

Pet therapy is a low cost, low tech, low maintenance activity that improves mood and provides meaningful interactions for residents. It can be a positive experience for residents with cognitive impairment and intact cognition. Numerous residents were avid pet owners prior to admission to a personal care home and appreciate being able to reconnect with a pet.

Pet therapy has the ability to decrease: agitation, loneliness and boredom.

Pet therapy has the ability to increase: self-esteem, verbal communication, social skills, interactions with others and exercise.

Many studies have been conducted in order to prove results that are congruent with the above statements. According to Kawamura,(2007), there is observable improvement in reducing resident anxiety levels, concentration and motivation when pets are introduced to the pch environment.

Misericordia Place and Misericordia Interim Care have three dedicated dogs providing pet visits/therapy to our residents: Oh Henry, Ollie and Jesse. There are also numerous family and friends who bring their pets to visit specific residents. It has been observed that many residents benefit from those visits also.

At Misericordia Place an average of 40% of the residents have interactions with the three named dogs. Visits can range from as short as 5 minutes to 30 minutes, depending on the situation. Visits may be scheduled based on a unit request, a family request or occur spontaneously.

Visits were observed and documented by a Social Worker student over a one month period. The student spent time observing the residents pre and post pet visit.

Resident #1: Resident often shows signs of distress, getting easily frustrated and upset. She yells and swears at staff and rarely smiles. Prior to pet visit she presented as frustrated, stating she wanted to get out of here and throwing items.

When the pet arrived on the unit she immediately smiled, stating what a beautiful animal...he is so cute. She began petting him gently and laughing. She exhibited joy and contentment, solely focused on the dog.

Resident #2: Resident had been declining for a couple of weeks and was now at end of life. Prior to her decline she had weekly visits with the dog. Family contacted MP to request the dog visit during the palliative process. He was brought to her room on 3 occasions to sit on her bed. Resident responded by gently petting him.

Resident #3: Resident, prior to pet visit, was screaming and displaying fear and distress. In the presence of the dog she immediately stopped yelling, started talking to the dog and showing him love and affection. Once the dog leaves she reverted to her screaming.

Resident #4: Resident was observed wandering the hallway, distant look on her face. When spoken to she didn't respond. When the dog arrived for the visit she began smiling, stating how lucky the owner was, talking about his sweater. She engaged in conversation for 15 minutes.

Resident #5: Resident was quietly sitting in the common area. When the dog came onto the unit she called him over, stating with joy, "I used to have dogs all the time. I miss them so much." She spent time reminiscing about her life.

These are just a few examples of the outcomes of pet therapy at MHC/MP.

There is great value to having pets available for residents to interact with. It enhances quality of life and addresses the many losses experienced by residents.