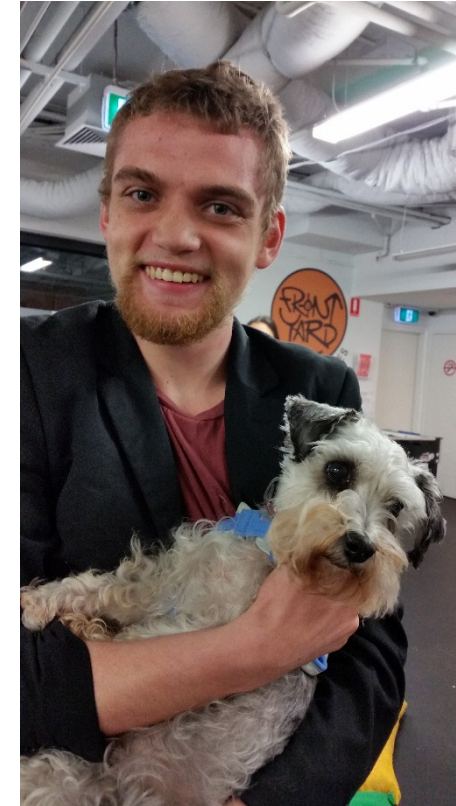
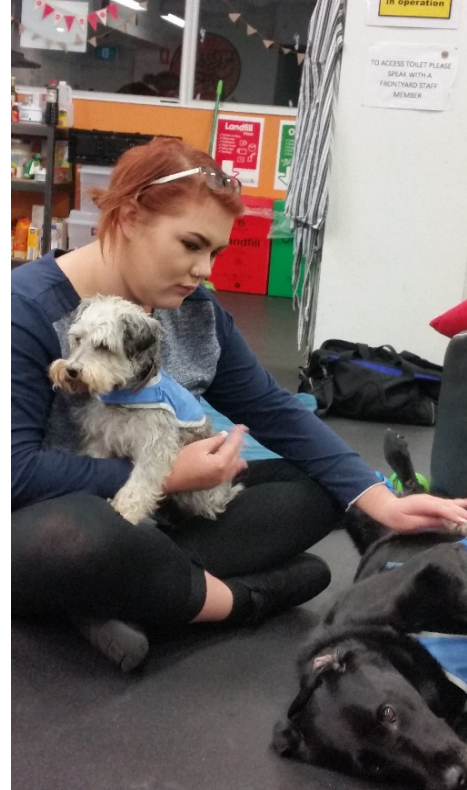


“Happiness is hugging a therapy dog”: Exploring the use of Animal Assisted Interventions with Homeless Youth



Ms Poppy Fotiadis, Frontyard Youth Services; Ms Melanie Jones, Lead The Way; and Dr Jess Heerde, The University of Melbourne



Support we provide at Frontyard

- Housing
- Financial
- Case Management
- Life Skills
- Health and Legal
- Dual Diagnosis
- Mental Health
- Family Reconciliation
- Education and Employment
- Parenting



Basement Drop in Program

TILA - Transition into Independent Living

Creating Connections

Intensive case management

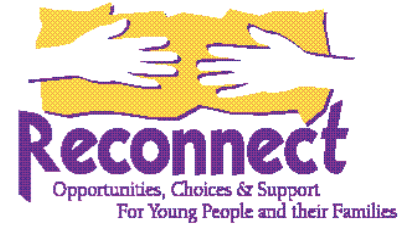


Young Women's Crisis Service



Melbourne Academy

Young & Pregnant Parenting Program





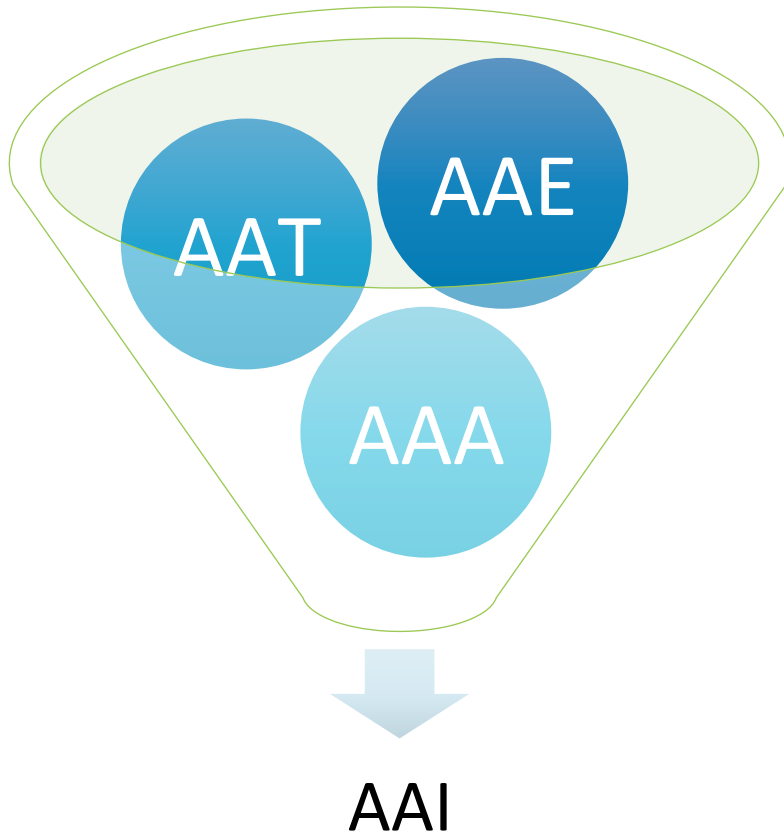
PSYCHOLOGY & ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY

- Established in 2003 in response to a growing interest in Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT).
- **Lead The Way Psychology Clinics** - Provides AAT to individuals, families & groups incorporating therapy animals (dogs, cats, horses, rabbits).

- **Lead The Way Institute** – Provides training in Animal-Assisted Interventions, including;
 - Professional development, consultancy and clinical supervision to health and educational professionals wanting to work with Animals
 - Intensive training and certification programmes for Therapy-Dogs/Horses and their handlers.



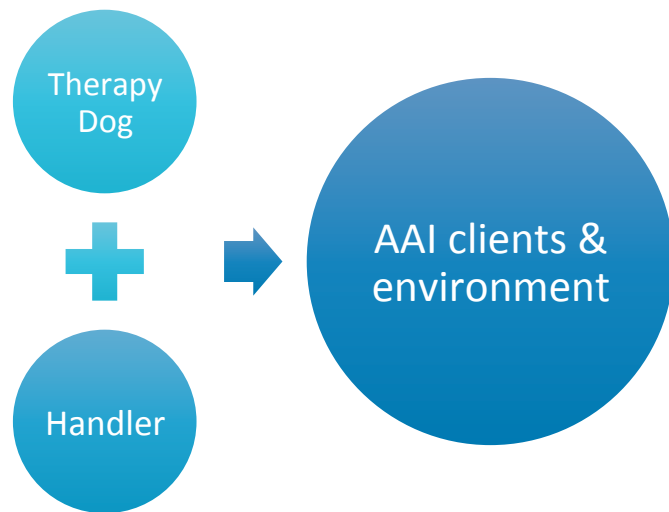
Animal-Assisted Interventions



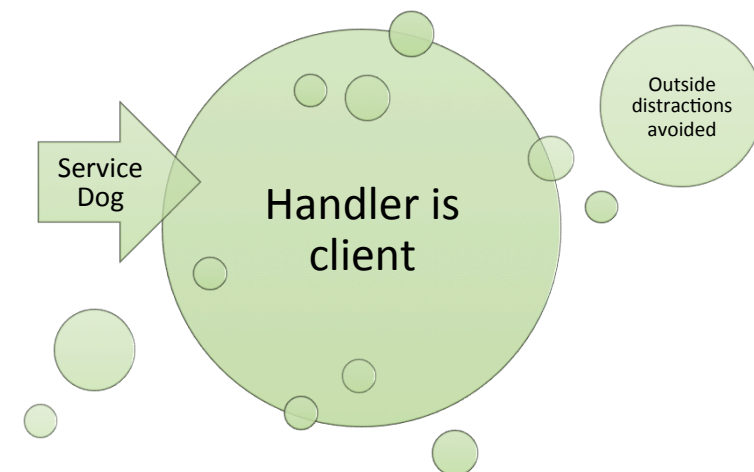
- **Animal-Assisted Interventions** - an umbrella term covering all of the different ways that animals are called upon to assist with the healing or helping of humans.
- **Animal-Assisted Activities** - also known as Pet Therapy, Visiting Dogs etc. These activities are designed to facilitate emotional or physical well-being. They are not necessarily overseen by a professional, nor are treatment plans devised or outcomes recorded.
- **Animal-Assisted Therapy** - a specialised, goal-directed intervention, where the use of the animal is integral to the treatment. The treatment is conducted or directed by a professional, within their scope of professional practice.
 - **Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy** - a sub-set of AAT, where the therapy being conducted is psychotherapeutic and the relationship is the primary agent of change.
- **Animal-Assisted Education** – A goal-directed educational intervention, provided or supervised by an educational professional, designed to improve learning outcomes.

Therapy animals are not service animals

The role of the Therapy Dog is to react and respond to the environment and multiple clients, under the guidance and direction of the Handler. The most important person in this model is the AAI client



This is in stark contrast to the Service Dog, whose job is to exclusively focus on the Handler, to the exclusion of all other situations, people and distractions. It may be life-threatening should the service dog's focus move away from the Handler. The most important person in this model is the handler with a disability



Activity One Tricks!



Why work with Animals?

- Pets have been shown to have a significant role in families (Boat 2010; Walsh 2009).
- They play a significant role in child and adolescent development, having an influence on the development of empathy, non-gendered care-giving skills, and attachment. Children bond quickly and closely to animals, and have a tendency to confide in them (CIAS 2004; Malon, 1992; Malon 1994; Melson & Fine, 2010; Menzies 2003).
- Biophilia and nature hypotheses – suggest a genetic predisposition to be drawn to animals and nature (for mutual benefit)



What is the Human-Animal Bond?



- Many of the qualities of the Human-Animal Bond are in line with the qualities of Human-Human attachment (Green, Mathews & Foster 2009; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011)
- There are many individual and cultural differences to the meaning of animals. Context is therefore vitally important and may include individual circumstance, family influence, cultural or religious influences
- Most of our research is based in Western Culture - Historically, western culture comes from an hierarchical perspective, where human's occupy the 'top' position, however there have been significant shifts in western cultures within the past few decades, and these coincide with a shift in the perceived importance of companion animals, and animal welfare (Wood, Shardlow & Willis, 2009)
- Despite many homeless persons not owning their own pets, there is evidence to suggest that animals still play an important part in the lives of homeless people, and may elicit the importance of welfare and safety. Pets can play an important role in managing loneliness (Rew, 2000; Slatter, Lloyd & King, 2012).

Why use Animal-Assisted Interventions?



- Even brief encounters with pets, such as participating in Animal-Assisted Interventions with Therapy Dogs can have profound impacts.
- Therapy Animals have been implicated in a myriad of health, social, behavioural and emotional benefits, and may have positive impacts on wellbeing and operate as psychological 'assets'.
- Key areas of efficacy are:
 - Engagement, rapport & social lubricant effect
 - Physiological and health outcomes
 - Behavioural disorders
 - Emotional wellbeing

(Bennett, 2012; Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, Uvnas-Moberg, 2013; Nimer & Lundahl, 2007; Schneider & Pilchak-Harley, 2006)



Activity Two Co-regulation

**Lead
the Way**  EST 2003
PSYCHOLOGY & ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY

How the Human-Animal Bond heals



Impact on Humans

- Reduction in stress physiology – Cortisol, BP
- Reduction in feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increases in ‘bonding’ & ‘affiliative’ responses including Oxytocin, Dopamine, Prolactin
- Autonomic down-regulation & co-regulation
- Bonding and the oxytocin hypothesis – opens up the relational space

Impact on Animals

- Dogs may co-regulate with handler’s or owner’s cortisol
- Cortisol responses in dogs are mediated by a strong bond with their owner
- Dogs will produce oxytocin when bonding with their owner
- Dogs have been known to display negative or stress-related behaviours in interactions with humans (e.g. AAT), but this is not always correlated with BP or Cortisol
- Freedom (e.g. no lead) and breaks improve dog’s stress responses to AAT

(Glenk, 2013; Haubehofer & Kirchengast, 2006; Haubehofer & Kirchengast, 2007; Odendaal, 2000; Schoberl, et. al. 2012)

Why use Animal-Assisted Interventions at Frontyard?



Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI):

- potential to mitigate against the challenges faced by young people accessing Frontyard Youth Services through opportunity to engage with the therapy dogs.

AAI Program

- explored and a 3 month pilot was developed and implemented.
- method of reducing stress, anxiety and aggression
- method of increasing social interactions & motivation, mood
- method of enhancing rapport and engagement with clients

The structure of the Program was in three stages:

1. Identify appropriate AAI Services that could be engaged to facilitate the 12 week Program.
2. Engage Lead the Way to deliver 12 sessions of AAI Program
3. Evaluate the pilot Program by utilising different assessment tools such as attendance and retention; qualitative interviews; and observations by Frontyard staff.

Program Implementation Strategies

There was extensive promotion work undertaken before the Program commenced

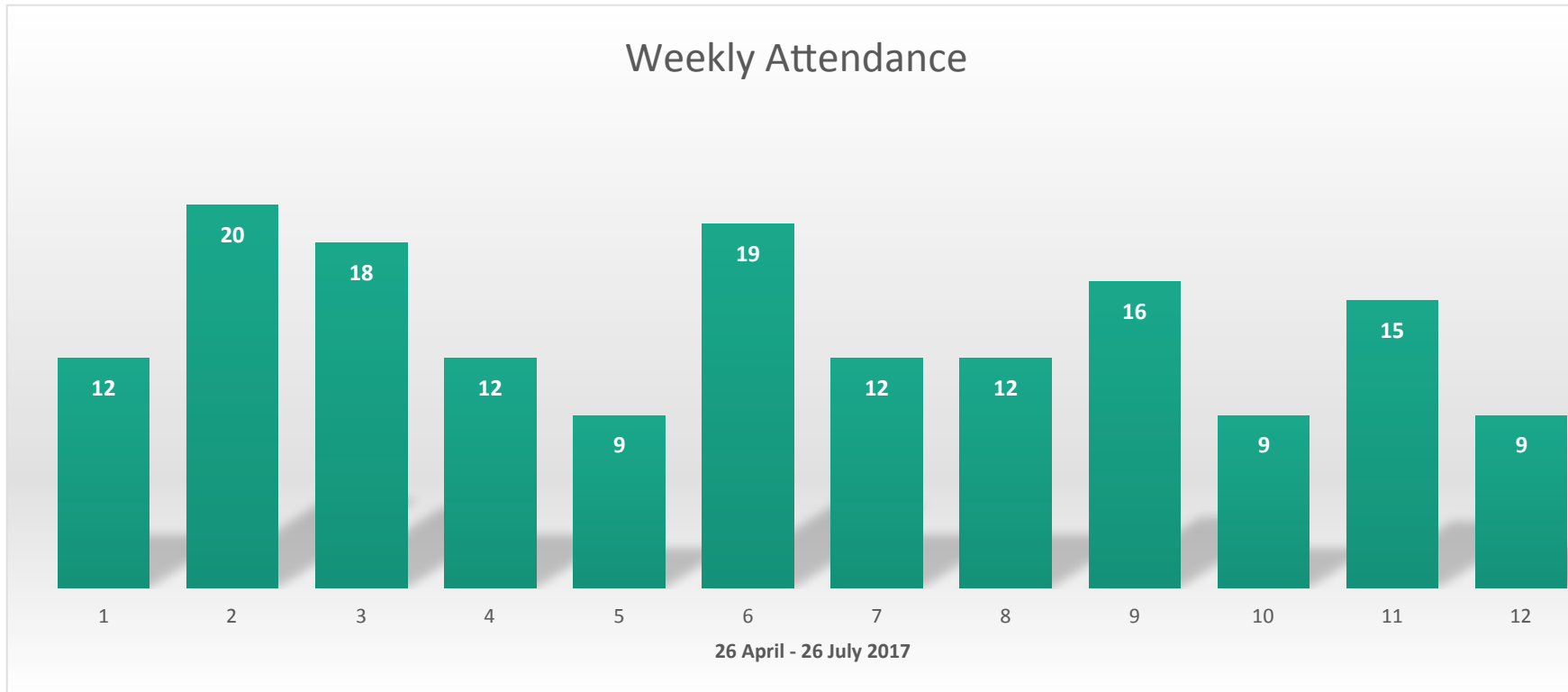
Strategies included:

- A poster was developed and distributed within key stakeholders to promote the Program.
- Existing Programs at Frontyard Youth Services were engaged to promote the Program to their clients.
- Frontyard Youth Services Facebook and tweeter was used to also promote the Program.
- Once the Program commenced a detailed data base was developed utilising the attendance lists and cross referencing it with other data bases from other Programs at Frontyard Youth Services.
- By week 3 every young person was getting regular SMS's, text messages to remind them of the Program.
- Weekly emails went out to all the collocated services at Frontyard Youth Services and other key stakeholders to remind their clients about the Program.



Program Attendance

- 171 young people (males=80, females=91) participated in the Program.
- Age range 17 to 24 years.
- Of the 171 young people, 80 of them engaged in 4 to 12 sessions.



Program Implementation Framework

- Each session was facilitated by Melanie G Jones (qualified Psychologist and Animal-Assisted Therapist)
- Session implementation was supported by Program Officer and other staff from Frontyard.
- Each young person was informed of some of the rules guiding each session (respect for others, the dogs, handling and sharing of dogs) prior to their participation.
- The young people were given an opportunity to participate in a range of structured activities or to simply relax with the therapy dogs.
- The structured activities included training young people to get the therapy dogs to do certain tricks (going through tunnels, jumping, sitting, shaking hands).
- The activities offered young people opportunities to build a relationship and trust not only with the therapy dogs but other young people in the group.

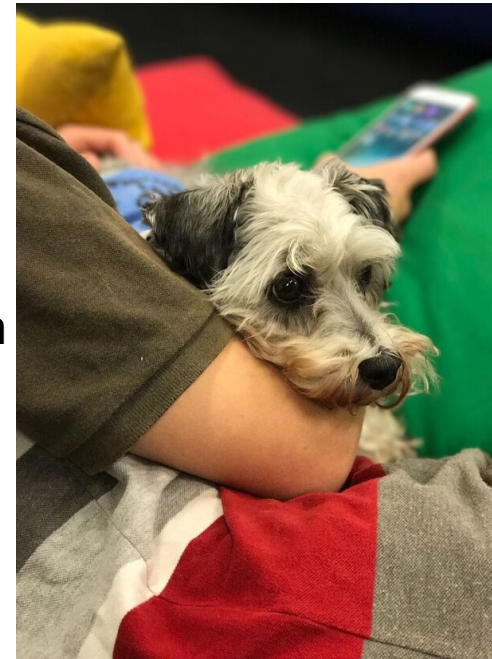


Activity Three Mindfulness



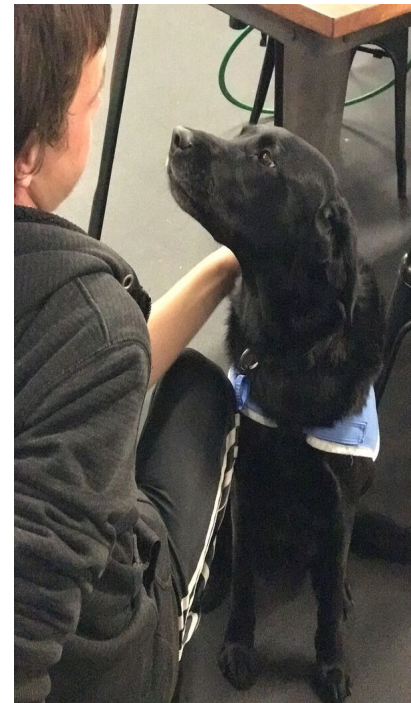
Program Results

- 52 young people were interviewed for the evaluation of the Pilot Program.
 - Interviews conducted without disrupting the young people who engaged in the Program.
 - Interviewed in a comfortable and relaxed setting over a coffee and once the AAI session was over
 - Afforded an opportunity to speak freely about their experiences.
- Overall:
 - Improvements in behaviour, confidence, team work, social connectedness
 - Personal improvements - self-esteem, better communication and interactions with other young people, better mental and overall wellbeing.
- Therapy dogs
 - Immediate impact on the participants
 - Instilled a greater sense of well-being.
 - Example: the young men did not want to play any computer games, or listen to music when the therapy dogs were in the basement.



Program Results

- Participation in group activities with the dogs and other young people
 - Increased their interactions with other participants
 - Improved their mastery in engaging the dogs to undertake different tricks which improved their self-esteem.
- Young people were very protective of each other and respectful of the therapy dogs. By session 4 it was observed that
 - Some young people took up the responsibility of introducing the dogs to the new members of the Program
 - Took the lead to teach them how to engage with the dogs in an appropriate manner.
- Program environment provided an opportunity to:
 - Form friendships
 - Develop social skills
 - Learn to work collective with others
 - Participants began to build trust between themselves and the therapy dogs and between themselves and other young people in the Program



Young people's views on the Program

"The dogs make me feel happy, alive and they brighten up my Wednesdays..... The dogs give me a break from my problems.... I smile when I am around them and my smile is genuine... I usually put on a smile but it is a front.... It masks my problems, the drugs, the family situation.... I don't have many friends left, four of my friend were killed in a car accident all at once... my smile is real when I am in the basement with the dogs"

"The dogs make me feel at home when I haven't felt at home in a long time. They make me feel as if I can be me again"

"It is really hard to get me to smile given what I am going through – family issues, police issues, accommodation.... The dogs have assisted me in feeling happy from 12.30 to 3.30 because I don't think about anything else but how I am going to get another hug from Opal"



Young people's views on the Program

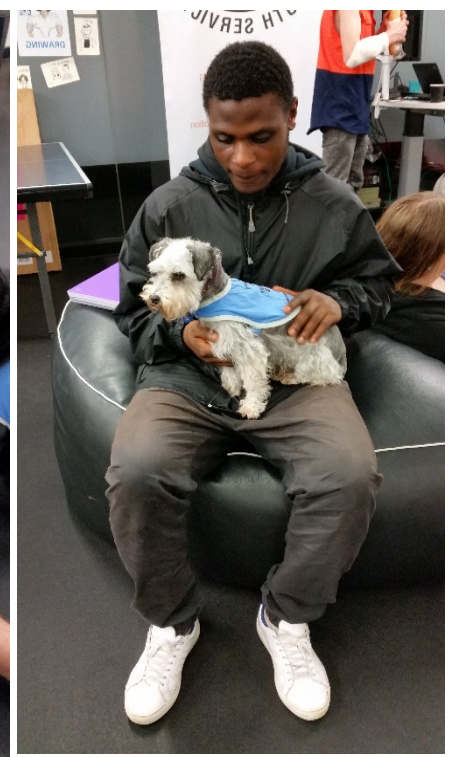
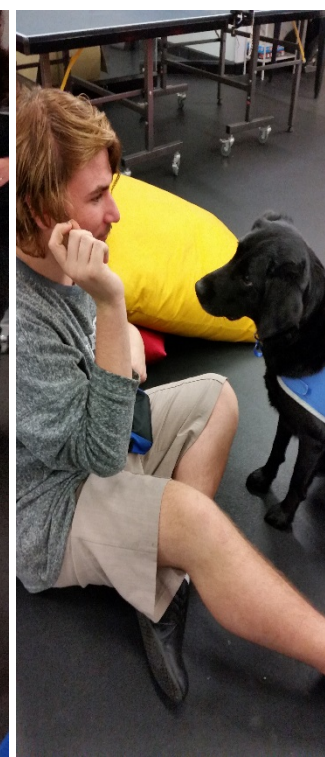


"I have observed if someone comes into Frontyard stressed and tensed the dogs seem to calm them down"

"I feel happy, relaxed and in control when I am in the Program.... When I have a bad day the dogs have cheered me up".

"The dogs keep my paranoia and anxiety at bay and because of the dogs I am more social"

"The dogs have made it easier for me to talk to other people at Frontyard.... The dogs have helped me to control my anger.... I am more fun to be around with"



Program Implementation: Phase 2

- 14 sessions from August to November 2017
- 51 young people have taken part in the first 3 sessions (of Phase 2)
- The Program has taken on board some of the ideas (visits to the park with the dogs, cooking) put forward by the young people in the evaluation.
- Program evaluation will be conducted in partnership with The University of Melbourne



Program Evaluation: Phase 2

- AAls with vulnerable groups:
 - development of a trusting and positive relationship
 - Lowering confrontational and negative behaviours
 - Increases social skills, intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal skills
 - Inclusion of animals in homeless shelters and services has been suggested and recommended
- Industry-research collaboration
 - How the collaboration is formed
 - Industry and research working together to achieve positive outcomes
 - Working together to overcome any differences
 - Documenting challenges and achievements to further the collaboration



Program Evaluation: Phase 2

- Evaluation seeks to *understand the influence* of the Program
 - Document the processes (Program & Collaboration)
 - Qualitative and quantitative data
 - Qualitative (interviews with clients, staff)
 - Quantitative (program participation, attendance, retention)
 - Possible survey (social skills, intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal skills, mood, perceived well-being)
 - Written project report, paper for publication
- Findings will inform ongoing program development, seeking philanthropic investment, models for building successful industry-research partnerships.
- Knowledge gained will:
 - build understanding of the use of therapy dogs and AAI's in service settings
 - assist in identifying effective models of AAI's with marginalized youth
 - inform the design of future AAI's in services available to these youth.



Thank you!



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