

## Puppy Love

An introduction to the role for Occupational Therapy in animal-assisted services  
**Expressions of Interest Sought**

Online – 3 hours

Term 4, 2025

Animals in helping roles is a notion that has been around for decades, however the recent increase in anecdotal stories portrayed through the media has resulted in an increased need for animal-assisted services. With this increased need has also come a considerable amount of confusion over the terminology used to describe the different forms of animal-assisted services impacting the way these services are communicated to our clients. Assistance/service dogs work to assist individuals with a physical disability, such as vision or hearing impairments, and those with limited mobility achieve greater independence in completing specific tasks or occupations, as well as individuals with a diagnosed mental health condition to support community participation and social interactions with others.

Therapy dogs work alongside their handler to provide animal-assisted therapy, a goal directed service performed by a health or education specialist working within the scope of their profession. This involves health professionals such as occupational therapists who have received additional training and assessment to work alongside their therapy dogs in order to support the social, emotional and physical needs of their clients. Therapy Animals, particularly dogs, have been shown to have many positive effects within therapy sessions including reduced anxiety, increased engagement and rapport between therapist and client, as well as acting as an intrinsic motivator to support engagement with therapy interventions.

Finally, the benefits of companion (pet) animals, have been widely acknowledged within the research, for individuals with and without a disability. Benefits of pet ownership suggested within the literature includes reduction in stress and anxiety, increased social interaction and companionship and increased sense of purpose.

**Workshop Objectives** – this module will provide participants with:

- An understanding of the differences between an assistance animal, therapy animal, companion (pet) animal (including public access rights, training requirements etc)
- An overview of the underlying theoretical foundations of animal-assistive services
- An overview of the ethical and professional responsibilities for occupational therapists entering the space of animal-assisted therapy
- An overview of the occupational considerations of owning a companion animal or pet
- OT role in supporting the relationship between clients and companion animals to support therapeutic goal achievement (i.e. therapy dog as an assistive technology/support)
- An overview of the considerations that need to be made when supporting a client to request funding from the NDIS to access an assistance dog.
- Considerations for services interested in utilising animal-assistive therapy
- Ideas for the practical application of animal-assisted therapy for occupational therapists.

This workshop is suitable for occupational therapists.

### Workshop Delivery

Participants will need to have access to internet facilities including Zoom and webcam to ensure that they are able to download and view workshop content, as well as actively participate in the online presentation.

## Workshop Recording

Please note to safeguard the copyright of material presented, maintain the confidentiality of case discussions and the privacy of participants, **this workshop WILL NOT be recorded.**

## About the Presenter



**Dr Jessica Hill** - Jessica (Jess) is a Lecturer in Occupational Therapy at the University of Queensland (UQ); and was appointed the Deputy Director of the UQ Animal-Assisted Services Research Unit in 2018. She is also the Chair of the Queensland Committee for Animal Therapies Ltd. Jess has completed her PhD, *Canine-assisted Occupational Therapy Interventions and Engagement in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Jess has also published various journal articles on animal-assistive interventions and has authored a chapter in *Animal-Assisted Interventions for Health and Human Service Professionals*.

Jess has extensive clinical experience in working with children on the Autism Spectrum. She has attended formal Animal-Assisted Therapy training, including Level 1 AAPT (2016) and EAGALA (2018). Jess works with her canine-assistants, Labradoodles - Elsa & Loki, to engage and motivate clients to participate in OT activities such as fine and gross motor skills, pretend play and social skills.

**Expressions of Interest** for this workshop are now being sought. Please contact Zi Mei Events on [info@zimei.com.au](mailto:info@zimei.com.au) or (07) 3358 3689 to register your interest.