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Increasing Occupational Therapists' Knowledge and Awareness of Service Dogs

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Increasing Occupational Therapists' Knowledge and Awareness of Service Dogs

Emily Freyberg, S/OT, Jessa Kenworthy, B.A., and Kristen Pataki, OTD, OTR/L, ATRIC

Abstract

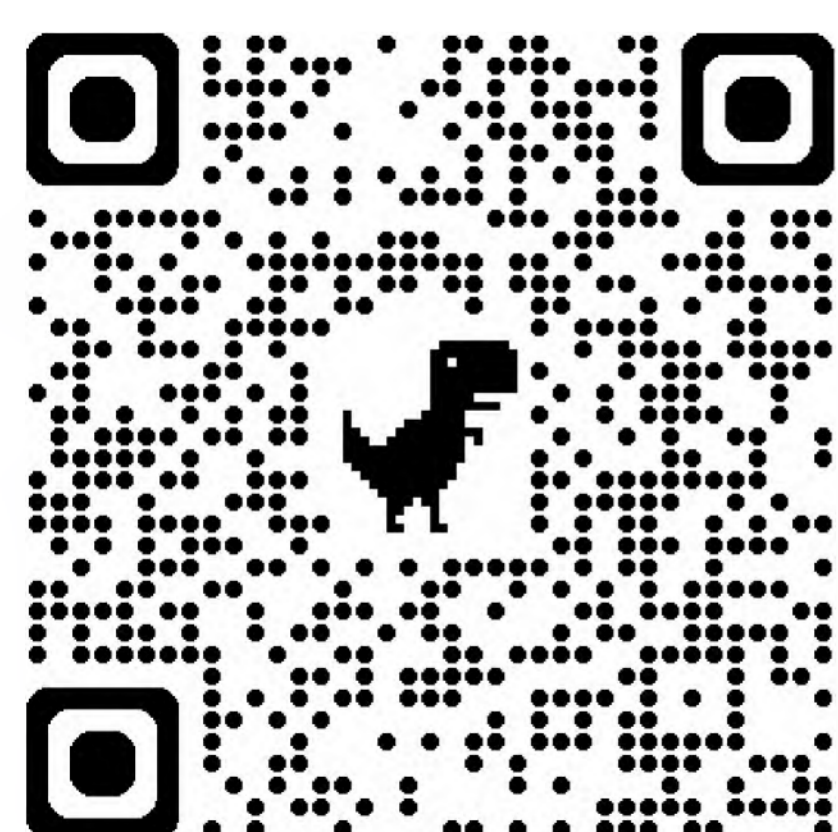
- There is a lack of knowledge and resources on service dogs in the occupational therapy (OT) profession, leading to a lack of confidence and ability to refer and educate individuals/families.
- Only 14/145 occupational therapists (OTs) have referred a client for a service dog (Iong et al., 2021).
- 60% of OTs believe it is within their scope of practice to refer clients for service dogs, however only 25% report receiving education or training in order to refer (Chan et al., 2021).
- I collaborated with 4 Paws for Ability, an organization providing service dogs for a variety of children and needs.
- I developed an educational resource manual for OTs through observation of service dog training and placement classes, reviewal of client intake information and client educational materials, and research on several topics.
- Service dogs are a tool to increase independence.
- As OTs strive to help their clients achieve independence, they need to be aware of this tool.



This photo demonstrates tethering, a service dog task that helps prevent children from eloping or wandering away.

Brief Biography

My name is Emily Freyberg, and I am an occupational therapy student at Cleveland State University. I chose my capstone as I am passionate about dogs and the benefits they can provide, as well as children deserving a fair shot at childhood. I see myself working in an outpatient pediatric setting in the future. Scan the QR code below to view more on my E-dossier page!



Capstone Experience and Implications

- Service dogs provide benefits in occupational performance areas.
- I created an in-depth manual on service dogs for children, which was presented and disseminated to an outpatient pediatric therapy clinic.
- **Goal:** increase awareness and understanding on the purpose and scope of service dogs in the OT profession

Examples of topics educated on:

- Tasks the service dog can perform
- Client process and costs for receiving a service dog
- Service dog laws in the Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Who might benefit from a referral
 - Realistic expectations of owning a service dog

Main activities: volunteer tasks including exercising and playing with service dogs in training, outreach events involving educating others about service dogs, observation of service dogs being trained in their specific tasks, and observation of families meeting and being educated on their service dogs.

Main takeaways:

- Service dogs have immense benefits for children and families.
- Service dogs are still gaining public awareness and acceptance.
- OTs should have knowledge on this topic as they are likely to encounter a situation with a service dog in their career.

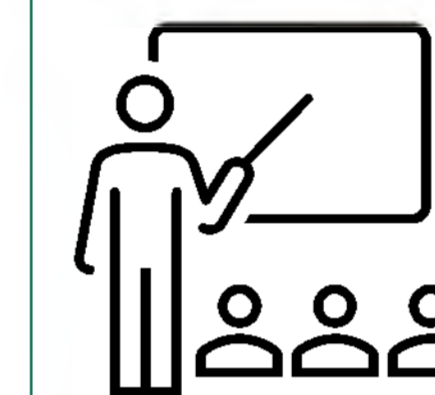
The resource manual is available on my E-dossier.

Key References

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Challenges and Recommendations

- There is a lot to know about service dogs, making it challenging to only include the most pertinent information in the manual.
- Since I included many topic areas, I had to keep each area somewhat broad.
- Next time, I would include less topic areas so I could include more detail.



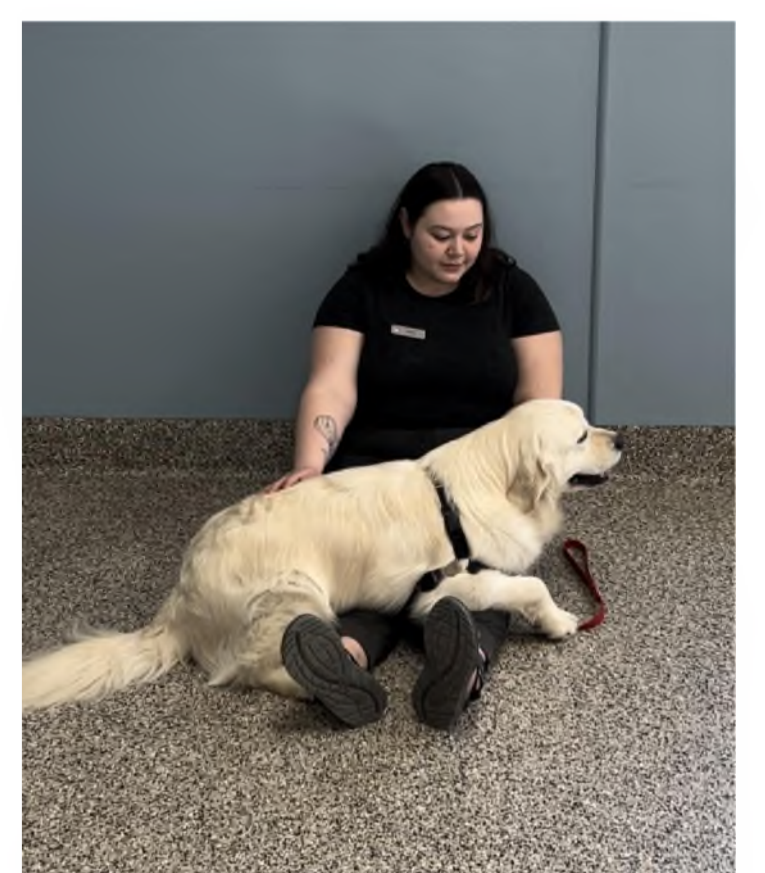
The next step should be a lecture prepared for students, so they have this knowledge entering the field, or creating a continuing education course for a more directed approach to education.



A screening form to assist OTs in determining appropriate referrals would also be a good next step.

Synthesis

- Through this capstone, I found there is a lack of education and resources for OTs on this topic, which is consistent with the literature.
- This manual helps fill the gap by being a concise resource for OTs to utilize to become educated on this assistive option for children.
- This education is important so OTs can refer when appropriate, answer client questions, and navigate having a client with a service dog in a therapy setting.



A service dog can provide deep pressure by laying their body weight over the child.

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