

Transitioning Registered Handler-Animal Therapy to the Community



Analeah Green, Ph.D., MSW

Setting the Stage: AAA and AAT

- AAA is practiced by professionals as well as volunteers with an animal and consists of informal visits to an individual or a group of people where treatment goals are not specified,
- The volunteer and treatment provider does not track the person's progress, and
- Length of the visit with the animal varies.

Setting the Stage: AAA and AAT

- AAT is practiced by trained individuals and the trained animal is a primary component in goal oriented treatment.
- Goals and objectives are identified and AAT sessions are customized to the person's individual needs.
- AAT sessions are timed and the individual's progress is measured

Research Problem

- The problem is research has yet to explore how individuals who provide animal assisted therapy (AAT) services, regard the concept of community care.
- This lack of knowledge may be a barrier to providing community-based AAT that could be investigated further.

Purpose

- Explore the beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and observations of registered handler-animal therapy individuals
 - ▣ who volunteer their services in New York State in relation to community based AAT.

Formulating the Research Questions

- The goal of this study is to explore and better understand the following:
 - ▣ Reasons for utilizing AAT in institutional settings thus far,
 - ▣ Potential barriers in transitioning to community-based settings, and
 - ▣ The prospective willingness of handlers to volunteer their services in community locations.

Study Framework

- Conceptual: Human Companion Animal Bond (HCAB) – Asserts that one’s attachment to an animal has positive emotional and physical impact (exists throughout the literature)
- Theoretical:
 - Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society)
 - Durkheim’s mechanical (community) and organic solidarity (society)
 - Putnam’s social capital (solidarity/collective wellbeing)

Connection to Current Study

- Communities for aging adults exist in contemporary society
 - Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)
 - Aging-in-place
 - Aging friendly
 - Exploring the motivating factors of handlers (i.e. the pet owners) to practice in community based environments could provide insight into how their services could be incorporated into service delivery plans for aging adults
 - Approximately 72% of NYC's population is comprised of individuals age 60 or older and living in their homes/communities , indicating a need for cost effective/inpatient services

Research Design

- A phenomenological (qualitative) approach that allows for:
 - ▣ In-depth inquiry; open ended questions to obtain rich first hand experiences
 - ▣ Description of an identified lived experience
 - ▣ Insight within a particular context

Empirical in order to:

- Assess prospectively the transition of services to community based settings

Participants

- Homogenous, purposive sampling frame
 - ▣ Access to respondents needed (via public website)
 - ▣ Similar training experience needed from participants for insight and perspective into the tenets of the service (i.e. therapeutic activities, protocol, scheduling)
 - ▣ Similar experience from respondents needed from participants for insight and perspective into the role of the registered handler (i.e. lived experiences, observations, recommendations)

Instruments

- Primary: An exploratory questionnaire created by student researcher (6 closed ended, 13 open ended)
 - Goal: 15-20 responses
- Secondary: 5 follow-up telephone interviews
 - Study participants can opt to do so and provided contact information on questionnaire

Study Procedure

- Call for participation distributed to
 - Manhattan, Queens, Bronx, Staten Island, Brooklyn (NYC)
 - Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange, Putnam, Ulster, and Dutchess counties (NYS)
 - 28 individuals responded to the call for participation
 - 21 returned a consent form
 - 18 individuals provided responses to the electronic questionnaire

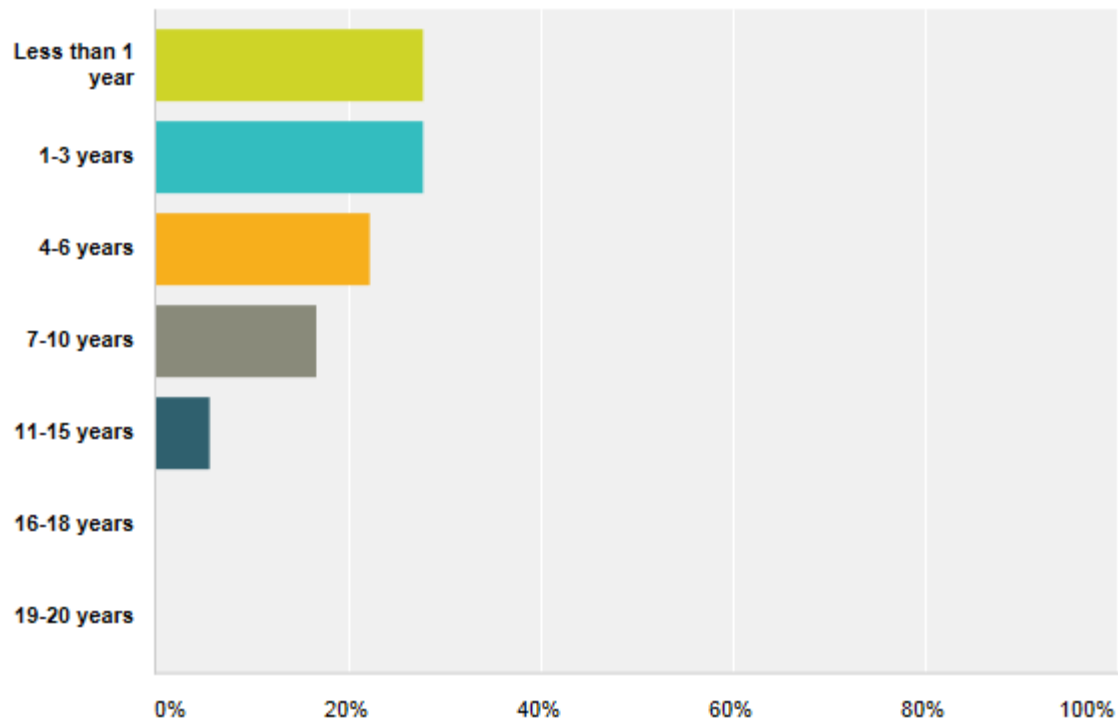
Results: Demographics

- The composition of the 18 respondents included 3 male (16.67%) and 15 female (83.33%). One individual reported being 36-40 years old (5.56%) while the remaining 17 reported being older than 41 years old (94.44%). All respondents (100%) reported being a registered handler being willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview.

Demographics Cont'd

How long have you worked as a registered handler?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0



Data Analysis

- Through pre-coding and coding, the themes identified for this study were:
 - Interaction: provides insight into Research Question 1 in regards to the purpose of this service provided in institutional settings and the potential for similar benefits in community settings.
 - Acceptance: provides insight into Research Question 2 as transitioning into community settings requires acceptance (of the animal and service) from potential clients and agencies
 - Exposure: provides insight in Research Question 3 as increased exposure of the service may assist in the overall understanding of this service in order to volunteer in community settings

Major Findings/Review of Literature

- The human-companion animal bond concept and its positive impact on people was confirmed by study findings.
- Registered handlers reported how animal visits and interactions had fostered rapport building with clients and caregivers managing a chronic condition.

Major Findings/Literature Review

Cont'd

- The theoretical frameworks of Tonnie's Gemeinschaft and Durkheim's mechanical solidarity were confirmed by study findings.
- Respondents reported the significance of community care and its potential impact on the older adult population.
- Moreover, a majority of respondents reported being willing to practice in community based settings demonstrating that shared interpersonal relationships were desired.

Major Findings/ Literature Review

- The theoretical frameworks of Tonnie's *Gesellschaft* and Durkheim's organic solidarity were confirmed and applied to contemporary society.
- Respondents reported that institutional settings are separate and distinct (i.e. specialized) in providing client care and support while serving a social function

Major Findings/Review of Literature

- The conceptual framework of Putnam's social capital was confirmed by study findings.
- Respondents reported the need for personal interaction remains.
- Moreover, the scope of has broadened to include interactions from humans and animals that can involve physical and emotional tasks to promote individual wellbeing

Recommendations for Local Action

- It is recommended that study findings be disseminated to local and city level agencies so there is awareness and exposure of this service (i.e. conferences)
- It is recommended that this service be considered by community based case management organizations in NYS within existing service delivery models or models in development in an effort to address the emotional needs of the rising number of older adults residing in their homes

Implications for Social Change (beyond NYS)

- The aging demographic indicates a growing need for alternatives to inpatient care for individuals.
- Cost effective and community based therapies may be rising in their importance.
- Adds to the existing knowledge base of human service professionals

Reflection / Closing Statements

- While reports and narratives on specific client interactions were provided, what surprised me was that respondents provided insight into broader human services related experiences, including program development, community outreach, and administrative leadership.
- Such insight could be used to improve our communities as well as the lives of the clients we serve

Thank you for coming!



Questions?