Integrating Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Therapy

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Integrating Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Therapy

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Faculty Mentor: Carlene Johnson OTD, OTR/L
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This presentation is in partial fulfillment of OTD 6680 for a Doctoral Degree in Occupational Therapy

Pet Partners

Pet Partners is the national leader in demonstrating and promoting the health and wellness benefits of animal-assisted therapy, activities, and education.

Mission: To improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond
- Pioneer in training for the human end of the leash
- Creation of CEU’s for general public and soon-to-be professionalized courses in animal behavior and infection control for animals working in healthcare settings
- Provide registration and re-certification every two years for therapy animal handlers
- Supports animal welfare
- Engages volunteers in special initiatives to promote all aspects of public health

Pet Partners is currently working on the creation of a professional association and certification exam for AAI professionals, expecting to launch in early 2022.

Agency Needs

- Internal data on various professional organizations noting the prices and amenities offered through memberships.
- Information about the needs of professionals currently using AAI in practice.
- Relationships and a sense of community between professionals in the field.
- Buy-in for the upcoming professional organization.

Goals

- Develop a certification exam market analysis to learn more about other certifications that are available to professionals in this space and create a spreadsheet with the data.
- Research current literature available to occupational therapists on AAI.
- Interview healthcare professionals and discuss their journey with AAI.
- Build relationships with professionals in the field in hopes to inspire buy-in for AAI.
- Create a written publication based on the data collected from the interviews.

Key Findings

Blazing your own trail: The lack of resources currently available led to many professionals having to develop their own tools and resources to use in practice

Developing an expertise related to animals: Participants spoke about the importance of spending time with and learning about their animal’s behaviors before working together with clients

First-hand accounts of the benefits of AAI: Participants unanimously expressed their belief in the idea that animals have a healing presence

Barriers to AAI: The need to inspire buy-in from colleagues, help with practical considerations regarding AAI, lack of information to protect animal welfare, insurance, lack of resources

Need for information and education: Participants highlighted the significant gap in educational materials, research, and services that are available to professionals seeking to learn about the field

Hopes for the field: Participants are seeking to connect and share ideas with each other. Calls for networking, mentorship opportunities, and a physical place for like-minded individuals to gather were noted as ways to increase exposure and a sense of community for AAI practitioners

Interview Descriptions

Professional Identity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Identity</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
<th>Mental Health Counselors</th>
<th>School Teachers</th>
<th>Professors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Therapists</td>
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<td>Physical Therapists</td>
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Animals Used in Practice

- Over 10 years: 30%
- 5-10 years: 20%
- 1-5 years: 40%
- New to the field: 10%

Deliverables: Resource Guide For AAI in OT

A literature review of current publications in the field including research on AAI directly used with occupational therapy as well as populations that could benefit from AAI.

Provides a variety of resources for occupational therapists to begin the journey of incorporating AAI into practice.

Outcomes

Organization Outcomes
- Evidence for a need for a professional organization
- Interprofessional relationships within the field
- Buy-in for the upcoming certification exam and professional organization

Personal Growth Outcomes
- Interview skills
- Qualitative data analysis skills
- Awareness of the dynamics between therapists in the workplace
- Awareness of the differing of opinions on what OT setting animals are appropriate in
- Opportunity to advocate for OT in an emerging practice area

Future Research

- Continued research within the various health care disciplines pertaining to the incorporation of AAI into practice.
- Development of educational materials on AAI tailored to specific professions.
- Development of resources for professionals at the beginning stages of their journey to incorporating AAI into practice.

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References Available Upon Request