



What's Working: Successful Practices of a Local AAI Organization

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INTRODUCTION

At Therapy Animals of Utah, teams provide brain power for ideas, problem solving, and synergy. They are also helpful for sharing the work. Therefore, we focus on using a diamond model of teamwork, expertise, and tools that we have developed for each step of the process of bringing the skilled human-animal therapy teams together with professionals and their clients.

OBJECTIVES

1. We will describe and show photos of the new Pet Partners handler training core course that our instructors helped to develop.
2. We will share the benefits and organization of training teams and evaluation teams.
3. We will describe our site assessment process and demonstrate the computer-based staff training that we provide for the staff of facilities we serve.
4. Those who attend our session will be able to discuss our mentoring process, view the mentor checklists we developed, and hear how our staff continues support of our members.
5. We will briefly describe our public education efforts in cooperation with the University of Utah.

TRAINING TEAMS

The *Training Team* comes together three times a year to put together the Pet Partner Core Course which our instructors helped develop. The course is practical and interactive, beginning with animals' calming and stress signals. It emphasized that the handler's job is to take care of their animal and progresses through handling skills in a variety of environments.

- *Executive Director:* registration, books, handouts, media, marketing
- *Training Coordinator:* scheduling, equipment (computer, projector, bed, wheelchair, IV pole), food and drinks
- *Pet Partner Volunteer Instructors:* bring teaching materials, collaborate on instruction, senior instructor acts as Pet Partner liaison for ordering books and sending training report as needed.
- *Evaluation Demo Team* (human and dog)
- *Evaluation Neutral Dog Team* (human and dog)

EVALUATION TEAMS

The *Evaluation Team* comes together two to four times a month to provide Pet Partners evaluations as required to keep teams registered for working with clients.

- *Evaluation Volunteer Coordinator:* scheduling teams to be evaluated, database of evaluation dates, reminders of time and equipment, Q&A
- *Evaluation Site Coordinator:* scheduling site and dates with facility, evaluators, and required volunteers for room and registration table, print schedule, Pet Partners Evaluation log, and fill in names on Pet Partner Team Evaluation forms in advance.
- *Evaluation Registration Table Team:* check in, observation, encouragement, traffic control to avoid animal to animal encounters
- *Evaluation Room Volunteers:* three volunteers as required by Pet Partners for role play during the evaluation.
- *Evaluation Room Neutral Team* (human and dog): participate in PPST exercise 12
- *Pet Partner Licensed Team Evaluators:* team on each evaluation, one observing and scribing, one performing hands-on exercises, both collaborating on scoring. Senior evaluator acts as Pet Partner liaison as needed.

Key services provided by the volunteer staff of Therapy Animals bridge the gap between initial training of volunteers and actually moving them into facilities to provide service to the public.

AREA COORDINATORS

The *Area Coordinators* for the three northern Utah counties we serve are the key team that build and maintain the relationships between members, volunteer mentors, professionals, and the facilities we serve.

Duties: welcome new members, equipment, uniforms, Q&A from members and the public, data bases of local members and the facilities they visit, monitoring visit reports, facility site assessments, facilitating connections between members, mentors, and facilities.

FACILITY SITE ASSESSMENT & STAFF TRAINING

- Site assessment and staff training is accomplished by the area coordinators in response to facility or member requests for new programs.
- During the site assessment, the Area Coordinator looks at facility population, program needs, and physical layout and makes recommendations for optimal AAI settings.
- If the facility does not have AAI policies and procedures in place, the coordinator can offer templates.
- Staff training is complemented with a computer-based program that addresses terminology, the preparation of our teams, the role of the handler, and the role of the staff, including client assessment, permissions, conduct of the session, and evaluation of progress towards goals. Facilities are encouraged to download a copy of the program for future staff training and review.

TEAM MENTORING

- New members are assigned to their mentor by the Area Coordinator.
- New members observe their mentor and her animal partner on at least one visit for specific handling skills.
- During subsequent visits the mentor observes the new handler and his/her animal partner, using the mentor checklists or Skill Spotting checklist to guide the observations.
- Mentoring may continue for several more sessions, depending on the confidence and skill of the handler and the animal.
- The staff, member, and mentor decide together when the novice team is ready to visit without a mentor.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

- The value of the human-animal bond to human health and well-being has been explained by TAU staff and volunteers in numerous informal and formal events.
- Information booths at Best Friends Strut Your Mutt and the downtown Salt Lake farmer's market are annual events.
- In cooperation with the University of Utah, our Board and Staff members have presented summer AAT Applications workshops, and, most recently, a two credit hour Introduction to Animal Assisted Interventions class to graduate social work and psychology students.



SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

In 2007, in an effort to make sure our teams were providing the professional quality of service that is our goal, TAU began mailing annual satisfaction surveys to all the facilities served by our handlers. Questions were taken from the mentor checklists, used a Likert scale of 1-5 to rate performance, and included a self-addressed stamped envelope to improve our response rate.

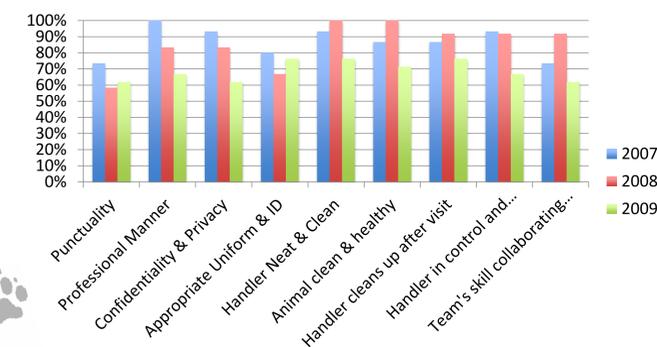
Table 1 shows that even though every year our number of facilities fluctuated, we consistently had over a 50% response rate, with the highest number of facilities responding in 2009.

Table 1: Satisfaction Survey Results

Year	2007	2008	2009
Survey Total	27	21	37
Response % (n)	56% (15)	57% (12)	57% (21)
Survey distribution & collection methods	Mailed to every facility with a self addressed stamped envelope included.	Mailed to every facility with a self addressed stamped envelope included.	Mailed to every facility with a self addressed stamped envelope included.

Graph 1 shows that while the percentage of questions answered "Very Satisfied" varied, they consistently remained very high. 58% was the lowest score in 2008 for Punctuality. While it appears that the percentages started to go down in 2009, that may have been due to the increase in number of facilities that TAU served. The lowest score in 2009 was 62% in the areas of Punctuality, Appropriate Uniform & ID, and Team's Skill Collaborating with Professional Staff in Working on Client Goals.

Graph 1: Percentage of Very Satisfied Facilities



All of the results were tallied and given to the TAU Board of Directors. In response to lower scores, "TAU Tips of the Month" were sent by email to remind handlers of essential elements of their role in AAA/T.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Therapy Animals of Utah is an active program in the communities of Salt Lake, Davis, and Utah Counties. Its services are being used and deemed useful by the participants.

Goals for the program include:

- Provide increased training in animal assisted interventions to community volunteers and university graduate students.
- Increase fundraising and grant writing through development opportunities.
- Increase training and mentorship for volunteers.
- Increase the ability to conduct research on animal assisted interventions with clinical therapists in the community.
- Expand current evaluation tools in order to obtain the most accurate results possible.

NOTEBOOK CONTENTS

- Core Course Agenda
- Core Course Outline
- Satisfaction Survey
- Sample Site Assessment
- Staff Training Power Point
- Team Evaluation Score Sheets
- Mentoring Checklists
- Skill Spotting Checklist
- Class Syllabus
- Student Course Feedback

