressure (Cusack and Smith 33). Cancer is more frequent in elderly non pet owners, and more elderly non pet owners have heart conditions such as coronary heart disease (Cusack 19). Elderly pet owners have a reduced chance of hip fracture (Serpell 5). Animals increase activity and mobility, which increases muscle flexibility, strength, and endurance (Hoffmann 202). Animals are a relaxant for hypertensives (Hoffmann 704). People living with Alzheimer's disease eat more when sitting in front of fish tanks because of a reduction in stress hormones (Jackson)

Additionally, elderly pet owners experience longer lives, and pets can improve the quality of an elderly person's life (Stallones 18). Elderly people with pets have improved attitudes toward others, enhanced mental health, greater happiness, and a connection with the world (Hart 40). Pets can help to restore order and provide a secure grasp of reality for elderly owners (Stafford 347). Pets provide a focus for daily life and a requirement that their owner respond to their needs (Stallones 18). Social interaction with animals reduces the sense of isolation, increases life satisfaction, and provides critical resources for daily activities (Stallones 18). Animals provide a relaxing focus for attention, a source of contact comfort, a feeling of safety, companionship, nurturance, and a source of meaningful daily activity (Friedmann 8). They increase sense of humor, laughter, alertness, enjoyment of life, and incentive to live (Cusack and Smith 20). Animals provide entertainment, friendship, a sense of security, and feelings of youthfulness and joy (Hoffmann 196). Pet owners have better physical functioning, improved emotional health, and are less depressed (Stallones 18). Animals decrease loneliness and boredom (Stafford 347). Animals boost morale, raise self-esteem, and provide anticipation for every day (Hoffmann 204). Elderly pet owners are more responsible, dependable, helpful, benevolent, independent, and self-sufficient and less egotistic and self-centered than non owners (Stafford 347).

Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities in Nursing Homes

The human-animal bond is beneficial to people of all ages, but the bond is especially important for residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Birds, fish, cats, dogs, and rabbits have had positive effects on residents in nursing homes

(Edney 705). Animals in nursing homes can stimulate conversation, increase responsiveness of residents, and enhance the environment to make it feel more like home (Cusack and Smith 19). In an institution, pets increase social interaction and help people to have better relationships with others (Stafford 347). Pets stimulate smiles and conversation and increase sociability (Hoffmann 202). Pets help residents to have an improved relationship with staff members and greater interest in others (Cusack and Smith 20). In institutions with pets, there is a reduction in the amount of time residents spend alone (Cusack and Smith 24).

Of course, the human-human bond is also very important, but in some cases, humans cannot provide the same benefits as animals. Hearty adults can send negative nonverbal signals to elderly patients (Cusack and Smith 17). Risks of human connection include evaluation, correction, punishment, inattention, contradiction, and unsolicited advice and instruction (Cusack 81). For this reason, human visitors alone sometimes stimulate little interest (Cusack 141). Elderly people in nursing homes anticipate visitation from animals and become more responsive upon their arrival (Cusack and Smith 141). Communication with animals is easier than communication with humans; animals are less threatening because they are not cruel (Okoniewski 258). Pets are also easier to love than people; pets love without judgment, and they will not criticize (Cusack 56). Intimacy with animals can be achieved instantly, as people feel they can indulge their feelings more freely (Cusack 13).

Some ages and types of animals better complement elderly people at various levels of function. Bedridden or wheelchair-bound elderly people seem to respond best to small, playful breeds of dogs that can be held, sit in their laps, or sleep on their beds

with them (Cusack 17). Mobile elderly people work well with medium or large dogs that need exercise and play (Cusack 107). For mobile elderly people, puppies are generally not a good choice. Puppies are fragile, not housebroken, and do not know when to stop playing (Cusack 107). They may unwittingly trip people, and their lifespan is too long for an elderly person to own at their own residence (Fine 244). Young dogs may also be too strong for an elderly person to walk (Fine 244). Mature dogs are generally more beneficial. In nursing homes, elderly dogs are often preferred; many residents comment on their noticeably gray faces and immediately feel a connection with them (Cusack 145). For elderly people using canes and walkers, large dogs are ideal because they can be petted without the person having to bend over and risk injury (Jendro 417). Bedridden people can also reach over from their beds and pet these dogs (Jendro 417). Cats are a good choice for elderly people, but they must be able to bend over to change a litter box, and there is also the possibility of tripping over cats (Fine 246). Rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, and turtles have also been successful in nursing homes and hospitals (Edney 704). All animals must be energetic (Jendro 417). Pets that are used for therapy need to love people and be able to show their love actively, since a shy or reserved animal may make people feel rejected (Jendro 417).

Environment plays a role in the effectiveness of animal therapy. In order to receive many of the benefits of the presence of animals, people must be actively caring for the animal. Therefore, in a visitation program, people may not receive all possible benefits associated with animals. If the animal does not belong to the patient, there may be less emotional connection, so the interaction may not be as beneficial. Animals in a visitation program cannot provide continuous love and affection for patients, and a

personal bond is sometimes difficult to achieve because different animals may visit every time (Cusack and Smith 142). However, research has been done to suggest that residents do benefit from short visitations with animals.

Owners benefit more from associating with animals than non-owners do, even if the association is not with their pets. Also, positive prior experience with animals is a good predictor of response to animals in therapy (McCulloch 390). Improvements in physical activity are seen more often with people interacting with their own pets than with visiting animals (Edney 704).

A Local Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities Program

The program was formed to use animals to help all people with special needs. It is made up of representatives from the College of Veterinary Medicine, private veterinary practitioners, and volunteers from the community of Knoxville. The program sponsors pet visitation programs in nursing homes as well as assisted living residences, retirement centers, schools, mental health centers, residences for children with special needs, rehabilitation facilities, and hospitals. Volunteers visit people of all ages through both simple animal visitation programs and animal-assisted therapy programs.

The volunteers are specially trained, and the animals are medically and behaviorally evaluated before making visits. To become a volunteer, people are required to attend one of two general information meetings offered twice each year and submit an application. The medical evaluation of the animal is completed by the animal's veterinarian, and a behavioral evaluation includes a profile and history form filled out by the owner as well as a behavioral screening performed at the College of Veterinary

Medicine. Before a volunteer can visit a facility with an animal, he or she must make an orientation visit with an experienced volunteer, meet the staff of the facility, and take a tour. Also, the first visit of an animal to a facility must be made under the supervision of an experienced volunteer in order to be certain that the pet will not react strangely in a new environment.

Methodology

The participants of this project were elderly people living in assisted living facilities that have animal-assisted programs. Participants were between the ages of eighty and one-hundred. Facility personnel recommended residents who were capable of participating in the study according to competency. The number of participants interviewed was six.

For this project, data were collected through audiotaping and photographing. Participants were interviewed and audiotaped; interviews lasted approximately five minutes each. Quotations from the audiotaped interviews were selected and included in the presentation of the final project. Photographs were also taken of the elderly participants who were willing. These photographs were used in the final presentation of the project, but names were not attached to the photographs, nor were quotations from the interviews attached to photographs.

Reactions of Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facility Residents

An assisted living facility was observed during a visitation by an elderly volunteer with his eleven year old terrier. The volunteer and his dog have been visiting the facility

every week for six years, and both seemed to look forward to the visit and thoroughly enjoy it. The facility included Alzheimer's and dementia care buildings as well as independent and assisted living. Walking through the Alzheimer's and dementia care building, the pair was greeted with smiles by all residents present. Some reached out to pet the dog, and others even got up from their chairs to walk over to her. One resident brushed the hair out of the dog's eyes. Several others commented on how cute she was and how much they loved to see her.

In the assisted living buildings of the facility, most of the residents seemed to recognize the volunteer and the dog. The residents eagerly fed the dog treats that her owner provided for them. The volunteer chatted with the residents and shared stories and jokes while the residents petted the dog. One woman took the dog's leash and walked her around the building.

Interviews with Assisted Living Facility Residents

Some of the residents in the assisted living facility were willing and able to be interviewed. These residents were asked to answer some simple questions about their experiences with animal visitations and their own opinions about animals. All residents stated that volunteers with animals came to visit them at least once per week, and most of them remembered the volunteers who visit on Mondays and Fridays, the animals they bring, and information about the volunteers. When asked how they felt about the visits, they unanimously agreed that they were appreciated by everyone. One said that the animals are wonderful. Another resident remarked that they are "a lovely gesture for elderly people" and that the dogs always "liven people up." Another stated that the dogs

are always well behaved and patient. She thinks the dogs are happy to see everyone and that everyone is happy to see the dogs. One responded, "I am always glad to see them. I love animals." She even went on to state, "I like all animals, but I don't like all people." The biggest animal lover in the group proclaimed, "I can't wait for them to come, and I hate to see them go." She, too, said that she likes animals more than people, and that if the staff would let her, she would "have a lion and a tiger in her room". One remembered that a former resident used to save some of her food to feed to the dogs from the table until they were prevented from entering the dining room.

Every resident except one stated that they anticipate the visit with the animals. The one who did not anticipate the visits said that she enjoys the visits, but she probably would not remember if they did not visit. One commented that she "looks forward to anyone visiting." One resident stated that she had recently been in the hospital for two weeks and that while she was there she had missed the animals coming to visit. One answered that she would miss them if they did not visit but that they always visit so she does not have to. One resident declared that she was definitely disappointed if the animals did not visit because they are special to her and like her very own pets.

Each resident interviewed had previously been the owner of many pets before they moved into the facility, one has a fish tank in his room, and one even continues to keep a cat. Both residents with pets were very proud of their animals. The resident with the cat remarked that she could stand in the doorway with the door open to talk to someone and the cat would not run away. The man with the fish discussed each fish and said that one was pregnant. He remarked that he would have a dog, but that he would

feel guilty because there was nowhere for a dog to run and that he would not want to walk it when the weather was not nice. He does, however, go to the animal shelter



An assisted living facility resident describes one of her former pets.

often and check the local paper to see the miniature pinschers. The residents all commented that they had always had animals and that they liked all pets. The most common were dogs, cats, and rabbits, and favorites were dogs and cats.

Nearly all residents interviewed remembered his or her first pet and favorite pet. One described a mother cat and her kittens as being her first pets. Another said a red chow was his first pet when he was four years old, but that he loved his two miniature pinschers best. Another had two rabbits as her first pets. One resident recalled that her



An animal-loving resident.

favorite pet was a big German Shepherd who "wouldn't bite you if you were dipped in gravy." One talked about a "little fat bulldog" she loved. One woman remarked that she loved all her pets equally. She remarked, "Each was individual, and all have a place in my heart."

Each resident was asked what he or she missed most about having a pet. One said that she gets lonesome now and that she misses how her pets used to learn her habits. She commented that if she came home early, she could scare her pets. One misses the attachment pets provide for their owners. Another simply misses having something to talk to and to show affection for. She commented that her pets were always good friends and that it was nice to have something to come home to.



A resident looks forward to her next visit with an animal.

Finally, residents were asked about special memories of their pets. Although each resident could remember something about at least one animal, some chose not to share their memories. One resident remembers and misses a big black dog he used to own. Another remembers one of her cats that used to look in her window and talk to her at dinnertime. One resident remembers picking her first dog from a litter when he was a puppy and how well-behaved the dog was when she took him on a road trip to Washington. A resident shared the story about how she bought her first dog on the sidewalk from a man for five dollars. While walking her new dog, she was asked by

another woman what breed the dog was, and she was "embarrassed to tell her because the dog was a spitz". She also vividly recalled how the dog would "walk around on her hind



A resident remembering her first dog.

legs and hold her front paws up in the air". Finally, a resident remembered her Siamese cat Cinderella, who she "later discovered was a Cinderfella." The cat would meet her when she came in the door and would talk to her all night.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that the visits with volunteers and animals are short and do not occur on a daily basis, the residents seem to benefit from them and enjoy them. The fact

that residents remember how often the animals come to visit and the volunteers and specific dogs suggests that the animals do have a positive impact on them, at least on their mental health. Also, because the residents have memories of their own pets, sometimes even their first pets, it is an indication that pets do play am important part in peoples' lives.

Clinical observations and results of recent research have demonstrated the belief that the association between people and animals contributes to overall health and well-being. Animal-assisted therapy is now being used for learning disabled children, emotionally disturbed youths, and people with attention deficit disorder, asthma, allergies, arthritis, chronic pain, diabetes, cancer, acute immune deficiency syndrome, and Alzheimer's. Animals are included in speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and nursing. It is thought that service dogs actually reduce the costs of health care (Cusack 206). Research is currently being conducted for the possibility of using epileptic seizure alerting dogs. In order to help these programs to succeed, people should be educated about the benefits of human-animal interactions. Animal-assisted therapy and activity programs should be expanded, and programs that train service animals need to be promoted. Animals are a natural and valued part of life, and all people need the opportunity to receive benefits from their presence.

Works Cited

Bulcroft, Kris. "The Benefits of Animals to Our Lives: Pets in the American Family." People, Animals, Environment: Delta Society Magazine. 8 (Fall 1990):13-15.

Connell, Cathleen M. and Daniel J. Lago. "Favorable Attitudes toward Pets and Happiness among the Elderly." The Pet Connection: Its Influence on our Health and Quality of Life. Eds. Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart, and Lynette A. Hart. Proc. of Conf. On Human-Animal Bond, 1983, University of Minnesota and University of California-Irvine.

Cusack, Odean and Elaine Smith. Pets and the Elderly: The Therapeutic Bond. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1984.

Cusack, Odean. Pets and Mental Health. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1988.

Delta Society. "About Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy." 29 April 2005. <http://www.deltasociety.org/aboutaaat.htm>

Delta Society. "Healthy Reasons to have a Pet." 30 September 2004. <http://www.deltasociety.org/dsc020.htm>

Delta Society National Service Dog Center. 29 April 2005. <http://www.deltasociety.org/dsb000.htm>

Edney, Anthony T.B. "Companion Animals and Human Health: an Overview." Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine. 88 Dec. 1995: 704-8.

Fine, Aubrey H., Ed. Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice. New York: Academic Press, 2000.

Friedmann, E. "The value of pets for health and recovery." Pets, benefits and practice. Proc. Of Waltham Symposium 20, 1990, Harrogate.

Friedmann, Erika, Sue A. Thomas and Timothy J. Eddy. "Companion animals and human health: physical and cardiovascular influences." Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships Between People and Pets. Eds. Anthony L. Podberscek, Elizabeth S. Paul and James A. Serpell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Granskog, Sharon K. "People and Pets, the Perfect Combination: National Pet Week 2001." Journal of the American Veterinary Medicine Association. 218 Jan. 2000:8-9.

Hart, L.A. "Pets, veterinarians and clients: communicating the benefits." Pets, benefits and practice. Proc. Of Waltham Symposium 20, 1990, Harrogate.

Hoffmann, Rosemary G. "Companion Animals: A Therapeutic Measure for Elderly Patients." Journal of Gerontological Social Work. 18 1991: 195-205.

Jackson, Harry Jr. "Studies help explain human-animal bonding." The Post and Courier. Charleston.net. 26 November 2004. <http://www.charleston.net/cgi-bin/printme.pl>

Jendro, Connie and Charles Watson. "Effect of Pets on Chronically Ill Elderly." The Pet Connection: Its Influence on our Health and Quality of Life. Eds. Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart, and Lynette A. Hart. Proc. Of Conf. On Human-Animal Bond, 1983, University of Minnesota and University of California-Irvine.

McCulloch, Michael J. "Pets in Therapeutic Programs for the Aged." The Pet

Connection: Its Influence on our Health and Quality of Life. Eds. Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart, and Lynette A. Hart. Proc. of Conf. On Human-Animal Bond, 1983, University of Minnesota and University of California-Irvine.

Melson, Gail F. "The Benefits of Animals to Our Lives: Fostering Inter-Connectedness with Animals and Nature: The Developmental Benefits for Children." People, Animals, Environment: Delta Society Magazine. 8 (Fall 1990):15-17.

Okoniewski, Lisa. "A Comparison of Human-Human and Human-Animal Relationships." The Pet Connection: Its Influence on our Health and Quality of Life. Eds. Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart, and Lynette A. Hart. Proc. of Conf. On Human-Animal Bond, 1983, University of Minnesota and University of California-Irvine.

Serpell, J.A. "Evidence for long term effects of pet ownership and human health." Pets, benefits and practice. Proc. Of Waltham Symposium 20, 1990, Harrogate.

Stafford, Kevin and Monika Kyono. "Continuing Education: The benefits of pet ownership." Irish Veterinary Journal. 55 2002: 343-350.

Stallones, Lorann. "The Benefits of Animals to Our Lives: Companion Animals and Health of the Elderly." People, Animals, Environment: Delta Society Magazine. 8 (Fall 1990):18-19.