

[Pet Therapy in Nursing Homes: Assisted Living May Never be the Same](#)

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When the time comes for a family member to move into a nursing home or retirement community many worry that their loved ones will begin to feel lonely and unneeded as time goes by. Fortunately, thanks to people such as Kit Darling and Dr. Karen Snowden and their work with organizations like Aggieland Pets With A Purpose, many elderly residents are getting the chance to experience the unconditional love of a pet.

“People in nursing homes usually face a lot of physical challenges, and having a pet live with them is not an option,” said Kit Darling, infection control coordinator at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science (CVM). “But many nursing homes now will allow personal pets to visit or may schedule pet visits with an animal-assisted therapy group.”

[Aggieland Pets With A Purpose](#), or APWAP, is a local non-profit animal-assisted therapy organization. APWAP members and their pets, usually dogs or cats, visit many assisted-living and nursing home facilities in the Bryan, College Station community. “It is always very rewarding to see a person smile or talk about their pets when one of my APWAP certified dogs like Dexter or Daschle visits a nursing home facility,” said Darling.

“Each animal involved in APWAP has passed a temperament test and receives regular veterinary care with parasite control and vaccinations in order to be a part of the program,” said Darling. “It is also important for the animals that visit to be healthy and clean, so all of our animals have a bath within 24 hours prior to a visit, including having their nails filed and ears cleaned.”

Some retirement communities and assisted living facilities allow their residents to have pets live with them. In these communities, the residents usually have an apartment and must be physically able to care for their pet’s daily needs. The pet must also be friendly towards other people and animals, and should have regular visits with its veterinarian to ensure that it is healthy. There may also be restrictions on the type and size of pets allowed depending on the facility.

“Having a pet can be greatly beneficial to the health of the older population,” said [Dr. Karen Snowden](#), professor at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science (CVM). “A pet can provide companionship and social opportunities for the elderly population, as well as physical, psychological, and emotional health benefits.”

“After children are grown and maybe a spouse has passed, a person may feel isolated and inessential,” said Snowden. “Having to care for a pet provides a sense of need, and having regular interactions with a pet has shown to lower blood pressure, decrease anxiety, increase physical activity, and enhance social opportunities.”

About Pet Talk

Pet Talk is a service of the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University. Stories can be viewed on the Web at vetmed.tamu.edu/news/pet-talk. Suggestions for future topics may be directed to editor@cvm.tamu.edu.