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## The Role of Occupational Therapy Practitioners in the Care of Pets and Animals: A Guide to Aging in Place with Pets and Animals

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## The Role of Occupational Therapy Practitioners in the Care of Pets and Animals: A Guide to Aging in Place with Pets and Animals

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### BACKGROUND

Occupational therapy practitioners may neglect to address the care of pets and animals among older adults which has been referred to as the “forgotten” instrumental activity of daily living (IADL) for this population (Fields & Kogan, 2019, p. 499).

### PROBLEM

Barriers exist that hinder the ability of older adults to safely and independently perform the occupation of caring for a pet or animal. Those challenges may result in relinquishment of the pet or animals which limits the years that older adults can experience the health benefits of occupational engagement in the care of pets or animals.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this program is to conduct a needs assessment of older adults who own pets or animals and provide education on strategies and resources to extend pet and animal ownership for older adults.

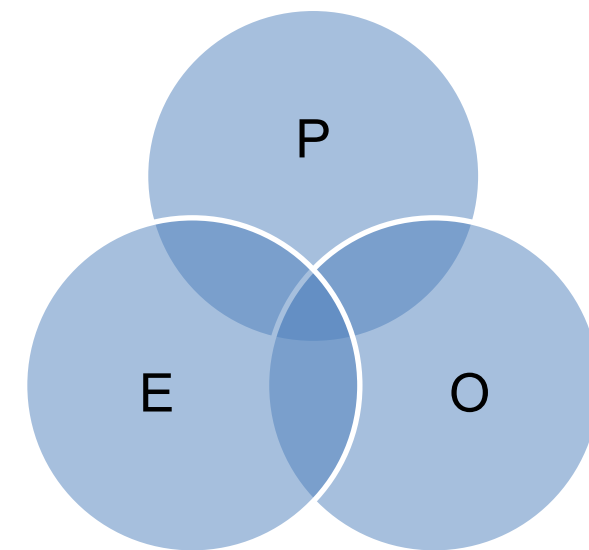
### Outcome Objective

The outcome objective of this program is to learn about older adults who have pets and animals, learn what problems that have in performing this occupation, discover how to help them to address these problems so that they can become independent, and then share that with Cathedral Square which represents 27 independent living, assistive living, and special-purpose housing communities.

### Process/Methods

#### Theoretical Framework Behind Process/Methods:

Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model



This model was chosen due to its compatibility with using the modified approach to occupational therapy intervention.

#### Program Participants:

There were eight participants in this program which included seven Cathedral Square residents and one SASH participant.

#### Process/Methods Steps:

- The needs assessment was conducted through surveys and individual and group discussions with participants as well as Cathedral Square staff members.
- The multi-faceted education product was designed through themes that emerged among the participants as being the most prevalent barriers to successful participation in the care of pets and animals.
- The effectiveness of this program was evaluated through conversations with participants on what strategies to improve occupational performance in this occupation were proven to be most effective.
- The education components were then compiled into a resource guide to be accessed by Cathedral Square communities to extend participation and improved performance in the care of pets and animals.

### PROGRAM

#### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

##### Program Modules:

This resource guide provided strategies on improving performance in the care of pets and animals among older adults by addressing six topic areas:

1. Dementia/memory- Setting reminders to feed and water pets and animals.
2. Orthopedic limitations- Simplifying tasks of taking care of pets and animals to accommodate physical impairments.
3. Balance/endurance issues- Increasing frequency and reducing intensity of maintaining litter box to reduce time spent bending over.
4. Financial restrictions- Securing reduced prices for costs associated with the care of their pets and animals, including veterinary expenses.
5. Transportation/access- Identifying how to arrange appointments for yearly checkups at veterinary clinics.
6. Volunteer program- Outlining a volunteer position, including among Cathedral Square residents.

##### Strategy Implementation:

1. Supported care of pets and animals among older adults using strategies that encompassed one or more modules based on their performance limitations, including assistive technology, environmental modifications, and proper body mechanics.
2. Delivered strategies to other Cathedral Square residents who participate in this occupation as well as SASH coordinators and wellness nurses to facilitate extended pet or animal ownership for their clients as part of their prescribed “healthy living plan”.
3. Recorded an audiovisual slide show presentation that references handout for Cathedral Square residents to watch as part of their “Stay Healthy Learning Series” which are posted self-managements on YouTube.

##### Targeted and Anticipated Outcomes:

The OTS prevented the relinquishment of at least 2 of the 8 participants’ pets.

### Conclusions / Future Directions

The OTS identified and learned about how occupational therapy practitioners can facilitate increased participation and improved performance in the care of pets and animals as means and ends to purposeful interventions among older adults. The future directions of this program are that the OTS will be helping to expand upon Cathedral Square’s relationship with the departments of psychology and social work at the University of Vermont, Champlain College, and St. Michael’s College in Northwest Vermont by establishing an “Aging in Place with Pets and Animals” part-time internship program. The OTS will also be helping to expand upon the Area Agency on Aging for Northwest Vermont’s (Age’s Well’s) Meals on Wheels program through developing a “Meals on Wheels for Pets and Animals” program.

#### References

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