Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions: Professionalizing the Field

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Develop domain mapping spreadsheet to gather data in an organized fashion on the education that is currently available for professionals in AAI. This will help your facility to see awareness about AAI.

Identified Needs
Pet Partners plans to develop a professional association and certification exam with the expected launch date of 2022.

1. Lack of internal data on various professional organizations noting the prices and amenities offered through memberships.
2. Lack of data on current research/education on AAI that is available.
3. Lack of data on the needs of professionals currently using AAI in practice.
4. Lack of community with professionals in the field to inspire buy-in for implementing AAI into their practice.

Mission: To improve human health and well-being through the human-animal bond
• Pioneers training for the human end of the leash
• Creates CEU for both general public and professionals on animal behavior and infection control for animals working in healthcare settings
• Provides registration and re-certification every two years for therapy animal handlers
• Supports animal welfare

Project Process
Developed an understanding for Pet Partners as an organization including their mission, goals, and projected outcomes for the professionalization of AAI

Generated and organized education domain mapping for current textbooks, online courses, CEUs, current articles, and other resources currently available to professionals in AAI

Reviewed current resources and literature from various sources including Pet Partners on AAI to familiarize ourselves with the professional field before interviewing and writing on the subject

Interview Descriptions
• Interviews with professionals from varying disciplines:
  o Recreational therapists
  o Occupational therapists
  o Occupational therapy assistants
  o Physical therapists
• Social workers
  o Mental health counselors
  o School teachers
  o Professors

Topics Covered:
  • Time spent using AAI
  • Areas of expertise
  • Certifications/registrations acquired
  • Barriers
  • Hopes for the future

Interview Takeaways
“Just had to kind of pull it together myself... whatever resources I could think of. I wrote my own policies and procedures. I just did it myself.”

“I think there’s just not enough awareness about animal assisted therapy.”

“We need to know how to promote AAI in a way that will help your facility to see the potential for monetary benefit.”

“‘We need structure.’”

“The population served by interviewing professionals is a 50/50 split. I didn’t teach him to go lay at their feet when they’re crying. I didn’t teach him to put his head on their legs or on their hands when they’re out of control. You can’t teach that. I’ve just seen such a big change in the positivity of how my sessions go.”

“The state of professionalized AAI
• A white paper highlighting the taxing journey from a professional’s perspective that currently use AAI in practice, the barriers they have faced in their career, and their overarching goals for the future of AAI.
• Gives a starting point for how Pet Partners can best support professionals

Resource Guide for AAI in Occupational Therapy
• A literature review of current publications in the field incorporating occupational therapy and AAI
• Resources to begin the journey of incorporating AAI into your occupational therapy practice including
  ▪ Books
  ▪ Online Courses
  ▪ Podcasts

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Belmont University School of Occupational Therapy
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References Available Upon Request