

# Pet Therapy Interventions for Older Adults Experiencing Loneliness in Long Term Care Facilities

In long term care facilities, it is a frequent problem for residents to experience feelings of loneliness. This can be due to isolation, loss of a spouse, feeling far from family and friends or confusion. Research has shown that animal assisted interventions can reverse those feelings of loneliness. The study not only included live dogs however, incorporated robotic dogs as well. The interventions with the live and robotic dog result in improved quality of life, increased moods and increased socialization. (Banks, Willoughby, & Banks, 2008).



Animals and humans have always had a special relationship with each other. Thinking back to earlier times, the Ancient Egyptians valued cats while the cave paintings had shown the earliest humans sharing campfires with wolves. Animals have always been a part of our environment. Animals have been integrated into health care facilities for decades and there is no doubt that animals such as dogs and cats make humans feel good.

# How to Improve Loneliness in Long Term Care Facilities with Pet Therapy

## **Ownership Therapy**

- Hire a pet care coordinator in senior living
- The companionship of a pet provides a huge benefit for a human
- Residents are able to live with a beloved pet in their apartment (pet ownership)
- An animal can provide social support and decrease risk of loneliness (Gee, Mueller, & Curl, 2017).
  - Give residents the ability to live with a pet
    - A Pet Care Coordinator will ensure all pets living in the facility are up to date on vaccines, properly fed, groomed and cared for.

## **Visitation Therapy**

- Activities/Therapy department will contact willing owners to take household pets to visit nursing homes and long-term care facilities for older adults
- Allows residents to experience pets without responsibility of care
  - Owners roam the facility and visit the residents
    - Residents stroke the furry visitors as they pass by
    - The animals provide opportunities for social interactions

## **Robotic Dog Therapy**

- Robotic dog used instead of living pet.
  - Session will occur in residents' room

- Weekly visits for 30 minutes
- Resident will sit upright in bed or chair/wheelchair and interacts with dog
  - Robotic dog has hearing and communication abilities

# Resources for Pet Therapy

## Jennie by Tombot Puppy

- Robotic golden retriever who barks, wags tail and is covered in soft yellow fur
  - Jennie has lifelike expression and cute eyes
  - Responds to touch
- Release: May 2020
- Retails for \$450
  - Compared to expenses of a real pet...cost is worth it
- Residents are able to experience puppy love
- Long-Term Care facilities can purchase
  - Activities and therapy department would be in charge of pet therapy session with Jennie
- Click here for a cheap alternative
  - [https://www.robotshop.com/en/ageless-innovations-golden-pup-interactive-robot-toy-dog.html?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=surfaces&utm\\_campaign=surfaces\\_across\\_google\\_usen&gclid=Cj0KCQjwrIf3BRD1ARIsAMuugNsMqMVNKIyQO73QV4y0](https://www.robotshop.com/en/ageless-innovations-golden-pup-interactive-robot-toy-dog.html?utm_source=google&utm_medium=surfaces&utm_campaign=surfaces_across_google_usen&gclid=Cj0KCQjwrIf3BRD1ARIsAMuugNsMqMVNKIyQO73QV4y0)



## **Pet-A-Pet Club, Inc**

- Non-profit organization committed to encouraging the human-animal bond and providing education to the public in regards to benefits
- Therapy organization by American Kennel Club
- Dogs learn therapy dog title (not certification)
- Volunteers visit hospitals, nursing homes and long-term care facilities for older adults
- Contact
  - Locations
    - Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Wayne and Washtenaw
  - Click to contact and send message here  
<http://www.petapet.org/contact>



## Therapaws of Michigan – Sharing Human-Animal Bond

Mission: Therapeutically provide human-animal bond by placing qualified dog teams in healthcare facilities

- 40+ locations in Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor area and surround communities
  - Perform regular pet therapy visits
  - **Contact**
    - Request a visit here:  
[http://www.therapaws.org/about-us/#toc\\_mission](http://www.therapaws.org/about-us/#toc_mission)



## Interprofessional Team



**Physician** – will give permission to administer pet therapy

**Recreational/Occupational Therapy** – Management of activities in long term care facilities. Contact to pet therapy resources.

**Social Workers** – May have resources of other pet therapy volunteer organizations

# Occupational Engagement

Occupational engagement is defined as participation in activities of daily living (self-care, dressing, grooming, sexual activity), instrumental activities of daily living (care of others, driving, financial management, home management), work, sleep, physical, social, leisure and religious activities. Emotional well-being is required to fully participate in occupational engagement and benefit from the listed daily activities listed above.

Below is a picture of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health Framework (ICF). The ICF Framework is broken down into two groups

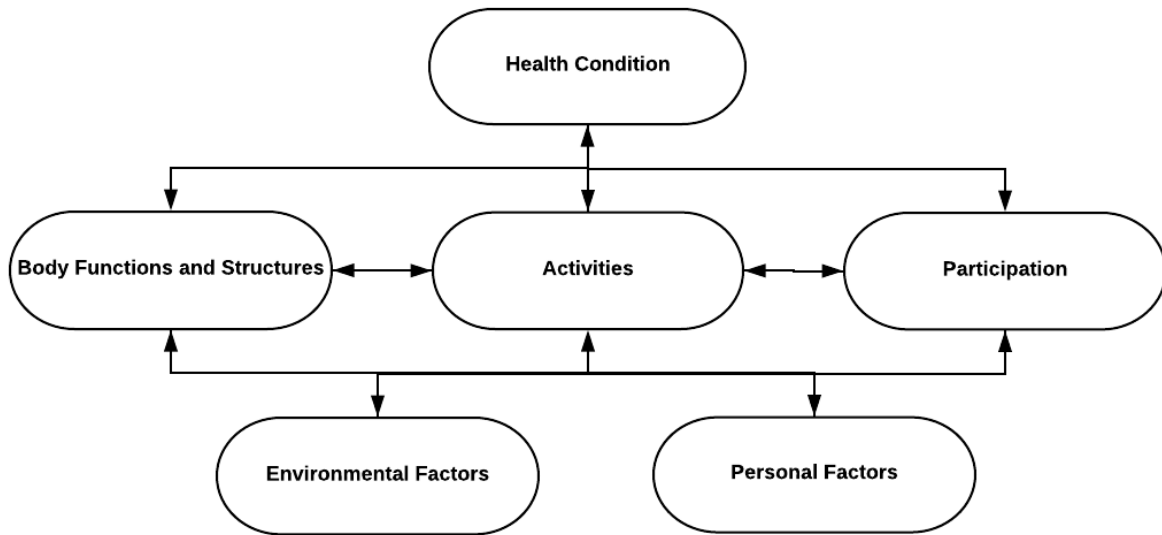
## **1. Functioning and Disability**

- Body Functions and Structures
  - Anatomy/Physiology and Psychology of the human body
- Activities and Participation
  - Describes a person's functional status
    - Communication, mobility, self-care, learning, applying knowledge, interpersonal interactions, etc.

## **2. Contextual Factors**

- Environmental Factors
  - Family, work, government agencies, laws and cultural beliefs.
- Personal Factors
  - Race, gender, age, education level and coping styles

By using the ICF framework, we can see that loneliness would be the health condition. Loneliness will affect brain function, and possible physical function (body structures) due to a decrease in participation of activities. Any personal or environmental factors may also play a role in a decrease of participation in activities.



# References

Banks, M. R., Willoughby, L., & Banks, W. (2008). Animal Assisted Therapy and Loneliness in Nursing Homes: Use of Robotic versus Living Dogs. *Journal of Post-Acute and Long-term Care Medicine*, 9(3), 173-177.

Gee, N. R., Mueller, M. K., & Curl, A. L. (2017). Human-Animal Interaction and Older Adults: An Overview. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1416. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01416>