

Pets As Therapy

Providing a service to older people in health and social care establishments across the UK



Maureen Hennis – Chief Executive, Pets As Therapy



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and residential care homes, directly benefiting older people. Other centres receiving **Pets As Therapy** visits where older people directly benefit include hospices, day care centres and sheltered housing associations.

Pets As Therapy and animal-assisted therapy (AAT)

Many of the **Pets As Therapy** visits provide older people with simple companionship and a chance to interact with the **PAT** volunteer in what can otherwise often be a lonely and isolating environment.

In some cases, however, **PAT** dogs are involved in more specific therapeutic work alongside a healthcare professional, commonly referred to as animal-assisted therapy.

The USA based **Delta Society** defines animal-assisted therapy as "a goal-directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is directed and/or delivered by a health/human service professional with specialised expertise and within the scope of practice of his/her profession.

AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning [cognitive functioning refers to thinking and intellectual skills]. AAT is provided in a variety of settings and may be group or individual in nature. This process is documented and evaluated."

History of the charity

Pets As Therapy (PAT) is a national charity which was founded in 1983 and is the largest charity of its type in Europe. The charity's volunteers provide therapeutic visits to hospitals, hospices, nursing and care homes, special needs schools and a variety of other venues with their own friendly, temperament-tested and vaccinated dogs and cats.

Some facts and figures

There are currently around 3,000 active **PAT** dogs and 92 **PAT** cats at work every week in the UK, giving more than 100,000 people, both young and old the pleasure and chance to cuddle and talk to them. The bedsides that are visited each year number a staggering half million.

Nearly two-thirds of all **Pets As Therapy** visits are made to nursing

NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF ESTABLISHMENTS FOR OLDER PEOPLE RECEIVING PETS AS THERAPY VISITS

Type of establishment	No. receiving PAT visits	Proportion of total establishments (538) receiving PAT visit
Private Residential Care Home	2384	44%
Local Authority Residential Care Home	546	10%
Private Nursing Home	468	9%
Local Authority Nursing Home	36	0.7%
Day Centre	442	8%
Hospice*	164	3%
Sheltered Housing	126	2%

*number of centres receiving PAT visits also include children's hospices

Rehabilitation following stroke

Pets As Therapy volunteers work alongside occupational therapists (OT's) across the UK in rehabilitation programmes for stroke patients. The patients are encouraged to use their affected limbs to interact with the **PAT** dog, for example, reaching out to stroke or touch them, brushing their fur, or throwing a ball for the dog to retrieve. An opportunity to interact with the dog in a fun and novel way can often provide the necessary motivation to participate in treatment, compared to the more traditional methods of rehabilitation, such as physical manipulation of the affected limb or joint.

Alleviating depression

Encouraging motivation is an important part of the work of the **PAT** dog and volunteer in many cases. Hospitalisation through illness or injury, or forced relocation into nursing or residential care can all be associated with feelings of depression. In March 2001, the Department of Health produced a National Service Framework (NSF) for

older people. The report claimed that depression in older people is under-diagnosed, particularly in nursing and residential care settings.

Dr William Thomas, pioneer of the *Eden Alternative* in the USA, identified loneliness, helplessness and boredom as the "Three Plagues of the Elders." The *Eden Alternative* is a different approach to the provision of nursing care for older people in the USA. **Dr Thomas** suggested that introducing plants, animals and children into nursing and care homes can make them feel more "home-like" and offer opportunities for nurturing, care-giving and socialisation.

Companion animal visits are an excellent way to trigger memories in older people and **PAT** volunteers often find that older people will recount stories of pets that they used to own. Reminiscence therapy is a recognised form of animal-assisted therapy and it not only encourages positive memories but has an important socialising role as the older person is motivated to interact with the **PAT** volunteer.

Pets As Therapy visits are happening every day at centres across the UK



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and the valuable work that the volunteers and their dogs and cats do, particularly for older people, often goes unnoticed. If you would like to know more about the work of **Pets As Therapy** or think that a **Pets As Therapy** visit may benefit people where you work, please get in touch with the charity to arrange a visit.

For further information, telephone 0870 977 0003 or visit their website www.petsastherapy.org