An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
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ABSTRACT

by

Anna L. Talbot

This research project is a review of literature about utilizing a therapy animal, specifically a therapy cat, within a school library. Since the options of hypoallergenic cats are now available, they can be used in schools to reduce worries about cat allergies. The strengths of using this animal-assisted therapy program will be discussed at length. Desirable cat characteristics will be discussed by project innovators who decide on the right cat for the therapy program. Training the staff members and animal with the help of Pet Partners will be explained. Then further instructional approaches for the therapy program will be discussed along with the option of collaborating with teachers. The evaluation of the therapy program describes the expectations of the therapy cat program.
THERAPY CAT IN THE LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Some students need unconditional love in order for them to enjoy school. The Animal-Assisted Therapy program could provide this unconditional love with a therapy pet to motivate students throughout the school year. Animal-Assisted Therapy programs have integrated and utilized different types of animals throughout the years. Therapy dogs have already been integrated with reading programs and have become popular within schools. Schools were not allowed to have therapy cats included in their therapy program due to common cat allergies. Since hypoallergenic cats are now available, schools have the opportunity to have a therapy cat in their therapy program. The goal of this study is to describe how a cat would integrate well within an animal therapy program in the library.

Purpose of the Study

Literature reviewed describes the steps to start and implement a therapy program within the library. The purpose of this research was to find out the different ways to utilize pet therapy within the library. A therapy pet within the library would increase library usage and student loyalty. Research literature shows that students became interested in breaking the barriers that may have prevented them from reaching their full potential. Research also describes how an animal therapy program promotes collaboration between the librarian and the teachers. In addition, therapy pets increased student achievement by improving their self-confidence, reading level, and attitudes towards school.
Research Questions

These research questions aided the research process. These questions were researched in order to determine the needs of a therapy pet within the library, specifically the therapy cat.

1. How do school personnel choose an animal for pet therapy and specifically, a therapy cat?
2. How does a pet therapy program affect student achievement?
3. How do school personnel implement a cat therapy program?

Limitations of Study

There were a few limitations with this research project. Even though library cats are popular, there was not a lot of research that involved the benefits of therapy cats. Once LifeStyle Pets’ Allerca cats are utilized for therapy cats, this factor will change. Another limitation is that the observation research described in this project was not collected by me. If I were able to observe a therapy cat program, it would give me a greater understanding the functionality of the therapy program.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used frequently within the paper. Terminology is defined as a guide to clarify meaning within the paper.

Animal-assisted therapy: An animal assisted by its handler that possesses a calm, collected personality that interacts with therapy patients. The animal acts as a diversion for the therapist and breaks down the barriers for patients to work on their goals during the therapy sessions.
Collaboration: Instruction from two or more people who work together to improve the instruction process.

Handler: A person who has gone through certification in order to control an animal during the pet therapy. This person is typically the animal’s owner.

Pet therapy: “(T)he use of trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients; also called animal-assisted therapy” (“Pet Therapy” 2012)

Therapy pet: Any animal that has been certified by an animal assisted therapy organization.

**Research Design**

Research was conducted to investigate animal-assisted therapy, particularly therapy cats, and how to implement a cat therapy program within a school. No original research was performed. Only literature related to therapy cats was reviewed for the purpose of this research study. Articles were retrieved using the following journals: *Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling and School Settings*, *Counseling and Values*, *Childhood Education*, *Cross Currents*, *Family Process*, *Journal of Applied of Gerontology*, *North American Journal of Psychology*, and *Reference Librarian*. Research terms included “pet therapy,” “hypoallergenic cat,” “animal-assisted therapy,” and “benefits of pet therapy.”

**Conclusion**

This research study has three chapters that explore animal-assisted therapy. Animal-assisted programs are introduced in chapter 1. The second chapter is a review of literature on the topic of animal therapy and, specifically, therapy cat programs. Chapter 3 has answers to the research questions introduced in chapter 1.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

All students need positive reinforcement to improve their attitudes towards themselves, their school, and their community. With the unconditional love provided by the therapy pet, students might be more able to overlook or overcome the stress present in their daily lives at school (“School Settings” 3). Having interaction with a therapy pet is also relaxing, making students more comfortable within the school environment (“School Settings” 3). The research presented in this paper supports having a therapy cat in the school library to improve students’ well-being. The library is an ideal place to house the cat, as all of the students in the school will have access to it. Research indicates a therapy cat will entice students to visit the library and read. The objectives of this research paper are to describe animal-assisted therapy, discuss therapy cats in particular, and describe the steps to implement the therapy program into a school.

Description and Benefits of Pet Therapy

Pet therapy in school involves a trained pet that assists with therapy to students. According to Dictionary.com, therapy can include “any act, hobby, task, program, etc., that relieves tension” (2012.) Kathleen Kelley, a pet therapy trainer said, “The (therapy) animal can take a patient’s mind off pain, provide comfort, and event boost the immune system” (Qtd. In McGraw). Several types of animals can be used for pet therapy. The training of the pet makes the difference in how people respond to the therapy program. Pets provide nonjudgmental, unconditional love, so therapists use animals to help patients deal with depression, loneliness, and traumatic events (McVarish 18). Therapy pets give individual attention to the clients which restores self-confidence.
“Human-animal bond” is a term created by three veterinarians, Stanley Diesch, Robert K. Anderson, and William McCulloch in 1977 (Anderson 7). These gentlemen co-founded Delta-Society which is now also known as Pet Partners (Anderson 7). The human-animal bond is the connection between the animal and the human. “Bonds with pets offer comfort, affection, and a sense of security” (Walsh 482). Cynthia Chandler, Ed.D is a counseling professor at the University of North Texas, and is the founder of the Center for Animal-Assisted Therapy. She describes how the animal bond allows a person to befriend the therapy pet. Many clients prefer going to a therapist with an animal because it helps them relax and open up during a session (Animal Assisted Therapy 17).

There are many benefits of pet therapy. Pets are sensitive to people’s moods and feelings. Pets build attachments with people, as people build attachments to pets. Since communication is not necessary to bond with the animal, this type of therapy works well with nonverbal students, (Arkow 3) or students who are not fluent in English. Therapy pets are also nonjudgmental and do not care about the popularity of the person or his or her physical appearance (Arkow 2). Therapy pets can also be a diversion in anxious situations (Arkow 3). The therapy pet allows each individual to relax and feel comfortable while dealing with the issue at hand. The therapy pet increases self-confidence, happiness, and a sense of being protected (Janssen 41). Pet therapy has had many positive effects on patients, especially on children (Pugh). Dr. Levinson found that children are able to adjust better psychologically to other people with pet therapy (Cited in Altschiller 4).

Pet therapy might also prevent the students from acting out. Since the pet provides unconditional love, the student may be able to resolve an issue by simply petting and talking to a
therapy pet. The therapy pet has an empathic approach which evokes a positive reaction to resolve the student’s problem. Students need to feel that they are loved (“School Settings” 3). The therapy pet’s unconditional love may also help dissuade student violence (“School Settings” 7). By having the affection of a therapy pet, the students think they are valuable members of the school community.

Therapy animals also have physiological effects on people. Studies have shown that petting or talking to a pet lowers blood pressure (Arkow 3). One college psychology class of 62 students, 28 male and 34 females, were tested for their blood pressure after sitting with a cat or dog in their lap for 5 minutes (Somervill, Kruglikova, Hanson, and MacLin 522).

Out of the 61 participants, 53 (85%) reported that they liked dogs, only 2 (3.2%) reported that they disliked dogs, and 6 (9.7%) reported they neither liked nor disliked dogs. Cats were not as popular; 40 (64.5%) reported that they like cats, 7 (11.3%) disliked cats, and 14 (22.6%) neither liked nor disliked cats.” (525).

Studies with the experiment showed that most individuals’ blood pressure dropped during those 5 minutes (526). Studies also showed that there were no differences in physiological responses from the dog or the cat (526). Females had a decrease in systolic blood pressure but an increase in pulse rate after holding the animal (526). The study did not mention the men’s pulse rate results. Wilson speculated that pets give off positive feelings that allow people to stay calm during stressful situations (Wilson 189).

Therapy pets have been used to help treat depression. Depression can diminish self worth in a person. Depressive disorders have been apparent in 1.9% to 3.4% of students in early elementary education and 3.2% to 8.9% of adolescents (Mehler-Wex & Kölch, 150). According
to Mehler-Wex and Kölch, adolescents’ depressive episodes are typically shorter periods of time compared to adults, but 1/3 of those adolescents have a relapse occur within three months (150). Children and adolescents do not show normal signs of depression like adults. There have not been any case study results on treating childhood depression with pet therapy; however, it has proven affective with adults. People with depression intermingle with others less than those who do not have depression, but therapy pets will make contact with them out of curiosity (McCardle 147). Studies showed that the animal bond provided people who suffer from depression with the comfort of thinking that the animal cared about them (McVarish 15). Even though McVarish conducted studies on using pet therapy on depressed individuals within hospitalized institutional setting, this information might be beneficial to the school environment as well.

Therapy pets are known to ease the pain of traumatic events for students. After the May 1998 school shootings in Springfield, Oregon, Thurston High School welcomed Bear, a husky dog that belonged to Cindy Ehlers from Eugene, Oregon (Altschiller 10). Mental Health Counselors discovered that Bear had a calming and therapeutic effect on students (Altschiller 10). Students were able to respond positively to pet therapy with Bear even though students did not respond to other types of therapy after this tragic event (Altschiller 10). After traumatic events each person reacts differently. Therapy is only successful when the therapy is right for that person. Pet therapy helped some of these students to recover from this type of trauma.

Therapy pets are beneficial to clients with emotional and disturbed behaviors. Psychologists at Colorado State University conducted case studies with two emotionally disturbed boys, ages 11 and 12 (Altschiller 10). These psychologists worked for three months with these boys using therapy dogs, having the boys teach their dogs obedience (Altschiller 10).
The psychologists discovered these boys found self-confidence from their interactions with the therapy dogs (Altschiller 10). The boys’ behavior improved after the treatment. They were able to pay attention in class, improve their social skills, and their control aggressive behavior (Parshall 49). These case studies concluded that emotionally disturbed children can benefit from therapy pets (Altschiller 10). The therapy pet builds the animal bond with the clients in order for the client to break down the barrier and work on their therapy. With these case studies, animal assisted therapy has proven to be successful in benefitting the children.

Therapy dogs have been integrated into schools’ reading programs to improve the students’ reading skills. According to Kurtz, “Researchers determined that subjects found having a close friend present when performing a stressful task were much more reactive than when they performed the task alone. The presence of their pet, on the other hand, decreased their reactivity to almost zero” (13). The handler brought the therapy dog into the classroom for the reading program. Oral reading was conducted in which the student read a book out loud to the dog. This provides intrinsic motivation for the student, and oral reading will improve the students’ reading comprehension (Kurtz 8). If the book becomes too difficult to read the handler will suggest another book to read (Jalongo 154). Some handlers let the dog perform a trick after the student finished reading a book (157). This provokes intrinsic motivation for the students.

In a case study using Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.), provided by Intermountain Therapy Animal, students who were academically at risk were assisted with therapy dogs. At Bennion Elementary School in Utah, the students were divided into two culturally diverse groups from ages 5 to 9 years old (Jalongo 156). The students improved on
their reading scores and grades after the two years of intervention. Research showed that students
decreased their absenteeism and increased library usage (156).

**Therapy Cats**

Cats make ideal therapy pets. Most people have been around a cat sometime within their
lifetime. A cat has a life expectancy of 15 years (Arkow 24). Since the cat’s life expectancy is so
long, it would make the therapy program long term. Cats vary in size but they are smaller than
most dogs. Cats are known for their independence, and they are easily entertained. Cats do not
need to be watched closely like other animals. They do not make as much noise as a dog. They
are quick on their feet which make them less vulnerable to getting hurt. They also do not need to
be relieved outside like a dog. Maintenance for a cat is easier than for dogs, which means the
school can have simple procedures for caring for it. For monthly supplies a cat only needs food,
water, and cat litter. This makes the cat easy to maintain as a therapy animal for the school.

**Hypoallergenic Cats**

Allergies are the chief reason cats are not viewed as therapy pets. Approximately 15% of
the population suffers from pet allergies, and more people are allergic to cats than to dogs
(Griffiths 1). However there is a new type of cat breed that can be used for the therapy program.
It is called the hypoallergenic cat. These cats have been bred since 2006 by the company Allerca.
Allerca has found a glycoprotein called Fel d 1 that is produced in the skin and saliva of the cat
(Flaim). Allerca has discovered a way to remove this glycoprotein from the cat’s genetics.
According to Allerca website, Allerca has a 95% success rate with customers who are allergic to
cats (Lifestyle Pets 2012).
Allerca cats are supervised by a full time veterinarian and are heavily socialized with the other cats within their facility. Then the cat will be released at twelve weeks old, micro chipped, and spayed or neutered. The cat will also have Softpaws covering their claws (see more about Softpaws in the discussion below on claws).

Allerca has two types of hypoallergenic cats, the Allerca and the Ashera cat. The Allerca cat would be the best fit for a therapy cat. Allerca cats are normal size. As of 2011 the Allerca GD (Genetic Divergences) cat is $6,950 (Lifestyle Pets 2012). The price might seem high, but when viewed across the 15 year lifespan of the cat, this is less that $500 a year for the Allerca cat.

There is a 30-day guarantee on Allerca cats. If the customer does not want the cat, the company will make a full refund. He will let the customers return the cat and will let another

Picture of Allerca Cat

customer adopt it afterwards (Flaim). There is also a year warranty on the hypoallergenic cat if death from sickness or accident occurs (Lifestyle Pets 2012).

Claws

Cat claws may be considered safety hazards. Safety is always an issue when having a cat around children. Cat claws can scratch children, and destroy carpet and furniture within the facility. This problem can be resolved either by declawing or using Softpaws. These options will be further described in the next two sections.

Declawing

One option for the therapy cat is to have it declawed. This would prevent any injuries to the students during the therapy sessions. Declawing is a veterinarian procedure where the cat’s claws are surgically removed. Declawing the therapy cat will need to be discussed with the project innovators of the therapy program. Budgetary numbers will be reviewed when making this decision as well. If the cat was purchasing from Allerca, they will void their warranty if the cat is declawed.

Softpaws

Softpaws are an alternative to declawing. Softpaws are plastic coverings that go over the cat claws. Cats do not even notice the Softpaws over their claws (Softpaws 2012). There are several colors of Softpaws that the customer can buy. The owner puts on the Softpaws. The plastic coverings tend to last four to six weeks (Softpaws 2012). They will shred off after this amount of time. Softpaws can be purchased online through the Softpaws website, through a veterinarian, or on Amazon.com.
Library Cats

Over the years it has been a popular idea to have a cat in the library. The library is an ideal place to have a therapy cat. All students have access to the library and it is a relatively quiet environment for the therapy animal to rest when it is not interacting with students. Students will like to interact with the cat while visiting the library. Some students will continue to visit that particular library just because of the cat. Several of the library cats have become notorious, such as Dewey Readmore Books. There is even a Library Cat Society that promotes cats in the library.
Dewey, the Library Cat

Many people discriminate against cats because they are stereotypically viewed as being aloof. In reality, cats have different types of personalities just like humans. Cats can have doglike, loyal personalities and will remain close to the owner at all times. A famous example of a cat with an outgoing, friendly personality is Dewey, the Library Cat (Myron).

Even though Dewey was not a therapy cat, he had the ideal personality for a therapy cat. Dewey Readmore Books, from Spencer, Iowa, was not just an ordinary cat; he was a library cat. His job was to interact with the people, not the books (Myron 26). The librarians found Dewey one bitterly cold morning in a book drop outside the library (Myron). The librarians fell in love with Dewey right away (Myron 9). When they asked the library board if Dewey could stay at the library, the library board allowed Dewey to stay inside the library his entire lifetime (Myron 15).

Allergies were not a problem for the patrons since the library had great ventilation throughout (Myron 20). Vicki Myron, the Library Director was responsible for Dewey. Dewey helped renew faith within Spencer, Iowa, for many patrons. They came to the Spencer Public Library to check out books and to visit the friendly cat. “Dewey ruled the library by affecting an emotional response in patrons- kindness, acceptance, friendliness, and trustworthiness among others” (Lund 50). He acted interested in the patrons and seemed to make a personal connection with them all.

He interacted with patrons of all ages regardless of politics, race, or financial situation. People came from all over the world to visit Dewey. During the holidays, Dewey would go home with Vicki Myron. After Dewey’s death in 2008, Vicki Myron wrote a book about him called, Dewey, The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World. Since then she has written more books about Dewey and amused the world with the stories about him.
Library Cat Society

There are a few organizations that support library cat programs. The Library Cat Society fully supports having a cat within a public library. As of 2010, there were 200 cats in the US within libraries, and 35 of them live inside the libraries full time (Walch 2010). The Library Cat Society promotes adopting cats from local pet shelters and allowing them to stay in the library. There are some that like to be in the center of attention at the library. Those cats get attention as well as recognition within the community. This type of cat personality would be great for the therapy program in a school library.

Managing a Therapy Cat Program

There are several steps that need to be completed before starting a therapy cat program. First of all, a faculty member needs to be in charge of the program. “One person must be assigned ultimate responsibility for the animal’s welfare and must delegate this responsibility to appropriate staff on evenings, weekends, holidays, and vacations. This responsibility should be written into that person’s job description” (Arkow 25). Since the therapy cat will be in the library, the librarian will be the responsible faculty member, the ‘key individual’ for the program. This librarian will also set up the events of the therapy program according to the needs of the students.

Project Innovators of the Therapy Program

Next, the project innovators need to be chosen (Arkow 6). These individuals will help design and implement the library cat therapy program and support it (Arkow 6). The school counselor, administrators, and school board members are ideal candidates for innovators. Next, expectations must be set for the therapy program. These expectations will be decided by the project innovators (Arkow 7). Expectations will include considering how the therapy program
Therapy Cat in the Library Media Center

will be evaluated, how it will affect classrooms, as well as its impact on the library environment. How are the individual students affected by the therapy cat? Data will be collected on how the individual students recognized by the school counselor as needing therapy have progressed with the therapy cat. Do the students become calm around the presence of the therapy cat? Do they seem happier at school? When these expectations are in place, they will help the librarian decide what activities to do with the therapy program.

**Therapy Program Requirements**

The project innovators for the therapy program will decide on the needs of the therapy program (Arkow 7). Administrators, teachers, and the librarians will inventory which students to intentionally expose to the therapy cat and how often. All students will see the positive impact of the therapy program, but it might be necessary for individual students to have more time with the therapy cat so they can experience needed benefits from the therapy. Having the procedures in place will help if problems arise within the therapy program (Arkow 7). The project innovators will also discuss startup and long term costs of the therapy program (Arkow 7). These costs are paid by the school unless the school has a grant or a donation designated for the therapy program. Procedures required by a grant will need to be discussed if the school has been approved for one. If the school receives donations for the therapy program, procedures also can be made accordingly. Having a policy will make the donation process simpler.

The key individuals will discuss procedures for the care and responsibility of the cat with project innovators (Arkow 7). The cat will be protected at all times by the library staff. For example if a student acts out during a session, the cat will be immediately removed by the library staff. The cat will be put in the hard case cat carrier and placed in the librarian’s office. This will
prevent the therapy cat from any harm from this student. The librarian will be responsible for the cat if it is owned by the school. This includes providing the therapy cat with shelter during nights, weekends, and school vacations within his/her own home (Arkow 25). This will make the therapy cat safe during non-school hours. If the librarian changes schools or retires, the new librarian will take on these responsibilities.

Possible liability of the therapy program will be assessed before the therapy program begins (Arkow 8). Decisions related to pet insurance will be part of this discussion. It will be necessary for the project innovators to fully research pet insurance plans. Some insurance policies pay for certain vet bills, otherwise these bills are paid by the school. Pet claws expectations will also be mentioned in the policy and procedures. These policies and procedures prevent legality issues before incidents occur (Arkow 8). By undertaking these preventive procedures the librarian will have guidelines for the students and staff to take. It is vital that the policies and procedures are kept current. This will provide for the safety of the therapy cat, the benefit of the students, and the success of the therapy program.

Getting Community Support

The project innovators will need support from teachers and community members within and outside of the school community (Arkow 7). Publicity and support make the therapy program successful. If a grant is used to purchase the therapy cat, publicity might be required by the grant provider. Local business owners can also be supporters for the program (Arkow 11). These members of the community are known to give back if they support the cause. Also, students might hold fund raisers to support the program. This will help the school get financial
support as well as providing publicity. Publicizing the therapy cat program within the school district is essential.

The school could welcome the therapy cat during an open house so that the community can meet the therapy cat as well. Writing an article in the town newspaper and school newsletter will inform the community and parents about the therapy program. Getting support from the local Humane Society is essential to the therapy program (Arkow 11). They might be able to provide informational resources for future classroom lessons. For example, the local Humane Society will appreciate the promotion of pet responsibility within the school. This will inform future pet owners, letting them know the expectations for pet ownership. Getting the support from a local accredited veterinarian will be essential for the program (Arkow 11). A partnership will help keep the general health and well-being of the therapy cat in good hands.

Selecting a Therapy Cat

There are many factors to decide when selecting the therapy cat. The project innovators will discuss the gender, color and markings, and breed of the cat (Arkow 19). These factors can be surveyed throughout the school in order to get more opinions on what would be the right cat for the program(Arkow 10). This will also allow students, faculty, and staff to express any personal opinions that may affect the therapy program. This will be essential information that will be noted prior to investing in the therapy program.

Health

A therapy cat must be routinely vaccinated, and this needs to be documented by a veterinarian (Pichot 263). Vaccinations include rabies and feline leukemia (Abdill 114). The therapy cat should be a year old prior to starting the program (Pet Partners 2012). This way the
cat will have outgrown the kitten stage. The cat will have the capability to use all of its sensory motor skills by that stage of life. “Animals that have a previous bite history or have killed another animal MAY NOT be [used]” (Pet Partners 2012).

**Gender**

Choosing the gender of the cat is essential (Arkow 23). It is necessary that the project innovators decide on this factor prior to buying the cat for the therapy program. Usually female cats are considered for the therapy program because male cats tend to mark their territory within the facility with urine spray if not neutered (Arkow 24). Neutering or spaying is recommended for therapy cats working in a school facility.

**Personality**

The personality of the therapy cat is vital to the therapy program. The cat’s personality should be docile, trainable, and friendly but not distant (Arkow 24). Keira, an Amherst resident who brings her cats into nursing homes, noted the cats that are feisty are only interested in playing and not interacting with people (Neville 1). Another factor is that the cat must like children. If the school decides to buy an Allerca cat, the school will request a cat that has a calm personality and a friendly disposition especially towards children. Stating this to Allerca will help the company choose the appropriate cat for the school.

**Markings**

Deciding the color and the markings of the cat may have an impact on the facility. A questionnaire can be sent out to the students, teachers, and administration to decide these factors (Arkow 10). Sometimes people have personal biases about cats. Black cats have been discriminated against for years because they symbolize bad luck. A white cat might be hard to
keep clean. A long haired cat might be difficult to groom. It is necessary to know these facts before purchasing the therapy cat. If the color or gender does not matter, the school will pick out the therapy cat based on the personality of the cat. The personality of the cat should be the most important factor of choosing the therapy cat.

**Staff and Therapy Cat Training**

Staff and therapy cat training is essential to the therapy program. The librarian can contact Pet Partners, a nonprofit organization which provides therapy pet training, to ensure that staff members have the training necessary for the therapy program. Pet Partners recommends that the therapy program staff have a code of ethics to abide by (Pichot 9). This will ensure the staff members have the right attitudes for the therapy program to make it beneficial for the students. If the library has a paraprofessional, this person would also be an ideal candidate for therapy cat staff training. The school will need to pay for the training. Pichot recommends that school personnel seek grants or donations to fund the therapy cat program. Library staff needs training to make the therapy program available to the students and at the same time protect the therapy animal (67). This includes providing a safe shelter for the therapy cat to rest while the librarian is working on paperwork. The therapy cat staff might have the school support but relying on the other teachers, paraprofessionals, and students to care for the therapy animal is not advised (McCardle 133).

Pet Partners is one of the largest therapy pet organizations that help train therapy pets and the handlers. It was established in 1977 as an international, nonprofit organization to improve and enrich lives of others (Delta Society). Pet Partners has classes that the therapy animal handler can take in person or online (Pet Partners 2012). The courses are nonrefundable and the
online class costs $70 in 2012. The online course can be taken three times. If the individual cannot pass the online class after the third attempt the individual has to enroll in a physical workshop (Pet Partners 2012).

Training a cat is another issue for the therapy cats (Pet Partners 2012). Many people say it is difficult to train a cat regardless of its personality. However there are training mechanisms now, such as clicker training, that can train the therapy cat to act appropriately based on external stimuli. This will help the therapy cat behave appropriately in the library environment. Before the cat is registered with Pet Partners, it must be taught obedience skills (Pet Partners 2012).

Pet Partners will only allow certified therapy pets to be part of their therapy program (Pichot 263). Pet Partners will test the cat as well as the staff to see if they fit the needs of the therapy program. The cat must pass a test in order to be approved to be a therapy cat. A tester will come out to the cat’s environment to see how the cat behaves (Corner). A successful cat will interact with the tester during this time. This will allow the tester to be able to see how well the cat interacts with strangers. This is necessary since the cat will come in contact with strangers constantly in the library. Then the tester will want to see how the cat acts after a car ride (Corner). If the cat is able to bounce back quickly after the car ride and interacts well with the tester, the cat will be able to visit the Pet Partner’s facility to see how it behaves under other testing conditions (Corner). Even if the cat is not able to pass a certain section of the test, it may still be able to pass the overall test (Abdill 193). If the cat and the handler do not meet expectations Pet Partners may allow them to retake the test at a later date (Animal Assisted Therapy 92). The cost of registering the animal by Pet Partners is paid by the owner (Parshall 47). It costs $190 to register one handler with one animal (Pet Partners 2012).
Implementing the Therapy Program

Implementing the therapy program is a time consuming process. Each step of the implementation will be planned according to the needs of the students. By completely emerging into each step will determine the success of the program. The librarian will assess his/her own lesson plans to ensure the therapy cat could have a presence within the lesson. Possible instructional programs involving the therapy cat and how to effectively evaluate the therapy program will be discussed in this section.

Instructional Program

Collaboration is one way to implement the therapy program into the classrooms. If the teachers collaborate with the librarian, this would help to make the instructional program even more successful (“School Settings” 7). The instructional program can be presented in the library or in the classroom. The cat can come into the classroom as long as the librarian has permission from the classroom teacher. The therapy cat might need to be transported to the classroom in a cat cage and released when it gets to the classroom (Pet Partners 2012). If appropriately trained, the therapy cat can be put on a leash and walked to the necessary classroom (Pet Partners 2012). “Classroom teachers hope that [the cat’s] presence will help to advance the curriculum, encourage student involvement with lessons, enhance children’s understanding of responsibility through [the cat’s] care and maintenance, and teach [students] the humane treatment of animals” (McCardle 118). Using the therapy pet to educate students on various topics about animals will benefit the therapy cat and other pets as well (McCardle 119). Teachers can collaborate with the librarian prior to the lesson in order to plan the integration of the therapy cat. By collaborating, the teacher and librarian will be able to work out the right time frame to implement the therapy
program. The therapy cat will also need breaks between instruction sessions (Arkow 7). This will allow the cat time to recuperate and time to nap. The therapy program will be more successful if the therapy cat is rested.

**Therapy Program**

The therapy program is known to calm students during stressful times (Arkow 3). The therapy program can be integrated with the school’s special education program or the school counselor. Special education students can work one-on-one with the therapy cat. The therapy cat can help them work through their weaknesses by providing the student with attention. This gives the student intrinsic motivation to move forward with their therapy which will help them grow as individuals. Therefore, the therapy cat will improve the lives of these students. These students will learn hands-on the importance of taking care of animals when they are with the cat (“School Settings” 7).

The therapy cat can be integrated with different types of classes for the purpose of therapy. For example, teachers can ask to integrate the therapy program into their classroom if students are under stress with their class work. Utilizing the therapy cat for students who have test anxiety might ease the stress of the students. When the class takes a break from standardized tests, the librarian may bring the therapy cat to the classroom to reduce the stress of the students.

Implementing the therapy program in the school environment will be a vital process. The librarian and the special education teacher or school counselor can work together on the therapy program to assist students (“School Setting” 6). The librarian can adjust the library classes to incorporate the therapy program (“School Setting” 6). The therapy program can be tied into the library lessons in order to make it successful. One requirement for younger students might be
that they sit on the floor to interact with the therapy cat. The students will not be able to hold the cat and sit in a chair because not all the students will have equal access to the therapy cat if they do. Having students sit on the floor will allow the cat to interact with all the students equally (McVarish 21).

**Evaluation of the Cat Therapy Program**

Evaluation of the therapy cat is crucial to the therapy program. Administrators, teachers, and students will evaluate the therapy program (Arkow 30). They all can be invited to evaluate the integrity of the therapy program as well as how well the program was implemented in the school (Arkow 30). Pet therapy has been known to increase morale within the facility, especially to the staff members (McVarish 18). Teachers can gather data to evaluate the morale in the school without and with the program implemented. During evaluation, teachers evaluate the impact of the school environment with the use of the therapy cat, and students list the ways the therapy cat impacted their daily lives. The evaluation will tell how well the therapy program has affected the school and students. This evaluation will give the therapy program ways to better meet the needs of the students (Arkow 30). The therapy cat’s staff will also be evaluated on how well they treated and employed the therapy cat. Providing the library staff with feedback helps them to adjust the therapy program accordingly.

**Conclusion**

Even though there is not much research on therapy cats, this might soon change after institutions start using hypoallergenic cats as therapy pets. As long as the cat therapy project innovators take time to create policies and procedures, and then select the correct personality of the cat for the therapy program, it will have positive effects within the school. The well-being of
the therapy cat should be monitored at all times. With the partnership of the veterinarian, the
therapy cat’s health will be monitored accordingly. Training the cat with Pet Partners can
provide the school with certification for the therapy cat.

Library staff can take the lead in the therapy cat program. The therapy cat will be well
cared for by these individuals and can provide services to the entire school from the library.
Including the school counselor in the implementation of the therapy program will be ideal for
reaching students who have issues that can be addressed by interacting with the cat. Teachers
also might want to collaborate with the librarian in order to see these benefits within their own
classroom. The students’ interactions with the therapy cat can lead to a rewarding character
education to the school.
CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will demonstrate that having a therapy pet, specifically a therapy cat, in the school library provides several benefits. Therapy cats are usually excluded from being used as a therapy pet within schools because of common cat allergies. With the hypoallergenic cat now available, cats can be an option as a therapy pet within schools. This chapter describes how to choose an animal for pet therapy, and specifically, how to select a therapy cat. The second section describes how a cat therapy program can impact student achievement. The third section describes how to implement a therapy program.

How to Select a Therapy Cat

Studies have shown that animal assisted therapy has been able to improve students’ social skills according to the needs of the students. Therapy pets also provide physical and physiological effects to students. Petting the animal will lower the blood pressure of the students and calm them down from their daily activities. The therapy project innovators will decide what type of animal is best for their students. The animal will be used to implement pet therapy within the school. Project innovators are staff and faculty members within the school who are heavily involved in the curriculum of the school. The project innovators will decide on the specific students who will need the individual sessions with the therapy pet. They will collect data on the needs of the students. With this data the project innovators have the information to make the decision about which type of animal assisted therapy best fits the students’ needs.

Although dogs are preferred with an animal therapy program, that opinion was formed prior to the creation of the hypoallergenic cat. Lifestyle Pets removes the glycoprotein (Fel d 1)
from a cat’s genes to allow people to be around a therapy cat even if they are allergic to most
cats. This factor might change opinions, making a therapy cat a more popular choice. A cat does
not have to be entertained or carefully watched. Cats are limber and quick on their feet which
make them less vulnerable to accidental harm. They also do not need to be relieved outside. Most
importantly, the lifespan of a cat is 15 years.

The project innovators will need to decide the right characteristics of the therapy cat. But
the personality of the therapy cat is essential to a successful therapy program. The project
innovators will need to research what characteristics will be necessary for the therapy program;
for example, the cat must like children. The project innovators will need to inform Lifestyle Pets
what characteristics they want in order for the company to choose a specific cat accordingly.

**Student Achievement with the Therapy Program**

Student achievement can be accomplished in many ways. Therapy pets can help students
to improve their communication skills and relationships. They can also entice students to become
interested in breaking the barriers that may have prevented them from reaching their full
potential. Studies have shown many positive effects from pet therapy. Pet therapy has proven to
be successful with patients who have depression. Trauma patients have been positively affected
by pet therapy because it allows the patient to have a diversion with the therapy pet while
working on the trauma issue. Students will be impacted by their interactions with the therapy cat.
Students will feel the unconditional love the therapy cat will provide to them.

The therapy program is effective with many social and behavior disorders. Emotionally
disturbed patients have improved their overall behavior because the therapy pet was willing to
provide attention to the patient. Achievement may also include preventing some students from
acting out, because the cat has a calming presence. Studies have shown that since the cat provides unconditional love to the students, it may deter violence within the school.

Instructional programs will be based on the needs of the students. Students will learn about animals, how to care for a pet, how to do research to learn about a pet. Classroom teachers will also be allowed to implement the therapy program in their classroom through collaboration.

The teachers will be able to access the therapy cat especially if the students are stressed from their class work. They also might experience a release from stress during difficult lessons and testing. This will allow the teachers to see the effects of the therapy program within their classroom. The librarian will need to plan with the teacher prior to the lesson to see how the teacher will like to utilize the therapy cat in the class. The cat will need to take breaks in between classes, which will allow the cat to stay rested.

**How to Implement a Therapy Program**

Implementing the therapy program in the school environment can be challenging. The librarian will assume the responsibility of being in charge of the program since the therapy cat will be housed in the library. The librarian will pick out project innovators who are heavily involved in the school curriculum. The project innovators will find the necessary funding to support the program. The project innovators will work with the therapy program budget to get the necessary supplies for the therapy program. The project innovators will decide on policies for the therapy program to protect the school from liability. Then the project innovators will seek out community support for the therapy program. Community support may give additional support and resources for the therapy program to be implemented within the school.
The project innovator needs to form a relationship with a local veterinarian to provide medical attention to the therapy cat. This type of relationship with the therapy program will be necessary for the therapy cat’s well being. The veterinarian can also provide informational materials for the librarian to implement with her library lesson plans. This will make the lessons more informative about taking care of animals.

Training the therapy animal and the handlers will be necessary. The therapy pet must be at least a year old prior to training. Pet Partners has online classes for handlers. It cost $190 in 2012 to certify one handler and a therapy pet with Pet Partners.

Evaluation of the therapy program will be necessary to assess the effectiveness of therapy cat. Administrators, teachers, and students have a say in the evaluation. During evaluation, teachers and administrators can determine the impact of the therapy cat on the school environment, and students can be invited to list the ways the therapy cat impacted their daily lives. The evaluation will tell how well the therapy program has affected the school and students. The therapy cat’s staff will also be evaluated on how well they treat and employ the therapy cat.
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