Chapter 14
Older Adults, Pets, and Intergenerational Service Learning

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This chapter expands on the topic addressed in Chap. 13. The previous chapter focused on older adults, men in particular, and pet ownership. It provided the foundation for this chapter by exploring the psychological and physiological benefits of pet ownership for older adults, and how important this relationship is for many seniors. The current chapter explores one way to support this bond—intergenerational service learning. The chapter begins with helping set the stage by providing an overview of how older adults are viewed in the United States. It then moves into describing service learning, including intergenerational service learning, before moving into a description of a specific intergenerational service learning program designed to support older adults' bond with their companion animals.

Older Adults in U.S.

What defines "old age" or "older adults" is certainly relative, and the age at which people are viewed as old has changed dramatically over time. Not long ago, few people even reached the age of 65 or older ("Aging and Ageism" 2012), but life expectancy in the United States has been steadily increasing. Life expectancy in 1900 was 47 years, compared to 77 years in 2000 and over 78 years in 2010 (Arias 2010).

The demographic distribution of older adults in the U.S. is different than the rest of the population. For example, females make up 57 % of Americans aged 65 or

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older. Racially, 80 % are non-Latino whites (compared to 66 % in the population as a whole); 8.6 % are African American (compared to 13 % of the population); and 7.0 % are Latino (compared to 15 % of the population) (Census Data 2012). The number of Americans 65 or older as a percentage of the population is expected to continue to rise. While they comprised 4.1 % of the population in 1900, they are expected to reach 20.2 % by 2050. Labeled the "*graying of America*," this increase will have important repercussions for the elderly, as well as the individuals and support services caring for them ("Aging and Ageism" 2012).

In many countries, the elderly are valued and revered (e.g., China, India, Korea, etc.). Unfortunately, this is not the prevenient attitude in the U.S. (Hernandez and Gonzalez 2008). Several studies have documented the negative attitudes of the U.S. population toward older adults (e.g., Gugliucci and Weiner 2013; Sink 2015). Often, older adults as seen as an undesirable outside separate group, rather than viewing aging as a natural developmental process. Many see becoming old as an inevitable decline or fading away-leading to dependence, depression, and isolation. As a result of these views, many attempt to emotionally distance themselves from the elderly. Unfortunately, this only reinforces the misconceptions, because younger generations are not able to interact with elderly and have an opportunity to reshape their perceptions (Sink 2015). Given the lack of actual contact, ageism in the media only perpetuates the problem (Diamond 2013).

The reasons behind ageism are complex and multifaceted, but one theory is the U.S. culture's emphasis on individualism, independence, and the Protestant work ethic. These values result in much of a person's identity and worth tied to his/her ability to work (Martinez-Carter 2013). To compound this problem, older Americans often face age discrimination in job selection. Despite numerous studies showing that older workers offer many advantages over younger employees, ageism is common in the workplace (Reade 2013). Thus, even for older adults who are able and willing to work, finding employment can be challenging. This is especially true for technology-related jobs. Many technology companies, for example, post openings exclusively for new or recent college graduates as a way to avoid directly stating they are only interested in younger candidates. Facebook, for example, recently settled a lawsuit involving a job posting for an attorney in which they specified a specific graduating class as preferred (2007 or 2008). These issues make it challenging for many older adults to continue being gainfully employed.

In addition to difficulties maintaining or obtaining employment, other factors influence the likelihood of dependence and isolation for older Americans, including family structure and geographical location choices. More people are choosing to remain single without children as well as move more frequently and both of these factors reduce the opportunity for family support (Diamond 2013).

The issues facing many older adults create the need to explore innovative ways to help support their physical and psychological health. As discussed in the previous chapter, pet ownership is one such option. Pets offer numerous physical, psychological, and social benefits, though a significant number of older adults face challenges related to caring for a pet. To help preserve and encourage this

human–animal bond, some organizations have worked to create supportive solutions. In addition to such organizations, another option worth exploring is that of service learning, which provides a way to reach beyond the scope of improving the lives of older adults and their pets to include an educational element that can positively impact another generation.

Pets Forever (PF) is an example of this type of program. The rest of this chapter will cover two major topics: the first part will explore service learning, with an emphasis on intergenerational opportunities, and the remaining part of the chapter will describe in detail PF, a program created to provide a unique opportunity to students, while helping fulfill the needs of vulnerable pet owners in the community.

Service Learning and Community Service

The willingness to give of oneself to improve one's community is universally viewed as a desirable trait and has been equated with higher levels of human development. As Maslow explained many years ago, self-actualized people have a deep feeling of empathy, sympathy, and compassion for human beings in general (Maslow 1954). Fortunately, the desire to give back to one's community is something that can be fostered and nurtured (Dharamsi et al. 2010); colleges and universities can help foster this character strength, for both men and women, through service learning.

Service learning, a form of community-based education, is a structured learning activity that balances service and learning (Bringle et al. 2004; Hood 2009). Service learning, as defined by Eyler and Giles (1999), is a teaching and learning methodology which fosters civic responsibility and applies classroom learning through meaningful service to the community. It combines formal coursework with community service in a way that promotes specific academic learning objectives, responds to community-identified needs, and is based on the premise that students can become better citizens when given opportunities to experience and understand complex social problems and apply what they learn (Eyler and Giles 1999). Bringle and Hatcher's (1995) definition of service learning focuses more on community needs: they define service learning as an educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets an identified community need, and are given the opportunity to reflect on the service as a way to encourage an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

Examples of service learning include a communication course in which students prepare public relation materials for nonprofit organizations, education courses in which students provide after school tutoring with at-risk students, or accounting courses where students offer free tax preparation assistance to low-income clients.

Service-learning courses accomplish several goals. They provide students with experiences that allow them to gain a broader appreciation of their discipline and

an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Ash et al. 2005; Eyler et al. 2001; Pelco et al. 2014). Although studies have found that women have higher levels of participation in community service compared to men, both during school and as working adults (e.g., Trudeau and Devlin 1996; Miller 1994), it has been suggested that increased emphasis by schools on service during men's formative years might help change students' behaviors related to service after graduation (Smith 2005) and improve the chances that they will engage in more community service as working adults (Ash et al. 2005; Celio et al. 2011; Markus et al. 1993; Vogelgesang and Astin 2000). Students in dental schools help exemplify this benefit. For example, it has been suggested that dentists' willingness to treat the underserved can be influenced during dental school (Coe et al. 2014; Holtzman and Seirawan 2009; Davidson et al. 2009). More exposure and experience in providing care to the underserved, especially in community settings, has been shown to improve dental students' awareness of community needs and their willingness to provide community service to those in need (Smith et al. 2006).

In addition to positively impacting later service-related behaviors, service-learning experiences have been shown to improve students' academic performance (Zacherman and Foubert 2014). Several studies have shown that involvement in cocurricular activities can improve GPA (Carini et al. 2006; Gordon et al. 2008; Kuh et al. 2008), critical thinking skills (Pike 2004), and increase the likelihood of disadvantaged students successfully graduating (Kuh 2009). Service learning can also impact students' career decisions by increasing awareness of career options, offering practical and professional experience, and reinforcing the value of a career that serves others (Blieszner and Artale 2001; Eyler et al. 1997; Fenzel and Leary 1997).

A modification of Schwartz's model of altruistic behavior can be useful when examining relationships between service learning and the formation of students' helping behaviors and attitudes (Schwartz 1977). This model includes four steps:

Step 1   Activation—students perceive a need to respond, in the form of awareness of the need and feeling connected to the people in need.
Step 2   Obligation—students feel a moral obligation to respond to the need through a personal and situational norm and empathy.
Step 3   Defense—students reconsider costs and benefits of helping, and then reassess the situation and become serious of the need to respond.
Step 4   Response—students develop intention to engage in the community service.

With this model in mind, there are some suggested pedagogical strategies instructors can use to enhance the success of service learning courses (Roodin et al. 2013). They include the following:

Preparation: Assess the community issue to be addressed through service, evaluate the resources required for success, create relationships with community partners, and make the commitment to creating the course.
Action: Develop the course content, including specific objectives and goals; prepare students for service through training and in-class experiences. Faculty must not assume they know what students are taking with them into the service

experience, nor should they assume that students are knowledgeable about what critical reflection is, or how it is done. To that end, Stogner (2004) suggested that faculty conduct lectures on critical thinking prior to students engaging in their service experiences. Similarly, Viggiani (2004) focused on ways to prepare students with "pre-service reflection," and provided readers with a reflection assignment format and a template for how faculty might review reflective journal entries. The next step in action is to initiate the service component of the course, monitor students' engagement, and assess how well the course is meeting the needs of the community partners.

Reflection: Develop opportunities for students to process their experiences, relate them to course content, examine personal values and beliefs, and explore personal feelings and reactions.

Reward: Celebrate students' accomplishments and use campus and local media to help showcase successes of the course.

Assessment: Conduct ongoing outcomes evaluation of students, clients, and community agencies; use this data to drive changes for future development (Roodin et al. 2013).

Because of the potential benefits, more colleges are implementing and supporting service-learning courses as one way to improve comprehension of course content, develop life skills, and create a greater awareness of community, service, and civic responsibility (Kalisch et al. 2013; Astin and Sax 1998; Batchelder and Root 1994; Eyler and Giles 1999; Hamon and Way 2001; Roodin et al. 2013). One specific type of service learning that is gaining popularity is intergenerational service learning.

Intergenerational Contact

As discussed earlier, the perceptions of older adults in the U.S. involve many negative stereotypical views. The elderly are seen by many as feeble, burdensome, inflexible, and having little to offer to their communities (Cohen et al. 2004; Sauer 2006; Kimuna et al. 2005). College students tend to embrace these negative stereotypes more often than other age cohorts (Lovell 2006; Cohen et al. 2004). The views of college students toward elderly are often validated by media messages that frequently support negative stereotypes (Lovell 2006).

As suggested by social identity theory, in an effort to maintain a positive self-identity, individuals attempt to identify themselves as members of a specific group, thereby creating clear distinctions between themselves and other groups. For college students, this can result in younger adults having unfavorable or negative attitudes toward the elderly and seeing themselves as fundamentally different and better than older adults (Kalisch et al. 2013; Lovell 2006).

Yet, as the U.S. population continues to grow older, there will be an increasing need for people who want to work with older adults. For many fields, however, this presents significant challenges. For example, in the medical field, the number

of physicians who specialize in the health care of older adults (geriatricians) decreased by 33 % between 1998 and 2004, and continues to decline (Gugliucci and Weiner 2013). It is estimated that by 2030 only 2.5 geriatricians will be available for every 10,000 adults age 75 and older. Since the older cohort is expected to double by 2030, a severe shortage is anticipated (American Geriatrics Society 2011). Unfortunately, many doctors do not feel comfortable caring for older adults (Gawande 2007). Only 7 % of pharmacy students, for example, describe older adults using a majority of positive terms (Sauer 2006). Lack of interest in this field will make it challenging to replace retiring geriatricians, let alone meet a growing demand. Given this backdrop, college students' career choice surrounding older adults is one of particular importance (Lovell 2006; Sauer 2006).

On a more encouraging note, there is some evidence that students who have the opportunity to interact with older adults have more positive attitudes toward them, and toward aging in general. Several studies have found that younger adults who have direct contact with older adults have fewer negative attitudes toward the elderly (O'Hanlon and Brookover 2002; Schwartz and Simmons 2001; Kite et al. 2005; Regan and Fazio 1977; Tiller and Fazio 1982). Since exposure and contact can make a difference, it is critically important that schools create opportunities to help change perceptions and foster an interest in working with older adults. It is for these reasons that intergenerational service learning has become an important component in many academic programs (Karasik 2013).

Intergenerational service learning, in which members of different age cohorts work together to achieve personal or academic goals, has been shown to be effective in reducing negative perceptions of aging populations (Kalisch et al. 2013; O'Hanlon and Brookover 2002; Vandsberger and Wakefield 2008; Knapp and Stubblefield 2000; McCrea et al. 1999). Additionally, these courses have been shown to provide "real-life" experience and knowledge about elder care and human service issues (Westacott and Hegeman 1996), dispel myths about aging and older persons (Karasik and Berke 2001; Krout et al. 2010; Whitbourne et al. 2001), increase students' understanding of the aging process (Blieszner and Artale 2001; Whitbourne et al. 2001), help students translate related theories into practice (Faria et al. 2010; Horowitz et al. 2010; Karasik and Berke 2001), and encourage students to choose careers in the field of aging (Blieszner and Artale 2001; Horowitz et al. 2010).

Studies by Dorfman et al. (2002), as well as those by Bringle and Kremer (1993), found that students who had been involved in service learning reported feeling less fearful of their own aging, were more likely to feel positive about the elderly, and had higher expectations of life in old age when compared to those who had not engaged in service learning. Roodin (2002) also found that service learning enhances students' understanding of course material and increases enthusiasm for the topic when compared to a traditional lecture course.

Other researchers have found similar positive attitude changes as a consequence of service learning (Ames and Diepstra 2006; Beling 2003; Blieszner and Artale 2001; Brown and Roodin 2001; Gutheil et al. 2006; Hegeman et al. 2002; Karasik et al. 2004; Krout et al. 2010). Hanks (2001), for example, conducted a

study with gerontology and business students working with older adults in discipline-specific service-learning activities. At posttest, these students' attitudes toward older workers showed less negative stereotyping compared to pretest scores. Even more promising is the likelihood that service-learning experiences create long-term changes. One longitudinal study reported that changes identified in students who participated in a service-learning course were evident years after they graduated from college (Fenzel and Peyrot 2005).

Intergenerational service-learning courses, in addition to offering all these benefits to students, also help address community social issues by combining the strengths and resources of universities and communities to address real-world issues (Roodin et al. 2013). Intergenerational service learning creates partnerships that help communities address local issues. Many communities begin to count on these partnerships, thereby allowing them to build new programs, strengthen service delivery in older programs, improve the ratio of volunteers to older adult participants, provide relief to overburdened staff, and address underserved groups of elders or increase awareness of a community need that has heretofore gone unnoticed (Roodin et al. 2013). Pets Forever—Supporting the Life-long Bond (PF), a successful example of intergenerational service learning, operates in such a community.

PF is a seven-year-old intergenerational service-learning course offered at Colorado State University (CSU), as well as an organization working in collaboration with the nonprofit arm of the school: CSU Foundation. The goal of PF is to preserve and promote the human–animal bond by helping low-income elderly and disabled local residents keep their pets as long as possible, while improving the health and well-being of these pets and owners. The program accomplishes this by providing a variety of needed assistance and resources. PF works closely with numerous community organizations that support low-income elderly and disabled, such as CSU's Clinical Sciences Department, the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, several private veterinary practitioners, local animal companies and animal groomers, as well as other nonprofit organizations that function to serve this population. As of January 2016, PF has helped over 350 clients (and currently serves approximately 155) with an average of 378 service/outreach hours each week.

PF's primary mission is the provision of direct services to clients and their pets, including companion dog walking (walking with the owner and their pet), independent dog walking, litter box scooping and cleaning, cleaning enclosures of caged pets, nail trims, bathing, brushing, feeding, yard feces removal, and transportation to/from animal-related appointments. In addition to in-home care, PF provides a full range of other health and well-being services; such services include a sponsored food program, the pick up, delivery, and administration of pet medications, and regular grooming services.

The associated service-learning course offers benefits to the University that include local and national recognition as a leader in an innovative, unique service learning, nonprofit program and helps foster positive community relationships through ongoing collaborative relationships with numerous local agencies. The community also benefits from the program through a greater awareness of the

benefits that pets have for older and/or disabled individuals, a wider acceptance of older and/or disabled individuals having pets that can contribute toward the stability of these vulnerable populations as well as reducing the number of animals relinquished to local animal shelters.

PF provides students from diverse educational backgrounds with an opportunity to gain valuable real-life experience while simultaneously earning college credit. Although PF has several volunteers from the community, a major part of PF's mission is the enrichment of students' experience through the opportunity to gain community service experience. The students involved with the program include undergraduate, graduate, international, and professional veterinary students.

The course is offered as a three-credit, advanced-level undergraduate course, as well as a three-credit graduate course. Enrolled students come from all majors and departments. Approximately, 60–65 % of the students are pre-veterinary students (majoring in biology, animal sciences, etc.) who are interested in obtaining experience working directly with animals. These pre-veterinary students are able to gain valuable volunteer animal contact hours and community service, which are two critical areas assessed by veterinary school admissions committees. In fact, several previous and current PF volunteers have successfully been admitted into veterinary programs. The remaining 35–40 % of students are interested in gaining experience working with vulnerable populations and come from majors such as psychology, social work, human development and family studies, and occupational therapy.

Veterinary students are an additional group impacted by the course. These students interact with PF clients and pets as part of the program's veterinary care services. PF gives these students the opportunity to gain practical experience working with low-income elderly and disabled community pet owners—a population they otherwise have minimal exposure to. Because CSU's veterinary teaching hospital, like most teaching hospitals, is a tertiary care facility, cases tend to focus on more advanced veterinary care and many of the pet owners who visit the hospital have the funds necessary to provide advanced medical care to their pets. Yet, many students upon graduation will be employed at clinics serving clients with limited funds who are forced to make difficult choices regarding the health care of their pet. For this reason, the clients of PF are felt to be more representative of a large segment of clients these students will serve after graduation. It is viewed favorably, therefore, that PF helps these fourth year veterinary students practice practical skills including the following:

- Discussing clients' financial constraints and adjusting treatment and recommendations accordingly
- Communicating with disabled pet owners who have cognitive or physical limitations that can make clear communication more difficult
- Learning to adapt to treatment or follow up plans to match clients' physical and intellectual abilities
- Communicating through a third party (in this case, a PF volunteer) when owners are not able to communicate directly.

One additional group of students who participate with PF worth noting is international students. For these students, PF offers the opportunity to view a very different aspect of American culture than what they are exposed to while on campus. They are able to practice their English skills in a different 'real world' environment and create relationships with Americans they would not have had an opportunity to interact with otherwise. For many of these students, what often begins as a very anxiety-producing experience (e.g., calling strangers on the phone, making small talk with clients) quickly morphs into an enriched cultural experience, both for the students as well as the clients. One additional unique factor of PF is that it is one of the few classes where freshmen and graduate aged students have a chance to interact and collaborate.

Course Objectives

The course focuses on several specific objectives. Students are informed that as a result of this course, they will accomplish the following: Based on firsthand experience, students will demonstrate the ability to make a difference in the lives of others, their companion animals, and the community. Students will acquire communication techniques useful in working with vulnerable populations and the medical and animal care community, and demonstrate these skills by developing effective relationships with Pets Forever clients.

- Students will become proficient in applying needs identification strategies in real life situations to assist individual clients.
- Students will acquire critical reasoning skills by being involved with the problem solving that naturally comes from working with a dynamically changing program and clientele.
- Students will develop presentation skills and practice techniques to promote the Pets Forever program through professional work ethic and behavior.
- Students will reflect on the nature of their weekly experiences by communicating their experiences with the course instructors and classmates.

Making sure these objectives are met is accomplished in part by explicitly stating the expectations of all students. These requirements include attending the weekly 1-h class and providing 5 h of community service per week. The class period is the only set time each week; the rest of students' schedules are self-determined. With over 155 active clients to select from, students are able to select which clients they would like to work with based on client and pet characteristics, services needed, and days/times requested. Once students select their clients, they retain these clients for the semester so they are able to establish long-term relationships with both the owners and their pets.

Each class period begins with a 'check-in' process in which students share their experiences from the previous week. These might be concerns or issues about an owner or animal, or a positive experience they want to share. Since many of the

clients are seen by more than one student each week, it is a great time for students to interact with other students who are providing services to the same client. There are many examples of when this type of communication is vital. For example, if a client is not home when one student goes to visit, it is important to determine the well-being of this client. Therefore, it is important to look for trends: did another student discover the client was not home? If so, this warrants further and immediate attention. Since many of the clients have limited contact with others besides PF volunteers, the program also serves as a safety net for these pet owners. PF volunteers are often the first ones to become aware of a client's changing health status (e.g., hospitalization, accidents at home, etc.). It is therefore a critical part of the program to maintain constant communication between instructors and students to help ensure rapid transmission of important information. In fact, one requirement of the course is for students to respond to all email correspondence within 24 h to ensure that important information does not fall between the cracks.

After students check-in each week, the remaining time in most class periods is filled with guest speakers from the community. Approximately, 50 % of the speakers come from local animal-related organizations (e.g., rescue shelters, humane society, pet food assistance, etc.) and the other 50 % come from organizations that service the population which PF supports. Examples include the Alzheimer's' Association, the MS Society, the Food bank, etc. In this way, students are exposed to a variety of local nonprofits designed to support vulnerable people and their pets. Feedback from students has suggested that they often have little prior access or knowledge of such programs.

In addition to their service, all students are required to complete a reflection paper that summarizes their experiences, thoughts, and insights gained from the class. Students are given the choice of either focusing their paper on one client or overall reflections related to their service work. To provide additional guidance, students are told the following:

- The reflection should be a true reflection of your experience with PF, rather than just a recap/summary of what happened.
- The reflection should be in context of the material discussed in class and the course learning objectives.
- Personal feelings are encouraged, but professional writing is expected.
- The reflection should demonstrate your ability to synthesize the experiences gained during the service-learning components of class.

The actual topic of the reflection paper can address any one or more of the following questions:

- In general, what are the most important things that you have learned through your experiences with PF?
- Discuss your experiences with one particular client and how this has changed your perceptions.
- How did your experiences affect the way you think about the issues and/or clients that PF deals with?

- What have you learned about social inequality through your service work?
- What have you learned about yourself from your service this semester?

At the end of the semester, students are asked to share their reflection papers with the class via a 5–7 min informal presentation that summarizes the key points of their paper, as well as reflections on their experience with PF. These papers and presentations provide a wonderful opportunity to assess students' perceptions of the class in addition to giving them the opportunity to personally reflect. These reflections, in addition to the informal discussions in class, help students explore their changing perceptions of the elderly and their unique experiences with each client.

Many students, through experiences with an intergenerational service learning course, began to change their previously negative perceptions of the elderly and see them in a new way (Kalisch et al. 2013; Davies et al. 2013). Similar to other research (Kalisch et al. 2013; Davies et al. 2013), we find students' reflections and experiences include descriptions of how impressed they felt by how their clients handle challenging situations, and how the experience has helped them reflect on their own personal biases and stereotypes of older people and aging. Many students talk about their own personal growth, and how they have gained a new perspective on the problems in their own lives. Often times, they come to recognize that these problems were not as big as they had originally thought they were. They meet clients who have struggled with tremendous problems and challenges, and they often report feeling a great deal of respect and inspiration. Students talk about the fact that many thought that older people would be unhappy and bitter, yet they find this is usually not the case.

Student quotes that illustrate these themes include the following:

What really surprised me was how attached I became to all of my clients.

This class was much more than spending time with animals; it opened my eyes to this whole other part of the community that I have unfortunately never thought much about.

It is like having my grandmother here in Colorado instead of across the country.

Some students are able to take the experience and make significant changes in their lives related to their priorities, their concerns, and their plans for the future.

As corny as it sounds, Pets Forever has taught me that life is fleeting and every moment and situation should not be taken advantage of, but rather cherished and appreciated.

I absolutely love just sitting down with my clients after taking care of their animals and asking them about their week and letting them know that someone does care about what is going on in their life.

For some students, this experience has changed how they view aging; similar results were also documented by Dorfman et al. (2002) and Kalisch et al. (2013), who found that service-learning students were less fearful and more comfortable with the concept of their own aging.

Each semester, there are several students who feel anxious about calling 'strangers' on the phone and going to their home. They often have inaccurate

perceptions of older or disabled adults and worry about how they will be able to communicate or relate. Inevitably, they return to class with stories about how 'normal' these people are, and how similar they are to the student in so many ways. The speed in which false impressions are dispelled each semester is always a joy to witness. One student, for example, came to class amazed that she and her client enjoy the same country western singer, and they 'celebrated' by listening to music together. Other students have reported their enjoyment in sharing television shows or talking about current events.

> I used to think that older people were so different, but I now realize how much in common I have with many of my clients.

> In reality, the way that my generation views most senior citizens (usually as frail, uptight people hopelessly stuck in the past) could not be more mistaken.

Students find they easily connect and form close relationships with their clients. Part of the reason for these types of connections is the repeated, regular contact students have with their clients over the course of the semester. Most students visited their clients at least once a week (and often more) for the entire semester.

> Not only did I get to know some of my clients on a personal basis, a lot of the time, they made my day much better than how it was going before I showed up at their houses.

> On days when I could stay longer, she would make snacks and just eat and chat with me for a long while until I needed to head home.

> It shocked me when my clients took such an interest in my life. To see them actually want to know about me and the things going on with me was unexpected.

> And this is precisely the magic of PF: While I spent time romping with canine companions, I also discovered how to become a better companion to humans.

For many students, these revelations translate into positive changes in their own personal relationships. Many students are able to engage in intimate life conversations with their clients that end up positively altering relationships with their own family, partners, and even themselves.

> Not only have my clients helped me to open up and become more comfortable with communicating, but also they have shown me how to care for others and taught me to appreciate and be thankful for all that I have.

Many students also reflect on how visits with their clients help them put things in perspective. Others discuss the reciprocal nature of the visits, recognizing that they both (student and older adult) benefit from the visits.

> Suddenly all of my daily problems seem trivial and I find myself just giving thanks.

> I have come to the realization that there are numerous people in the world less fortunate than I am, and Pets Forever has opened my eyes to how lucky I am to have the life that I have.

> This semester has taught me so much. The biggest thing I've learned is to be grateful for the life I live and how blessed I am. As well as appreciating every day I am alive, and every day I get to spend with people I love.

Although many students initally feel anxious about interacting with older adults, for most, this quickly changes to a feeling of comfort and enjoyment. As reported by (Roodin 2002), many students become excited to witness how they are able to make a difference for these clients.

> These clients are beyond appreciative of the organization's help and it feels great knowing we are making a difference.

> The amazing feeling I receive by helping make people happy is something I have never felt before and it is more rewarding than receiving a good grade or spending time with dogs and cats. It is an addictive feeling and now that I have experienced it I never want it to go away. Pets Forever has changed my life forever and made me a better person inside and out.

> When I thought of helping people, I would always think that I had to do something drastic to change their life in a positive way. Now I realize that the little things can make the biggest differences.

> I learned from this experience that as a volunteer/ helper we really do make a difference to their lives.

> Pets Forever has been a huge factor in helping me become a more patient and kind person.

> Pets Forever has definitely helped me this semester stay stress free and has taught me that giving back to the community through volunteering is probably the most important concept we should learn.

Once students have moved past their misconceptions and stereotypes, they grow increasingly able to connect on a deeper level. Students in PF change their perceptions of the elderly; such results are supported by previous research that indicates that experience with older adults can increase positive attitudes toward this population (O'Hanlon and Brookover 2002; Schwartz and Simmons 2001). Many students have reported that the experience has led them to reconsider their career path, or add a gerontology component; an increased interest in gerontology that has also been noted by Kalisch (2013).

It is not surprising that at the end of the semester, many students choose to remain involved with their clients. Many students opt to enroll in the course the following semester, largely to maintain the relationships they have created. For many, these clients have become surrogate family. As one student explained, he feels like he has several grandparents in town now, helping him make the adjustment to a new school much easier. Other students who are unable to take the course again, or are graduating, choose to stay in contact with their clients in less formal ways.

In addition to information obtained from students regarding the course, client feedback is collected regularly via personal interviews and surveys in order to assess the impacts of program. Statements from clients indicate the value and importance they feel that PF has in their lives and the lives of their pets.

The following three male clients' stories help illustrate the impact of the program.

James is a war veteran who has spent a great deal of time homeless, yet despite these challenges, he has been able to keep his 'best friend,' a small Shih Tzu, for

nearly 15 years. Recently, James was able to secure housing and he and Harley are doing well in their new home. James has explained that with the help of PF, he has been able to keep Harley fed and healthy even during his most challenging times.

Daniel is a client who is blind and spends most of his time in a wheelchair. He is able to enjoy the companionship of his cat, Winston, with the help of the PF program. Through the program, volunteers help Daniel with the care and maintenance of Winston, thereby preventing Daniel from having to live alone.

Tim is one more example of the type of client that PF helps. Tim moved into an assisted living facility after suffering from congestive heart failure, whereby he inherited a 12-year-old cat, Darcy, from a previous resident. Darcy quickly became Tim's best friend and has greatly improved his quality of life. With PF's help, Tim has been able to keep Darcy, whom he credits for helping him meet the challenge of adapting from living independently to residing in an assisted living facility.

These clients benefit not only from the comfort of knowing they are able to keep and care for their pets, but also from the companionship offered by PF students. For these clients, interactions with the students are the highlight of their week, and nearly all of the clients create strong, long-lasting relationships with their students over the course of the semester.

Program Expansion and Research

From the inception of PF, the vision of the program was to expand to other communities, and plans for expansion are currently underway. It is felt that any community that has any type of college or university (including community colleges) could implement such a program. For this reason, PF has created a 'blueprint' to share with other communities in an effort to expand this program throughout the country.

Additionally, the program offers an opportunity to conduct research. For example, the positive change in mood expressed by students after they visit with clients is one area deemed worthy of exploration. One ongoing study is to assess these mood changes by having volunteers record their moods before and after their visits using a mobile application on their phone designed to monitor mood.

Additional follow up with students involved with PF is to see if they feel it has impacted their choices pertaining to altruistic behaviors during their final years at school and beyond. Studies suggest that women demonstrate higher levels of community service as adults, when compared to men (Miller 1994; Trudeau and Devlin 1996), and one suggestion to positively impact this has been for schools to offer opportunities to serve that men are interested in (Smith 2005); therefore, tracking our male students will be especially important.

In our efforts to monitor the impact of the program on the clients, PF conducts annual interviews to assess clients' thoughts and feelings related to the program. Although this data is difficult to quantify, it has helped the program identify ways in which clients feel it has benefits them beyond just caring for their pet. There are

plans to continue these yearly interviews to collect data on new clients and obtain more long-term data on clients who have been with the program for several years. It is likely that the program helps older men become more open to receiving the support and care they might need, not only for their pets, but also for themselves. Assessment of this benefit would be helpful in the future.

Conclusion

The sentiments and experiences of PF students and the PF clients are not unique, as other studies have reported similar positive results. Dorfman et al. (2002) and Hegeman et al. (2002), for example, found both college students and seniors report positive companionship, social stimulation, and improved quality of life after participating in service learning. Other studies have noted an increased interest among students in working with older adults after participating in service learning with elders (Brown and Roodin 2001; Gutheil et al. 2006; Kolb 2008) as well as increased confidence in their abilities to communicate with elders, positive personal growth, increased empathy, decreased fear about their own aging, and feelings of empowerment (Ames and Diepstra 2006; Blieszner and Artale 2001; Brown and Roodin 2001; Dorfman et al. 2004). Students report a strong sense of satisfaction, often reflecting a dramatic positive shift in their attitudes toward the program from beginning to end. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dorfman et al. (2002), when comparing students who chose a service-learning option over a research project in an introductory gerontology course, found the service-learning group had more positive feelings about older adults and the possibility of working with them in the future than students who choose a research project; as many PF students have stated, service-learning involvement was their best college experience (see Brown and Roodin 2001; Dorfman et al. 2002; Hegeman et al. 2002).

Ways to enhance the college experience, especially for males, is critically important. Compared to females, fewer males are attending college, and those who attend college are graduating less often, obtaining lower grades, and pursuing advanced degrees less frequently (Weaver-Hightower 2010; Capraro 2014). While overall post-baccalaureate enrollment increased 36 % between 2000 and 2010, the number of females enrolled between 2000 and 2010 rose by 42 % compared to 28 % for males (Snyder 2014). Today, there are over 31 % more women on campus than men (Vedder 2014). Given these conditions, it has been suggested that universities have a compelling interest in making college a more viable and attractive option to a broad range of men (Weaver-Hightower 2010). Creating supportive infrastructure to help men succeed is critical. To address this issue, Weaver-Hightower (2010) has recommended schools create social opportunities that go beyond sports and other stereotypically male activities, including community service opportunities. The emphasis on community service or service learning is consistent with data related to how to best engage millennials.

Drawing from the research on millennials (people born 1980–2002), one major factor that helps these individuals be more engaged is to help give them opportunities to do things that have meaning; to make a difference. A Pew Research Center study reported that millennials place a higher priority on helping people in need (21 %) than having a high-paying career (15 %). Beyond marriage and family, 21 % of millennials say that helping people who are in need is one of the most important things in their life (Taylor and Keeter 2010). The positive feelings related to volunteering are only expected to grow, given the trends seen in the next generation. Over 77 % of Gen Z. for example, has been found to be extremely or very interested in volunteering, and over a quarter of them are currently volunteering (Schawbel 2014). These trends fit within the altruistic model proposed by Schwartz (1977) in which he indicated that altruistic behavior is influenced by the intensity of moral obligation which someone feels to take helping actions as well as their life experiences. PF might be the type of experience that helps developing young men make choices that focus more on relationships, and less on the more traditional gender roles of individualism and stoicism. Given that both the millennial and Gen Z cohorts appear to feel this obligation and desire to give back to their communities, it is likely that they will continue to exhibit high levels of giving behaviors. The impact of this type of program in these areas certainly warrants further research and exploration.

An intergenerational service learning program like PF is one way to help address this need. Caring for animals is an 'easy sell' for many male students and does not conflict with masculinity norms like some other types of volunteerism or community service might. Through this type of program, schools can increase engagement of male students, thereby positively impacting educational efforts and perhaps even patterns of social engagement upon graduation. Intergenerational service learning programs are indeed win/win proposals and should receive increasing recognition and support as ways to provide solutions for several pressing societal concerns.

> Everyone needs a hand to hold on to. Don't need to be no strong hand, don't need to be no rich hand - everyone just needs a hand to hold on to.

> John Mellencamp

As discussed in the previous chapter, social isolation is a challenge for many older men, and due to the masculine scripts held by many, they struggle to ask for or receive the help they need. Examples of these scripts, as defined by Mahalik et al. (2003), include the 'strong and silent,' and the 'tough-guy.' These types of scripts can limit the type of help men might be willing to accept, but can leave the door open for help related to their pet. PF offers a way to reach older men who have subscribed to the gender roles common to their generation. While in other areas of their lives they can continue to display restricted emotionality and affectionate behaviors, pets (and as an extension, caregivers of pets) create a safe outlet for otherwise unexpressed feelings and need for companionship and connection. Perhaps more than anything else, this is the real gift this program offers older men.

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