INTERDISCIPLINARY SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Pets Assisting with Student Success: PAWSS at MacEwan University
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MENTAL HEALTH WITH PAWSS

Mental health-related problems, stress and symptoms of mental illness have been increasing in Canadian postsecondary students. We need more focus on low barrier access interdisciplinary campus services that help students, such as animal-assisted therapy on campus (Ecclestone et al., 2023).

OBJECTIVE

Goal
To understand the needs in trauma-informed practices in Canadian universities, and to study the effects of the animal-assisted wellness program (PAWSS) at MacEwan University.

Expected Outcomes
Qualitative and quantitative results and recommendations about the benefits of the PAWSS program.

Animal-Assisted Therapy
The benefit of studying and understanding the effectiveness of the PAWSS program is that the animals are helping students who also might be experiencing oppression, discrimination, social loneliness, and other forms of distress having a compounding effect on their mental health (Helminen et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative
Our qualitative phenomenological approach provides data on students' experiences and insights into their lived experiences with the PAWSS program. This opportunity allows for an understanding of experiences and how the PAWSS program has assisted student mental health in the day-to-day lives of MacEwan students.

Quantitative
Furthermore, we use quantitative methods to measure levels of stress and mood before interacting with the PAWSS, and after attending sessions over 3 and 6 months. The measures are The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF). We used Qualtrics to collect answers to the online surveys and collect PSS and PANAS-SF results. The baseline (n=65) indicates elevated levels of stress and nervousness.

RESULTS

Fill out the qualitative survey here!

Fill out PSS and PANAS here!

CONCLUSION

According to the qualitative survey participants (n=22) self-reported decreased anxiety and daily stress after participating in a PAWSS event, due to increased social interactions and connection to animals. Also, participants highlighted that they meet new peers and maintain those connections.

Future Improvements
What else would you like to share that helps the researcher to understand your experience better?

"more PAWSS capacity", "more dogs please", "great program", posters around the schools to educate others, with photos of volunteers", "post pet's photos", "more advertisement"

References
Ecclestone, A., Linden, B., Monaghan, C., & Zheng, S. (2023). Canada's Student Mental Health Network: Protocol for a Comprehensive Program Evaluation. JMIR Research Protocols, 12, e41521. https://doi.org/10.2196/41521

Helminen, E. C., Scheer, J. R., Edwards, K. M., & Felver, J. C. (2022). Adverse childhood experiences exacerbate the association between day-to-day discrimination and mental health symptomatology in undergraduate students. Journal of Affective Disorders, 297, 338–347. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.10.058

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