



OT AUSTRALIA

Australian Association of Occupational
Therapists Victoria Inc.

The magazine for Victorian Occupational Therapists

February 2010
ISSUE No 10-12

enabling
people
to participate in everyday
life

Inside...

- 1 For Starters...
- 2 Pamela Kirk
- 3 Cognitive Assessment Workshop
- 4 From Enquiry to Evidence
- 5 Wii console issuings
- 7 CAREX 2010
- 8 The Therapeutic use of Animals in Practice: International Collaboration
- 12 Visitable and adaptable Features in Housing
- 13 BOOK Review
- 14 Interest & Regional Group Meeting Dates
- 13 2010 PD Calendar

Australian Association of Occupational
Therapists Victoria Inc.

Victorian Office
Suite 4, 430 Rae Street
NORTH FITZROY VIC 3068

Ph: (03) 9481 6866
Fax: (03) 9481 6844

The Therapeutic use of Animals in Practice: International Collaboration

Renee Jenkins & Melissa Winkle, OTR/L

Introduction

I recently graduated from the Bachelor of Occupational Science and Therapy Degree with honours at Deakin University, Geelong. Through my honours research project and my love of animals, I became very interested in the use of animals in occupational therapy practice. Full of knowledge and ambition to learn more, I sought out Melissa Winkle, an occupational therapist who is a pioneer in the manner in which she incorporates animals into occupational therapy practice. Melissa offered me the opportunity to complete a three-week post professional continuing education placement at her practice in Albuquerque, New Mexico, America, and I jumped at the offer. Melissa owns and runs Dogwood Therapy Services, an occupational therapy practice that facilitates both animal-assisted therapy as an occupational therapy modality, and assistance dogs as assistive technology options. Animal assisted therapy and assistance dogs are two very different subjects, but mesh well within this practice.

Different categories for the therapeutic use of animals are used by the Delta Society (2009a), a well-known international organisation that offers standards, training guidance and certification for dogs and their handlers who would like to interact with the community on a volunteer basis. They describe different levels in which volunteer or professional teams can participate: Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). Assistance Dogs International is a membership organisation that offers information about standards for trainers, clients and dogs who become part of an assistance dog team (Assistance Dogs International Inc, 2009a).

Animal Assisted Activities (AAAs)

AAA are activities involving an animal that are practiced by educators or volunteers with general therapeutic, educational or recreational

goals for people in mind. AAA includes animal visitation in hospitals or schools. These activities may have a therapeutic effect on the individual but should not be confused with AAT in which specific individualised goals are formed (Parish-Plass, 2008).



Animal Assisted Therapy

AAT is defined by the Delta Society (2009b) as "a goal directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Animal-assisted therapy is directed and/or delivered by a health/human service professional with specialised expertise, and within the scope of practice for his/her profession." Therefore, AAT is practiced by academically trained professionals, such as occupational therapists, with specific individualised therapy goals (Parish-Plass, 2008). AAT is not widely acknowledged in Australia compared to North America, Europe and the United Kingdom where AAT programs are widely used and well established (Moody, King & O'Rourke, 2002).

Research in the area of AAT is limited yet promising. AAT has shown to provide psychological, physiological and social benefits for people with ranging health conditions (Brodie & Biley, 1999). AAT used in occupational therapy sessions has shown to have a number of benefits. A study by Ferresse Foster, Kowalski & Wasilewski, 1998, (as cited in Velde, Cipriani

& Fisher, 2005) which researched occupational therapist's views of AAT found that long term care residents can have physical benefits from AAT such as increased range of motion, better sensory interpretation and a higher tolerance for physical activity when pain is present. Occupational therapists also reported that people with chronic mental illnesses had increased alertness and cognitive ability after participating in occupational therapy incorporating animals. Other reported benefits included enhanced emotional well being of patients, improved social interactions, and that having the dog present created a home-like environment for those people in long-term care settings.

A quantitative study conducted by Sams, Fortney and Willenbring (2006) compared language use and social interaction of children with autism receiving occupational therapy using standard techniques, and occupational therapy incorporating animals. Standard occupational therapy techniques involved activities such as completing puzzles, playing with sensory balls and asking for toys. Occupational therapy incorporating animals involved riding on backs of llamas, guiding llamas through obstacle courses and throwing balls for dogs. The sample consisted of 22 children who received both therapies once a week over a 15 week period whilst at school. Results indicated that children demonstrated significantly greater use of language and significantly greater social interaction in sessions incorporating animals when compared to sessions using standard occupational therapy techniques independently.

Assistance dogs

Assistance dogs are different to the dogs used in AAT. Assistance dogs are trained for individuals with disabilities and are placed with them permanently to help assist with every day tasks (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). Assistance Dogs International describes the various categories of assistance dogs and the

Therapists

assistance that they may be trained to provide: guide dogs, hearing dogs and service dogs (Assistance Dogs International Inc, 2009b).



Guide dogs are placed with people who have vision impairments. The dogs can assist by avoiding obstacles, stopping at intersections and crossing roads. The role of the dog is to ensure their human companions safety (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). Research suggests that guide dogs can benefit individuals by increasing independence, confidence, companionship, social interaction, and mobility (Whitmarsh, 2005).

Hearing dogs assist people with hearing loss by alerting them to a number of sounds. These may include a knock at the door or the sound of a doorbell, alarms, oven timers, smoke alarms, telephones, cry of a baby or a name call (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). A longitudinal study conducted by Guest, Collis & McNicholas (2006) uncovered that recipients of hearing dogs experienced significant reductions in hearing-related problems such as response to environmental sounds; significant reductions in measures of tension, anxiety and depression; and significant improvements in social involvement and independence. These results in many cases lasted up to 18 months after acquiring a dog.

Service dogs may be trained to perform a wide variety of tasks for people with conditions other than visual or hearing disabilities (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). Service dogs can be placed with people who experience physical disabilities. The dogs can assist by opening doors, fetching objects, pulling wheelchairs, turning on/off light switches, provide balance to those who have difficulty walking and finding another person. Service dogs can be trained to meet individual needs. According to Fairman & Huebner (2000) service dogs can benefit individuals by increasing activities of daily living, work activities and leisure activities. Service dogs also showed

to help participants feel safe, increased their social interactions, and reduced physical assistance by others.

Service dogs can also work with people who commonly have seizures (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009) and diabetes. The dogs can call for help using a K-9 rescue phone in which the dog can call 911 (American emergency service) and bark for help, orientate people after an episode, nudge a person who is having an absence seizure, give emotional support, and carry medication and client information. Some dogs have been found to be able to predict a seizure before it occurs. These dogs alert the person in advance so that they can avoid injury. Literature on seizure response dogs is limited. One study conducted by Dalziel et al. (2003) gathered data on the incidence of canine alerting/responding behaviour with patients experiencing epilepsy. A questionnaire, which was divided into the categories of personal information, measures of epilepsy and 63 patients in general completed attitude/opinion towards pets. Twenty-nine owned pet dogs. Nine reported that their dog responded to seizures and three reported that their dogs alerted to seizure onset. Findings suggest that some dogs have an innate ability to alert and/or respond to seizures.

Service dogs may also help people with mental health issues such as post traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). The dogs can provide people with emotional support and companionship and may provide people with the motivation to get out of bed in the mornings. The dogs can check the house and turn on lights in advance to alleviate fear. For people who find it difficult to leave the house the dog can provide a friendly barrier between them and strangers. A study by Esayra and Love (2008) aimed to generate knowledge about how service dogs work with people with mental health conditions. A volunteer sample that had a membership in a Psychiatric Service Dog list serve was recruited via e-mail. Seventy-one participants completed surveys. 84.4% of respondents reported that their psychiatric symptoms had diminished subsequent to canine partnership and 40.4% of respondents reported that their use of psychotropic medication had decreased.

Some service dogs are also trained to work with individuals with autism by decreasing wandering or flight responses and by assisting in daily transitions that the individual may find

difficult (Winkle & Zimmerman, 2009). The use of service dogs for children with autism is a new and growing application (Burrows, Adam & Millman, 2009). Research in this area is therefore needed to prove the efficacy of service dogs for individuals with autism.



My experiences

During the three weeks I spent living and working with Melissa and 9 dogs I gained a huge amount of knowledge on the use of animals in practice through observation, hands on practical experience and guided study. Dogwood Therapy Services primarily works with children and adults of all ages, who have disabilities, on a variety of individual goals. An interesting aspect of Dogwood Therapy Services is that clients can achieve their vocational goals by participating in integrated and community services in after-school programs, vet clinics, grooming salons, pet supply stores and by the collection of pet food for individuals who are home bound and receive meals on wheels. In addition, clients can also learn dog-training methods to assist in training assistance dogs for others in the community who have disabilities. In this manner, people with disabilities are helping to train assistance dogs for other community members who have disabilities, which supports the community model that Dogwood has become well known for.

Many of the sessions I observed were with children and adults with autism. Depending on the client's goals, the client may participate in a number of dog related activities such as grooming the dog, baking treats for the dog, picking fake fleas off the dog, blowing pop corn to the dog through a straw or participating in dog bowling. Dog bowling involves the client setting up bowling pins (recycled water bottles), a bowling lane using tables and giving the command for the dog to "come" and "crash" over the pins. One of my most memorable

experiences was to see the excitement and fun the client was having whilst participating in dog bowling as they worked on goals such as social relationships, sequencing, motor skills, bilateral integration and coordination. Research suggests that animal interaction in occupational therapy sessions can increase client motivation for participation (Ferrese et al., 1998, as cited in Velde et al., 2005).

Another highlight of my placement was observing an assistance dog evaluation. Melissa works with Assistance Dogs of the West, an organisation that trains assistance dogs. The purpose of assistance dog evaluation is to perform a functional evaluation and needs assessment. It creates a profile that is shared with the assistance dog training organizations to ensure that the individual is a good candidate for such a high level option, that they are matched with an appropriately trained dog that will meet their needs, and that the individual is able to meet the dogs needs. Melissa uses the evaluation tool that she created to make a profile of the client which identifies potential barriers that might inhibit the success of the match. She evaluates areas such as whether this person can hold a leash, recall the 90 cues to request the dog perform a task, or even whether they can feed the dog. She then provides the client with strategies to break down identified barriers. Dogwood Therapy Services, Assistance Dogs of the West and a number of other organisations believe this evaluation is important in providing successful and lasting service dog placements. Through continued collaboration with service dog organisations Melissa is participating in proving the validity and reliability of the evaluation tool.

During my placement I also had the opportunity to participate in a two day AniCare child conference. This course provides an intervention for children under 17 who abuse animals (Winkle, 2008). AniCare is based on a variety of theoretical perspectives, including cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic and attachment theory. Generally, it is a psychological, cognitive-behavioural intervention program for preventing cruelty, assessing cruelty and treating animal cruelty. It is important to note also that when working with animals in other programs, all clients need to be assessed prior to participating in animal assisted therapy to determine if they have ever witnessed or participated in cruelty to animals.

Considerations when working with animals

Working in a practice like Dogwood Therapy Services is not all sunshine and puppies. There are a lot of considerations that need to be taken into account before implementing an AAT program, assistance dog program or both.

Dog handler teams may consist of the occupational therapist and their dog or the occupational therapist and a volunteer who owns a trained dog. Either way, at the very minimum, for the sake of liability, dog handlers and their dogs should be certified by the Delta Society or another organisation to ensure that the human-animal team is ready for therapy work (Winkle & Canfield, 2008). The Delta Societies (2009c) certification involves:

1. Completing the Pet Partners team training course
2. Animal health check
3. Team evaluation
4. Complete registration

The limitations of this type of certification is that volunteer insurance does not cover professionals during working hours, dogs are only evaluated in one setting, dogs are not evaluated with all populations and there are no national standards set to evaluate working with children (Walsen, 2009; VanFleet, 2008; Winkle & Canfield, 2008.).



There are a variety of existing international minimum standards available for animal assisted therapy, however Melissa believes that human social service and healthcare professionals should achieve higher standards. She has developed higher standards for the selection of dogs, the training of the dogs and handlers, and the selection of potential clients that will

participate in sessions involving AAT within her own practice, and will propose them at a national level in 2010. My placement involved gathering and including information for that ongoing process and my goal is to have continued collaboration for this development and utilise the same level of standards for Australia.

Lead The Way Animal Assisted Therapy is an Australian organisation that has developed a dog-training program for dogs used in therapy sessions called the Lifestyles Canine Communication System. A key concept of this training program is to teach handlers how to work with their therapy dogs in real life settings, under high levels of distraction and in multiple and often difficult situations that can occur in therapy sessions. A comprehensive assessment is completed on the final day of the five-day intensive training course and handlers receive certificates that attest to the standards of their dogs. Handlers are then recommended to gain certification through an organisation such as the Delta Society and Dogs Victoria for liability purposes (Jones, 2007).

Other considerations before implementing an AAT program should include gaining insurance for the use of animals in practice, animal welfare, client selection criteria and questionnaires, zoonotic disease prevention, continuing veterinary evaluation, training of the dog, and training of the handler to work with the dog (for example, knowledge of animal behaviour and signs of stress in a dog). From living and working for three weeks with nine dogs I gained an understanding of dog behaviour and acknowledge how important it is for the animal handler to have the necessary skills when working with dogs. This is important for clients, visitors, staff and dog safety. I also gained awareness on the qualities a dog must acquire to participate in occupational therapy sessions. According to Jones (2007) dogs that are utilised in therapy session require a high level of sociability and reliability. They must also have a genuine love for people and the temperament to be a 'working' dog. A shy or fearful dog can easily become stressed in a busy and bustling environment day in and day out and is not appropriate to be used in therapy sessions.

Through my experience I have learnt that the dogs need to:

- Be calm and stable in their environments;
- Tolerate clumsy, energetic and out-of-line-of-vision petting;
- Give up a toy in a calm manner;
- Have the ability to be picked up without a fuss;
- Tolerate holding of paws and fingers in ears or nose;
- Respond to positive verbal cues; and
- Take treats gently.



Conclusion

The amount of knowledge and practical experience I gained from the post professional rotation at Dogwood Therapy Services exceeded my expectations. I feel that I am now at a good starting point for entry-level animal assisted therapy program development in practice. From observing the connection between the clients and the dogs, it helped me understand just how beneficial this type of occupational therapy modality can be for achieving client goals. I aim to keep updating my skills in this area and one day incorporate dogs into my work practices. For those interested in integrating animals into their practice I suggest studying human-animal bond, client selection, animal selection and behaviour, animal welfare issues, and zoonosis. This innovative area of occupational therapy practice is exciting and full of potential that those with a love of animals should definitely consider.

References

- Assistance Dogs International Inc. (2009a). Assistance Dogs international Inc. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from <http://www.assistance dogsinternational.org/index.php>
- Assistance Dogs International Inc. (2009b). About Assistance Dogs. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from <http://www.assistance dogsinternational.org/aboutAssistanceDogs.php>
- Brodie, S. J., & Biley, F. C. (1999). An exploration of the potential benefits of pet-facilitated therapy. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 8(4), 329-337.
- Burrows, K. E., Adams, C. L., & Millman, S. T. (2008). Factors affecting behavior and welfare of service dogs for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 11, 42-62.
- Dalziel, D., Uthman, B., McGorray, S., & Reep, R. (2003). Seizure-alert dogs: A review and preliminary study. *Seizure*, 12, 115-120.
- Delta Society. (2009a). Our Society. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from, <http://www.deltasociety.org/Page.aspx?pid=251>
- Delta Society. (2009b). Animal Assisted Therapy. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from, <http://www.deltasociety.org/Page.aspx?pid=320>
- Delta Society. (2009c). How to become a registered pet partners team. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from, <http://www.deltasociety.org/Page.aspx?pid=261>
- Esnayra, J., & Love, C. (2008). A survey of mental health patients utilizing psychiatric service dogs. Retrieved November 15, 2009, from, <http://www.psychdog.org/research.html>
- Fairman, S., & Huebner, R. (2000). Service dogs: A compensatory resource to improve function. *Occupational therapy in healthcare*, 13(2), 41-51.
- Jones, M. G. (2007). Training your dog. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from, <http://www.tlw.com.au/training.php>
- Lane, D., MicNicholas, J., & Collis, G. (1998). Dogs for the disabled: Benefits to recipients and welfare of the dog. *Applied animal behaviour sciences*, 59, 49-60.
- Martin, F., & Farnum, J. (2002). Animal-assisted therapy for children with pervasive developmental disorders. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 24(6), 657-670.
- Moody, W. J., King, R. K., O'Rourke, S. (2002). Attitudes of paediatric medical ward staff to a dog visitation programme. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 11(4), 537-544.
- Parish-Plass, N. (2008). Animal-assisted therapy with children suffering from insecure attachment due to abuse and neglect: A method to lower the risk of intergenerational transmission of abuse. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 13, 7-30.
- Sams, M. J., Fortney, E. V., & Willenbring, S. (2006). Occupational therapy incorporating animals for children with autism: A pilot investigation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 60(3), 268-274.
- VanFleet, R. (2008). *Play therapy with kids & canines: Benefits for children's developmental and psychosocial health*. Sarasota: Professional Resources Press.
- Velde, B. P., Cipriani, J., & Fisher, G. (2005). Resident and therapist views of animal-assisted therapy: Implications for occupational therapy practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 52, 43-50.
- Walsen, C. (2009, November/December). The need for standard behavioural screening for therapy dogs working with children. *The APD Chronicle of the Dog*, 25-28.
- Whitmarsh, L. (2005). The benefits of guide dog ownership. *Visual impairment research*, 7, 27-42.
- Winkle, M. (2008, June 30). Animal Assisted Therapy: Using AAT in corrections and residential facilities. *OT Practice*, 13(11), 20-22.
- Winkle, M. & Canfield, K. (2008, March 31). Considerations for using animals in practice. *OT Practice* 13(5), 33-34.
- Winkle, M.; Zimmerman, B., (2009, March 23). An assistive technology option: Assistance dogs. *OT Practice*, 14, (5), 14-16.
- Insert VNI_NHMRC CDA Flyer A4.1/2 page..... or ¼ page

Attention all members

To ensure you don't miss out on important news and information, please ensure you have provided your current email address via the member area of the OT AUSTRALIA Victoria website.

It is important that you apply for member access to register your email address so you receive all electronic communication from OT AUSTRALIA Victoria and able to access all Interest Groups.

To apply for Website Member Access:

Please go to www.otausvic.com.au and click the Apply for Member Access button on the home page and follow the instructions given. The application and approval process should take less than 2 working days. Please make sure you select your areas of interest so you can get automatic email alerts whenever an article of interest to you appears on the website.

To edit your user details

Go to www.otausvic.com.au, login as a member, click on the Edit User Details button and update the relevant details, including areas of interest for automatic email alerts.

PLEASE NOTE: You will also need to notify the association at membership@otausvic.com.au of any changes to your personal details so our database can be updated accordingly.

If you have any queries or trouble logging on, please ring Elaine on 9481 6866 or email:

membership@otausvic.com.au