

Introduction

Mental Health with PAWSS

Mental health-related problems, increased 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).

Figure 1: PAWSS MacEwan Image



Note. From MacEwan University [Photograph], by Nathaniel Castillo, 2018, Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/161115275@N07/46325895902/in/album-72157676250644588/>). CC BY 2.0.

Objectives

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

Preliminary results and recommendation 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 in different groups 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).

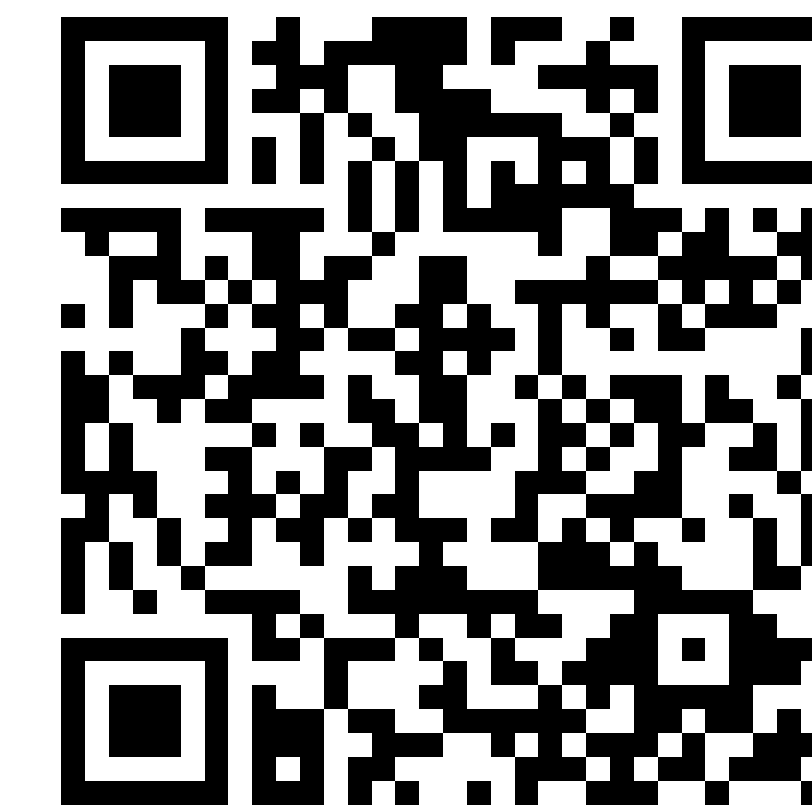
Methods

Qualitative Survey Study

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.

Programs Used

- Qualtrics – survey conduction
- NVivo- qualitative data analysis



Fill out survey here!

Conclusions

Participants (n=18) 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, different 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”

Results

Findings – Sample Questions/Answers

How would you describe the effects of participating in the PAWSS program in regards to your academic success?

don't know

I think that the biggest impact they have is to help you pause in the moment and realize that there is a life outside of academics so that when you return to the academics, you're more focused and able to concentrate. Quite honestly there have been days when I have felt like quitting and then at the end of my rope and I connect with one of the animals get a good hug get a good feel good talk to whoever is with the animals and I'm able to return to and refocus on my studies with success.

I don't know how they are correlated but I am less stressed about exams so I might have a clearer mind going in and be able to perform better

Not directly, but helped indirectly by reducing my stress level

greater in that class because I am able to pay attention due to lowered stress

How would you describe the effects of participating in the PAWSS program in regards to your social life/connections?

positive

Same impact as above less stress, equals, calmer interactions, and a better ability to see the big picture, let the little things go

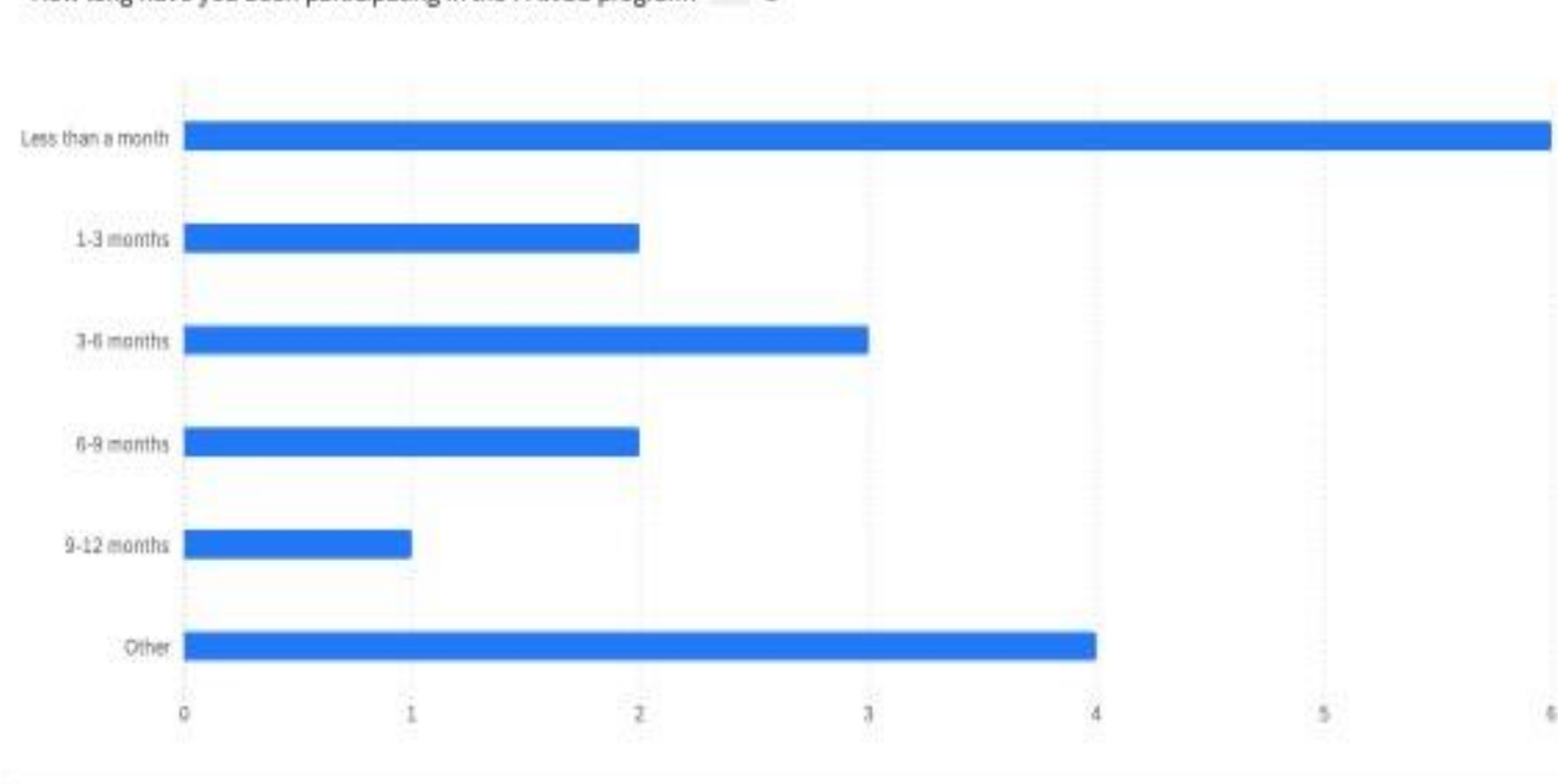
Highly positive

Not applicable.

Being able to interact with a furry animal makes my brain release dopamine and thus makes me feel more happy

connect with classmates while interaction with pawss dogs

How long have you been participating in the PAWSS program?



Common Themes



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>

Acknowledgements

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Figure 2: PAWSS MacEwan Image



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