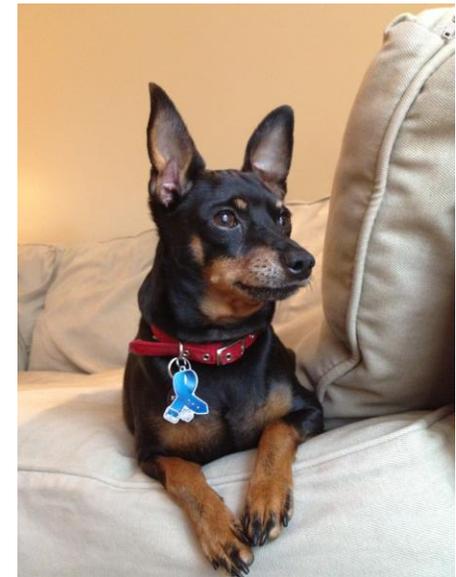


Animal Assisted Therapy for Trauma Survivors
VAWC Scholarship Colloquium Presentation
May 14th, 2014
Brady Root



Objectives

- Develop an understanding of various modalities that utilize trained therapy dogs
- Investigate impact of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) on trauma response including development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Observe research, goals and implications
- Explore innovative techniques available with AAT



Couples Counseling, San Diego

Introduction

- History of animal use in therapy and trauma response:
 - Animal visitation programs existed in hospitals as early as 1919 (Palley, O'Rourke & Niemi, 2010).
 - In the 1940s animals were used to help veterans after World War II
 - In 1962, Boris Levinson, a child psychologist noticed that his dog had a significant impact on withdrawn and unresponsive children (Hamama et al.,2011)



K9 Disaster Relief



Intermountain Therapy Animals



Therapy Dogs International

Forms and Goals of Animal Therapy

Animal Assisted Crisis Response (AACR)

- Goals: normalize the experience, provide a calming agent, establish rapport and help develop a therapeutic alliance (Anderson & Scott, n.d.)

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT)

- Goals: reduce isolation, brighten mood and affect, address grieving and loss, improve self esteem and socialization, decrease overall anxiety, learn appropriate touch and lessen depression (Hamama et al., 2011)

Animal Assisted Activities (AAA)

- Goals: motivation, education, recreation and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life (Anderson & Scott, n.d.)

Animal-Assisted Prolonged Exposure (AAPE)

- Goal: incorporate existing PTSD treatment with animal-assisted therapy to encourage survivors to complete the treatment by making the task less daunting (Lefkowitz, Paharia, Prout, Debiak & Bleiberg, 2005).

Impacts and Considerations

- Impacts include: lowered anxiety and increased trust-building provided by the unconditional, accepting, and supportive nurturing environment provided by a trained animal (Hamama et al., 2011).
- Pet ownership for survivors to establish a loving relationship, regain control and provide sense of safety (Lefkowitz et al., 2005).
- Cultural competency
 - Language barriers
 - Cultural status of animals
 - Personal Preferences



Research and Theoretical Framework

- Dietz, Davis, Pennings (2012)
 - Children in group therapy with therapy dogs showed significant decrease in trauma symptoms as well as significantly more change than those in groups without therapy dogs.
- Hamama et al. (2011)
 - Studied the effects of canine therapy on female adolescents who experienced physical or sexual trauma but were not cooperative with current individual interventions.
 - Results were a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms and a reduction in risk for developing PTSD. In qualitative response, the study found that a sense of control and mastery were gained due to the canine assistance in the group.

Theoretical Frameworks

- Objects Relations Theory
- Biophilia Hypothesis, which concludes that humans have a heightened awareness of, and interest in animals and plants because of the evolutionary relationship (Lefkowitz et al., 2005)
- Attachment Theory and Social Role Theory (Anderson & Scott, n.d.)

Implications for Social Work Practice

- Current therapeutic interventions: Long term group or individual therapy for survivors of trauma that incorporate AAT in conjunction with exposure therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, or empowerment therapy.
- Future potential: Animal-assisted intervention that occurs when sexual assault victims seek health related services (in conjunction with current empowerment driven crisis advocacy)
 - Potential to reduce PTSD symptoms by reducing re-traumatization and discomfort as well as vicarious trauma in advocates
- Sexual Assault Response Team would incorporate the option to have a therapy dog present during process
 - Research in animal companionship has shown reduction in physiological stress responses such as elevated heart rate and blood pressure (Friedmann, Katcher, Thomas, Lynch & Messent, 1983).
 - One study found patients' fear of medical treatment reduced 37% after brief session of AAT (Banks & Banks, 2002).



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