

Belmont University

## Belmont Digital Repository

---

OTD Capstone Projects

School Of Occupational Therapy

---

Spring 4-19-2021

### Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions: Professionalizing the Field

Annie Hudson

annie.hudson@pop.belmont.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.belmont.edu/otdcapstoneprojects>



Part of the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hudson, Annie, "Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions: Professionalizing the Field" (2021). *OTD Capstone Projects*. 81.

<https://repository.belmont.edu/otdcapstoneprojects/81>

This Scholarly Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School Of Occupational Therapy at Belmont Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in OTD Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Belmont Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [repository@belmont.edu](mailto:repository@belmont.edu).



# Occupational Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions: Professionalizing the Field

Annie Kate Hudson, OTD/S

Expert Mentor: Taylor Chastain Griffin, Ph.D.

Faculty Mentor: Carlene Johnson OTD, OTR/L

School of Occupational Therapy, Belmont University

This presentation is in partial fulfillment of OTD 6680 for a Doctoral Degree in Occupational Therapy

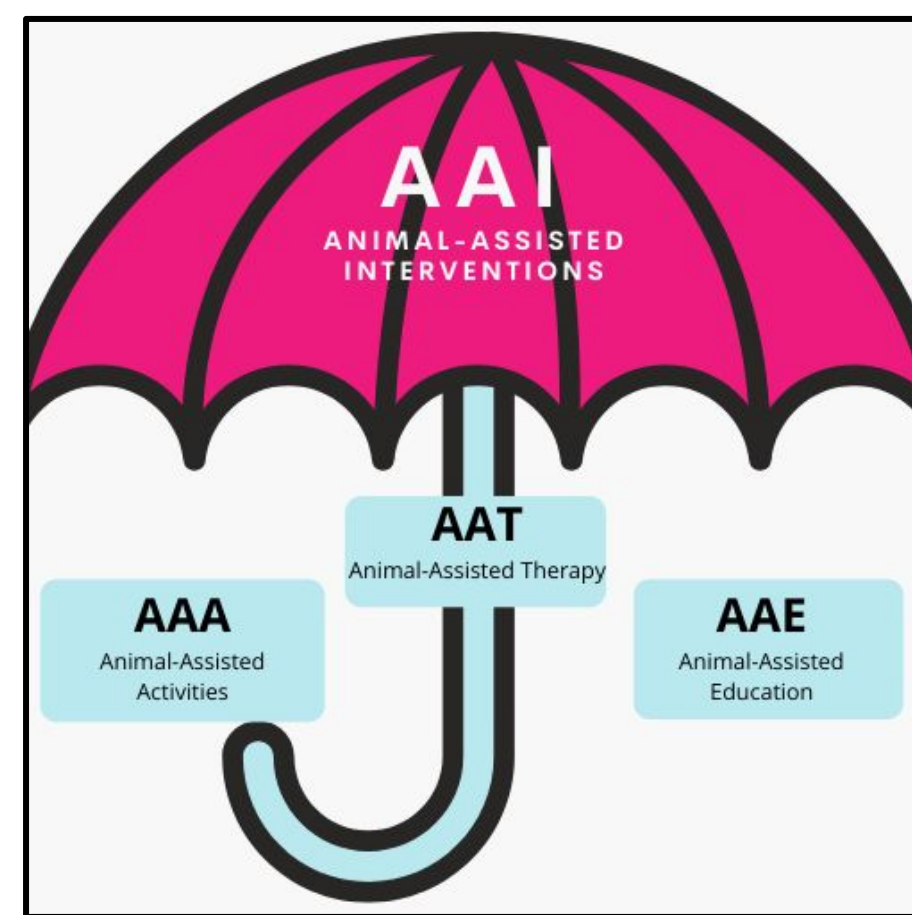


**Pet Partners**  
Touching Lives, Improving Health

## Pet Partners

**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



**AAI (Animal-Assisted Interventions):**  
Goal-oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education and human service providers for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness

## 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 the upcoming professional organization.

## Project Goals

- Develop domain mapping spreadsheet to gather data in an organized fashion on the education that is currently available for professionals seeking to implement AAI into their vocational practice.
- Create a literature review on the current research and educational materials available to occupational therapists seeking to implement AAI into their practice.
- Conduct interviews with a wide range of professionals to learn more about their journey with AAI.

## 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

Developed interview questions pertaining to a multitude of disciplines utilizing AAI

Conducted interviews with a wide range of professionals who are passionate on the field of AAI and sat in on focus groups regarding expansion of the field

Transcribed and organized 191 pages of qualitative interviews, gathered like themes, and constructed publication outlines

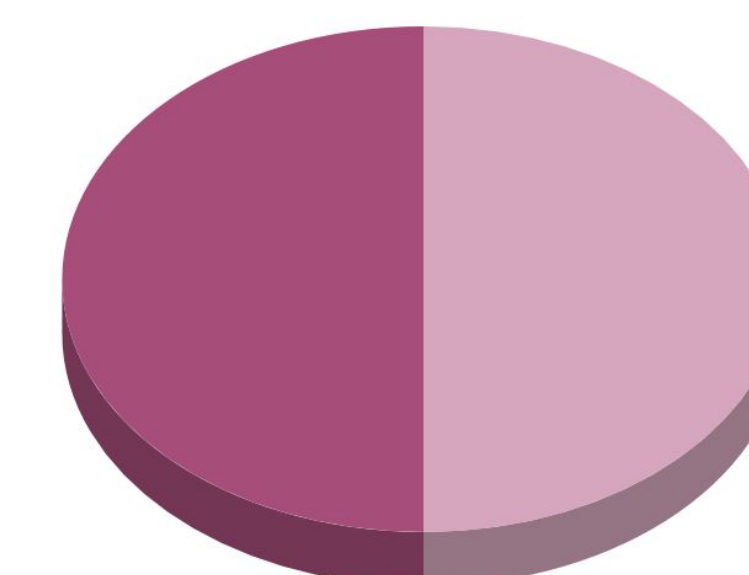
## Interview Descriptions

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

Topics Covered:

- Time spent using AAI
- Areas of expertise
- Certifications/registrations acquired
- Barriers
- Hopes for the future

● Pediatric ● Adult



The population served by interviewing professionals is a 50/50 split

*"I 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."*

## Interview Takeaways

*"We need structure."*

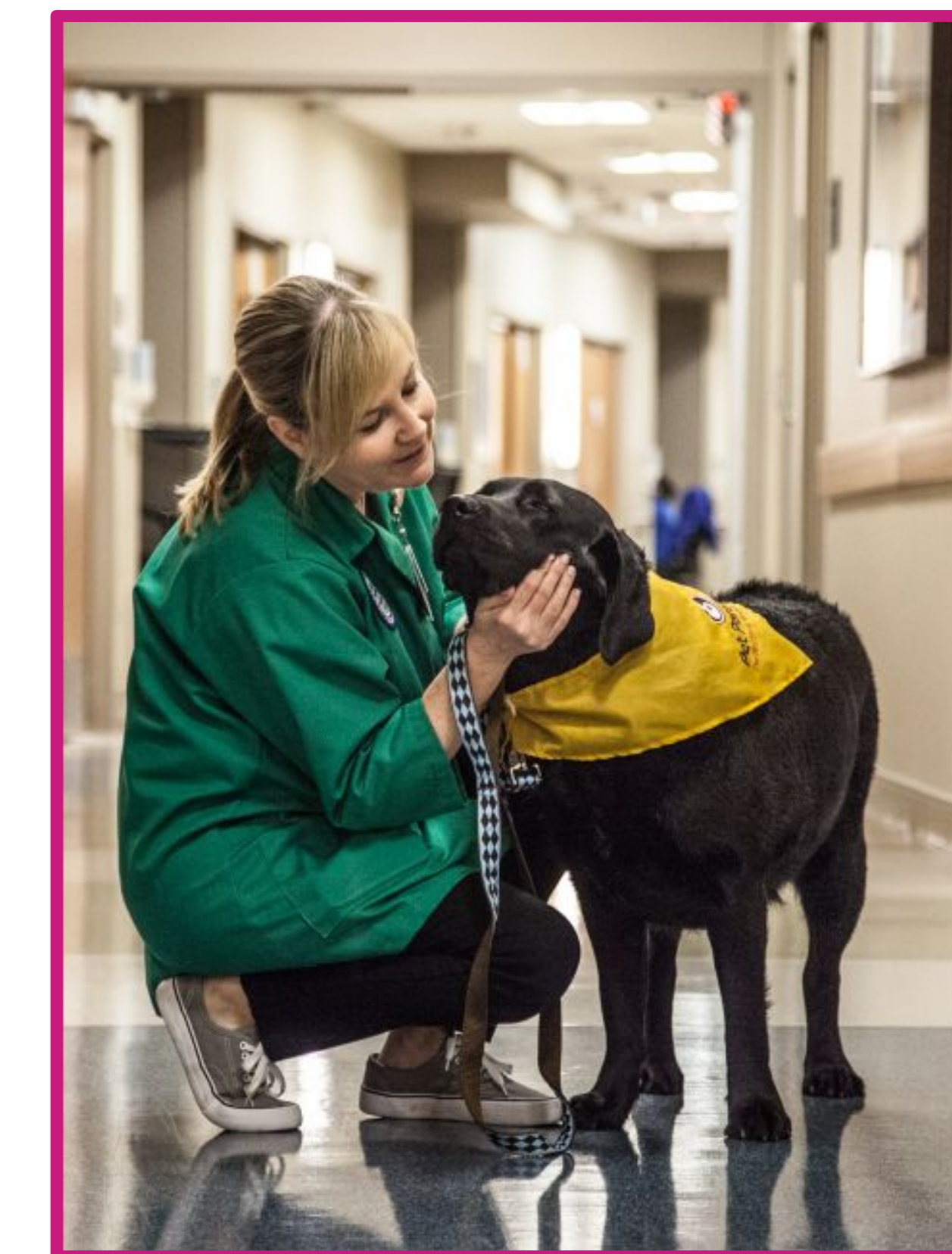
*"There's something innate in them. I didn't teach him to go lay at their feet when they're crying. I didn't teach him to put his head on their legs or on their hands when they're out of control. You can't teach that. I've just I see such a big change in the positivity of how my sessions go."*

## Deliverables

- **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
- **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

## Takeaways

- Advocating for animal welfare when working with AAI
- Continued research in the area of AAI
- Leadership options available in the field of AAI and OT
- Continued training for your therapy animal
- Community among professionals utilizing AAI



## Acknowledgements

**Taylor Chastain Griffin, Ph.D.**

Thank you for your time, guidance, knowledge, and support through this experience. I would also like to thank the Pet Partners faculty and the AAI professionals who were willing to provide their expertise and participate in this study.

**Carlene Johnson OTD, OTR/L**

Thank you for you committing so much time, support, and help. You have pushed me to excel and accomplish more than I thought possible, all the while keeping the focus on OT.

**Belmont University School of Occupational Therapy**

Thank you for providing me with this invaluable experience to delve further into my passion of incorporating animals into my future as an occupational therapy practitioner.

References Available Upon Request