

2019-2020 Assessment Final Report

Department: Watkins Health Services

Animal Therapy Program Assessment

Introduction

Assessment Project Description

Watkins Health Services Animal Therapy for Stress Management events are targeting students to provide stress management education in the form of animal assisted therapy, along with tips and tools to for stress management. Though the goal of these programs is aimed at stress reduction, research shows animal therapy can also help with varies categories relating to mental health and wellness including: depression, anxiety, trauma, etc.

Service/Program Student Learning Outcome(s)

Students participating in [Insert Service/Program Name] will be able to...

- Recognize the connection between stress management and academics (1)
- Identify stress management strategies to better manage personal health (2,3)
- Use stress information, services and/or resources to better manage personal health (3).

Population/Sample:

The potential population for this assessment is attendees of WHS Animal Therapy Programs: Pause 4 Pups, and Stress Busting Study Breaks. These events are open to all KU students. In order to be sent the survey, students either need to swipe their KU ID with one of our card readers, or physically write down their email address in order for us to contact them. During the '19-'20 academic year 684 students attended these events; 310 surveys were sent out. There were only 27 responses to the survey this academic year.

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Assessment Method(s):

At each Animal Therapy for Stress Management event students will swipe their KU ID card capturing contact and demographic information. Upon swiping cards students will be handed an information piece on stress management strategies. Stress kits containing tips and tool will also be available for students if desired, but not every student will receive one. An electronic copy of the survey will then be distributed via email to all students who attended the event two weeks after the original event date.

Summary of Key Findings/Results

- 93% of respondents reported they were **happier** after interacting with the therapy dogs.
- 85% of respondents reported they were **more relaxed** after interacting with the therapy dogs.
- 80% of respondents reported they were **calmer** after interacting with the therapy dogs.
- 85% of respondents reported being **less stressed** after interacting with the therapy dogs.
- 84% of respondents believe WHS stress reduction programs and resources **have helped them better manage their stress** throughout the week.
- 73% of respondents **plan to continue to engage** in stress management activities
- 88% believe that engaging in stress management activities **leads them to be more likely to be successful academically.**
- 96% of respondents would like to see the **animal therapy events continued.**

Conclusions

Impact of Assessment

Planning, staffing, and executing the events that make up the Animal Therapy Program at WHS take a great deal of staff time. While we would never want to do away with a successful program, these results inform the frequency of the events and have lead us to plan for the same number of events in the future while keeping the door open for additional events as they are requested. Unfortunately, we do not always staff the additional events which means we miss out on gathering data on how students perceived those events. Beyond maintaining the current number of events, it is clear

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that respondents who were service participants would like to see an increase in therapy animals at all the events. This information will be shared with the non-profit organization who trains the teams of owners and therapy animals at these events as well WHS Administration and Peer Health Educators.

Lessons Learned

The past two years of this program, the assessment strategy has not worked as well as it had in its first year. The largest challenge during this assessment year include the decreased number of events to assess due to campus stipulations caused by the COVID 19 pandemic and that wiping out the majority of spring semester Animal Therapy events. This year there were several setbacks with gathering KU ID's. Animal Therapy events are staffed by Peer Health Educators and Peer Health Educator Ambassadors; and occasionally a Health Educator will be present. Even though our Peer Health Educators & Ambassadors are dedicated to the work they do, the importance of assessing programs gets lost in translation. There were 674 students in attendance at Animal Therapy events yet only 310 card scans took place. While some participants may not have had their KUID's, it is also likely that students working the events did not ask people to scan their cards as they should. Having a 9% response rate is not the best outcome, but when you take into consideration only 46% of participants were emailed, it is difficult to project if the findings are an accurate representation of the program. Additionally, it would be worth HERO's time to look into requiring card scanners at the events that are requested to increase the number of participants to take the survey.

Even though over 80% of respondents felt more relaxed, calmer, and less stressed after interacting with the therapy dogs, it is clear that there needs to be alternate activities for participants of these events to engage in; at the very least having a greater number of therapy dogs available. However, it also raises the question *"do students feel more stressed than in years past?"*