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Pet Pals Program: Experiences of Volunteer Residents Providing Friendly Pet Visits to Individuals in a Memory Support Unit

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Dementia - Fifty million people are currently diagnosed. Estimated 82 million by 2030 (WHO, 2017).

Animal Assisted Therapy - Human and animal bond promotes improvement in emotional, social, physical well-being (Kaminski, Pellino, & Wish, 2007).

Community Volunteering - There is a positive relationship between late-life volunteering and health (Tang, Choi, & Morrow-Howell, 2010).

Participants

Residential Volunteers - From Independent Living, had well behaved dogs, and consented/committed to one hour per week.

Residential Participants - Lived in Early Memory Support Unit with diagnosis of dementia. CNA/floor staffing guided me towards appropriate residents. Verbal consents per visit.

Portraits

Portraiture is a method to organize qualitative findings and paints a picture through words to describe meaningful experience that is captured within context and through the lens of the person. The portraits were written by use of observation, conversations with volunteers, and the program's post-survey to display their experience in the Pet Pals Program.

Maggie's
Portraiture
Narrative



- 🐾 It gave her the opportunity to “be myself, to be at ease, and listen to them, and to see how they react to me and Charlie.”
- 🐾 She was excited to help me and stated that “her and Charlie were people persons.”
- 🐾 She stated, “I hope people with problems will experience Charlie's love because of the way he acts and accepts them, and that will make their day better.”
- 🐾 “I meet more people because of Charlie.”

Jim's
Portraiture
Narrative



- 🐾 “Schatzi fills me with joy and fellowship, follows me everywhere. He partially fills the big hole and emptiness left behind when my wife died. My apartment would be desolate and lonely without him.”
- 🐾 He replied “They see that the animal loves them and does not judge them, their hearts are filled with love and joy in return. It gives me joy too.”
- 🐾 He stated “enjoys seeing pets, owners, and patients all happily engaging.”

Anita's
Portraiture
Narrative



- 🐾 She loves to “bring joy to peoples' faces, smiles and laughter in their voices and faces”
- 🐾 She is “eager to continue the program and create relationships with the residents.”
- 🐾 She says, “Teddy brings her joy to her life every day and is very happy to share that with other residents.”

Manualized Intervention

- ▶ Section 1: Dementia and care
- ▶ Section 2: Animal-assisted therapy
- ▶ Section 3: Visitation Protocol
- ▶ Section 4: Activity lists
- ▶ Section 5: Program Brochure

Discussion

- ▶ The Pet Pals Program provided an opportunity for residents to use their personal dogs to renew or create relationships with others and have a sense of meaningful socialization.
- ▶ The uniqueness of the program is designed to promote human-animal interaction with individuals with dementia in the health care facility and those living in independent living.

Relationship to OT

- ▶ OT provides methods of engagement of meaningful activities, roles, and purposeful relationships to enhance health outcomes and quality of life for older adults.