Animal adoption profiles: An application of the human-animal connection

Autumn Stowe
University of Northern Iowa
ANIMAL ADOPTION PROFILES:
AN APPLICATION OF THE HUMAN-ANIMAL CONNECTION

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

Autumn Stowe
University of Northern Iowa
May 2022
This Study by: Autumn Stowe

Entitled: Animal Adoption Profiles: An Application of the Human-Animal Connection

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors

______________________________  ________________________________
Date   Rebecca Dickinson, Honors Thesis Advisor

______________________________  ________________________________
Date   Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program
Purpose

The social work field holds ethical values of service, social justice, and the importance of human relationships (National Association of Social Workers, 2022). Striving to drive change in our communities, practitioners work to address social problems and push for social advancement. Supporting clients, practitioners aspire to promote the self-autonomous nature of humanity - with the goal of empowerment and self-efficacy. Recognition of support systems and nurturing bonds are crucial in social work practice, promoting pursuit of benevolent connections. But do pertinent bonds depend solely on human-to-human connection? In line with the ethical principle of respecting the inherent dignity and worth of person, it is arguable that true acceptance is dependent on the recognition of all support systems - human or not.

Serving as important vehicles for change, relationships offer individuals support, empowerment, and guidance. Traditionally viewed through a humanistic lens, recognition of relational importance in the social work field is often only extended to human support. However, a profound literature base details the support companion animals provide across all life stages. Companion animals offer companionship and psychological support - ranging in species type across households. The human-animal connection is a vital component of individuals’ support system, contributing to increased civic participation, self-esteem, feelings of safety and support, and enriched social capital (Arkow, 2020; Wood et al., 2017).

With a professional commitment to community action, social workers are called upon to be cognizant of community needs. Given the beneficent nature of companion animal bonds, the plight of animal welfare organizations is recognizable as one relevant to social work. Additionally, the nature of animal welfare program development regularly aligns with values of social work practice. Their proactive efforts develop community support systems, promote ethical treatment, and support pet owners in need. Acknowledging the strength of the human-
animal connection, this hybrid research/service project seeks to highlight the relational importance of companion animals throughout the human lifespan and the interconnectivity of animal welfare and social work efforts. Awareness for pet bond prevalence in social systems enables practitioners to recognize significant relationships contributing to wellness and fulfillment.

In this project, the development of animal adoption profiles contributed to animal welfare efforts, aligning with social work values of social justice and service. Companion animal adoption photos and descriptions were produced on a volunteer basis through a partnership with Cedar Bend Humane Society (CBHS). Research literature detailing successful animal adoption profile characteristics was examined and traits associated with profile success were integrated into adoption profiles created. Highlighting the potential for social work partnership within the animal welfare realm, this project illustrates the capability for field overlap. System intersectionality provides additional support on several fronts, enabling social work practitioners to meet the unique needs of their clients.

**Pet Ownership Across the Lifespan**

Positive impacts of animal ownership are not a new phenomenon. Throughout cultures dating back to ancient times, animals have held a respected presence. Companion animal partnerships have been historically recorded as necessary for human health, survival, and healing (Walsh, 2009). Archaeological evidence indicates dogs lived alongside humans in settlements over 14,000 years ago. Assuming crucial roles in the establishment of human societies, canine and feline companions served as building blocks in agricultural communities. Dogs provided herd and farm protection, while cats sought to hunt disease-carrying rodents threatening farm grain supply (Serpell, 2008; Walsh 2009). As socialization and domestication of animals
transpired, cooperation between humans and animals was based on a mutual need for protection, shelter, and food for survival.

Over time, the strength and compassion of the human-animal bond grew, with pets becoming central to family life (Serpell, 2008). In the United States, 70% of households own a pet - equating to just over 90 million homes (American Pet Products Association, 2021). Pet ownership has been tied to physical, emotional, and social benefits for individuals in all stages of life. Non-human companionship is thought to be beneficial towards human health, offering a non-judgmental source of support and physical safety. A greater sense of social support contributes to increased physiological and psychological health - including decreased blood pressure, improvement in cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune functioning (Arhant-Sudhir et al., 2011; McConnel et al., 2011; Uchino et al, 1996). Furthermore, pet ownership correlates with increased physical activity across all age groups (Busch & Cook, 2018). Engaging in caretaking activities, such as play, walking, and upkeep offer increased potential for physical exercise.

Beginning in early childhood, companion animals provide a sense of support akin to a peer connection. When asked to describe the role of their family pet(s), children often refer to them as their best friend or sibling. Providing a sense of security, bonds with companion animals combat fearfulness and loneliness throughout development. When ranked in comparison to human relationships, connections with companion animals are regularly identified as providing a higher sense of comfort. Children who grow up alongside companion animals and develop a strong attachment to them have also been found to demonstrate an increased sense of self-esteem (McNicholas & Collies, 2001; Turner, 2005). In the process of social exploration, companion animals offer consistent encouragement.
Serving as supplemental attachment figures to aid in the bridging between a child and the world, the transitional nature of pet relationships provides non-judgmental acceptance. The simplicity of a family pet’s love provides a dependable source of positive affirmation - without fear of judgment. Contributing to the development of communicative networks, the reciprocal social nature of pet relationships requires consideration of the companion animals’ perspective. Navigation of companion animal relationships offer a precursor to human connection, providing crucial assistance in socio-emotional development. With reciprocity a key component of human relationships, early childhood pet connection can lay a foundation for the development of nurturing and caring behaviors (Mueller et al., 2019; Triebenbacher, 1998). Forming a sense of community, companion animal bonds offer increased social capital to children as they begin establishing connections beyond family systems.

For some children, exploration of social-emotional reciprocity and relationship development may be difficult. Finding interactions with people overwhelming, stress-inducing, and a source of behavioral distress, children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) regularly experience difficulty communicating with peers and forming friendships (Harwood et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019). Having found animal interaction to contribute to prosocial behavior in children with ASD, research reveals the positive potential for canines in promoting the socio-emotional development of children diagnosed with ASD. The calming nature of canine companions provides nonjudgmental acceptance and support of children with ASD and serves to help alleviate anxiety and behavioral outbursts. (Carlisle, 2014; Harwood et al., 2018; Walsh, 2009). When present in the home of children, pets contribute to the development of the child’s self-esteem, empathy, and socio-emotional skills (Carlisle, 2014; Horowitz, 2008; Walsh, 2009).
Children experience important social changes as they move through adolescence. Increased trust is placed in peer relationships, with social networks assisting in the facilitation of identity, autonomy, self-expression, and empathy (Cassels et al., 2017; Sturman & Moghaddam, 2011). As adolescents develop autonomy from their parents, they often report feeling no one understands them. Navigating an emerging awareness of self, feelings of isolation and loneliness are inevitable. Becoming increasingly concerned with acceptance of their identity, adolescents develop an attuned sense of self perception. Adolescence prompts a period of low self-disclosure and increased self-consciousness with pets stepping into the role of sounding boards, offering nonjudgmental support for adolescents sharing personal thoughts (Maras-Sambola et al., 2017; Piper & Utley, 2019). At a time when judgment is a primary concern, companion animals offer relief from social pressure.

Establishing self-efficacy, adolescent exploration is essential in identity formation. Driven to uncover unique attributes, self-perception is a critical lens often leading to loneliness and decreased psychological health. Faced with a perceived lack of support, generational disconnect, and budding independence adolescents can isolate themselves from family members. Furthermore, fear of peer rejection can result in loneliness and lack of self-esteem. Relationships with family pets offer a sense of security and support, providing acceptance in a time where identity feels uncertain (Black, 2011; Piper & Utley, 2019; Turner, 2005). Examinations of adolescent relationships with companion animals reveal positive attachment behaviors, and correlation to increased self-esteem and social interactions (Black, 2011). Accepting self-doubt and anxieties, companion animals provide comfort and reassurance.

Entering adulthood, the support companion animals offer differs according to lifestyle. Young adults choosing to pursue college experience a stressful influx of new stimuli. College
students face pressure to balance forming new social connections, identifying a career path, succeeding academically, and maintaining physical and mental health (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Hurst et al., 2013). When stress is perceived as severe, college students experience worsened physical health and decreased academic success (Leppink et al., 2016). For many, pet ownership offers an outlet for stressors. College students owning pets are able to establish routines to promote stability, while decreasing stress levels through animal interaction (Piper & Utley, 2019). Amongst the hustle and bustle of collegiate life, companion animals provide support and security.

Aside from college, companion animals can provide support in other endeavors. For those who have taken a partner, starting a family may be taken into consideration. To prepare for a future role as a parent, couples often adopt a pet as parenting practice. Pets acquired during this period of life display high levels of attachment, with companion animals taking on a child-like role in the budding family’s structure. Allowing for the exploration of parental roles, couples assess their aptitude as a caretaker. (Owen & Grauerholz, 2018; Turner, 2005). Young adult pet owners experience the same psychological and physiological benefits as children and adolescents (Walsh, 2009). Tied to lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels, pet presence has been found as more effective than a friend or spouse at mitigating cardiovascular stress factors (Allen et al., 2002). Stepping into caregiving roles allows individuals to feel needed, with the nurturing nature of pet relationships contributing to happiness.

Couples choosing to remain child-free often form powerful, emotionally intimate bonds with pets, calling attention to the formation of interspecies families (Black, 2014; Owen & Grauerholz, 2018). Suggesting that companion animals in child-free homes take on the roles of surrogate children, pets gratify emotional and psychological needs in unique ways throughout the
human lifespan (Greenebaum 2004; Turner 2001). Transcending past child-free families, this phenomenon impacts aging families as well. For parents adjusting to the role of empty nesters, pets provide owners the opportunity to feel needed as a caregiver (Blouin, 2012; Turner, 2005). Grieving children’s transition out of the home, companion animals help fill the space left by empty nesters’ adult children.

As healthcare improvements extend average life expectancy, our society hosts an increasingly growing elderly population. These individuals experience higher instances of loneliness and isolation compared to other ages of the human population. Having retired from the workforce and raised children to adulthood, fewer possibilities for regular social interaction exist. Furthermore, elderly individuals experience an escalated risk for health problems as they age (Busch & Cook, 2018; Hui Gan et al., 2019). Pet ownership amongst elderly individuals has been found to increase physical activity and social interactions, while decreasing loneliness. Elderly pet owners report higher levels of physical activity, with significantly higher levels of walking and overall functional ability associated with dog ownership (Baun & McCabe, 2000; Busch & Cook, 2018). Amongst the aging population, pet ownership provides increased opportunity for social interaction.

Attendance of pet centered activities, frequent walks, and shopping for pet care items enable the opportunity to meet others and create a social network. (Baun & McCabe, 2000; Busch & Cook, 2018). In a study of dog owners, 81% reported their dog helped them make contact with other people (Poestges et al., 2016). Outside of increased social capital, pet companionship offers support for the death of loved ones. When examined following spousal death, elderly pet owners report fewer health problems and less depression than non-pet owners.
(Baun & McCabe, 2000). Offering support in the final stages of life, pet companionship improves elderly individuals’ social networks and feelings of support.

Across all cycles of aging, forging a connection with companion animal(s) can offer benefits. Pet exposure and interaction activates the release of serotonin and dopamine, neurochemicals attributing to feelings of happiness and relaxation (Charnetsky et al., 2004). Companion animal fulfillment of social needs correlates with decreased bouts of depression and anxiety, with increased feeling of self-acceptance (Arhant-Sudhir et al., 2011; McConnel et al., 2011). When surveyed, 99% of dog owners and 96% of cat owners view pets as either members of the family or close companions - indicating the relational importance of the human-animal connection (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2018). Recognizing client bonds with companion animals as significant to well-being indicates a need to examine potential overlap of social work and animal welfare.

**Intersectionality of Social Work and Animal Welfare**

In the animal welfare realm, services extend beyond the animal population. Serving pet owners in all stages of their journeys, animal shelters offer vital community support systems. Ubiquitously overlapping, the social work and animal welfare fields intersect in countless ways. An examination of social services and collaborative community efforts formed by Cedar Bend Humane Society (CBHS) unveils adherence to values shared by the social work profession.

Connecting those in need with fundamental resources for successful pet care, animal shelters combat societal inequity - pushing for social justice on the pet owner front.

In Black Hawk County, nearly 14% of the population experiences food insecurity (NEIFB, 2022). Examinations of pet attachment regarding food insecurity have revealed that owners are likely to prioritize the dietary needs of pets before their own. When receiving food
assistance services not providing pet food, owners regularly choose to share food provisions with their companion animal (Raukitis et al., 2017). Addressing interspecies food insecurity, CBHS launched Paws Pantry in 2012 in conjunction with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank. This symbiotic relationship has empowered impoverished pet owners to maintain a high quality of care, while also successfully diverging shelter donation surpluses of pet food and treats.

Access to nutritious pet food are not the only barriers amongst impoverished pet owners. An estimated 23 million companion animals reside in underserved communities, with limited access to preventative veterinary care such as spay/neuter surgeries and annual vaccinations. In a survey of under-served communities, 53% indicated their pet had never received veterinarian checkups or treatment (Humane Society of the United States, 2013). Cost can act as a barrier of spay and neuter surgeries - resulting in pet pregnancies contributing to local animal overpopulation (Raukitis et al., 2017). Advocating for the health of companion animals, shelters such as CHBS offer low-cost vaccination and spay/neuter clinics. Enabling lower income families to pursue veterinary treatment, these programs allow animal health to be maintained while proactively addressing animal overpopulation.

Although pet owner retention programs offer additional support, it may not be enough to continue providing care. Individuals experiencing stressors such as relocation, family ailments, or financial difficulty may choose to surrender their companion animal (ASPCA, 2021). Open to owner surrenders, CBHS has created a safe space for companion animal caretakers to relinquish animal custody. Not considered for euthanasia unless terminally ill or deemed a danger to themselves or others, animals placed on the CBHS adoption floor face no time limit in finding a new home. In fiscal year 2021, 22% of dogs, 12% of cats, and 54% of pocket pets served at CBHS were owner surrenders (J. Christensen, personal communication, March 25, 2022).
CBHS’s barn cat program offers a solution to two issues - rodent overpopulation in agricultural areas and a surplus of unsocialized cats not suited to house life. For felines lacking socialization, life as an indoor house cat is not suitable. However, return of cats to their home environments can be detrimental to the environment - with feral cats decimating essential components of local ecosystems. Reintroduction without an elected caretaker also poses an ethical issue - with no party responsible for veterinary services (Janke et al., 2017). By offering unsocialized but otherwise healthy felines for adoption, rural property owners can acquire spayed and neutered barn cats. Preventing euthanasia of otherwise unadoptable animals, the program also works to counteract colony overpopulation in agricultural areas through reduced cost spay and neuter programs (Cedar Bend Humane Society, 2022).

Developing recreational activities that improve and sustain physiological, psychological, and social needs is an important aspect of residential care facilities. Within long-term care facilities, animal program participation has been found to decrease anxiety and depression - while eliciting positive emotions and memories. Following animal visits, residents exhibit an increase in social connectivity - communicating more frequently and in a more positive manner with nursing staff and residents (Holt et al., 2015; Kawanura at al., 2009). Acknowledging the positive impact animal visits can have in long-term care and retirement communities, CBHS connects with residential facilities in the community to provide animal visits. Doing so also provides animals the opportunity to get off-campus, and experience positive interactions with individuals.

Satisfying each other’s psychological needs, arranged visits with care facilities enable companion animals in CBHS’ care to receive needed socialization. Animals housed in a shelter environment experience social isolation and increased stress levels. To ensure psychological
well-being, animals awaiting adoption require regular human contact. Lack of socialization is harmful to companion animal health and can be damaging to demeanor and behavior (Coppola et al., 2006). Furthermore, outings provide opportunities to observe companion animal behavior in different settings. Knowledge regarding disposition, likes, and dislikes are paramount when developing accurate adoption profiles.

Committed to upholding animal welfare, CBHS is dedicated to fighting animal mistreatment. Oftentimes, pet abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence occur in the same household. When surveyed at a domestic violence shelter, over 70% of women who had a companion animal in the home disclosed their pet had been a subject of their abuser’s attacks (Ascione et al., 2007). Used as emotional pawns in cycles of abuse, animals are often harmed to exploit a close emotional bond between the companion animal and victim. Threats against the animal may be used to prevent victims from fleeing or to gain control. Additionally, many shelters and residential support services do not allow companion animals, resulting in a greater disconnect for pet-owning victims seeking help (Scheffer, 2019). Investigating and prosecuting reports of animal mistreatment and cruelty complaints ensures abusers are held accountable.

Due to the closeness of the bond between pet and owner, companion animal death can result in considerable grief. Following pet death, individuals may experience social withdrawal, loss of motivation, stress, depression, and severe bouts of anxiety. Integrated as a part of the owner’s social system and routine, pet loss causes significant disruption (Morley & Fook, 2005). To aid pet owners in their grieving, CBHS offers end of life services, cremation, and pet cemetery burial. For strongly attached pet owners, decisions regarding end-of-life care and respectful disposal present significant psychological stressors. Socially, lack of acceptance surrounding pet loss contributes to heightened grief. Without a support system to help process
and recognize companion animal loss, individuals can experience debilitating grief levels (Kogen et al., 2019). Connecting to community members who can recognize their pain is paramount to healing and acceptance.

Working to promote animal welfare while ensuring public safety, animal shelters serve a vital role in our communities. Their proactive efforts deter pet overpopulation, improve pet health, promote ethical treatment, and support pet owners in need. Animal shelter programs and services present opportunities for social work partnerships. Recognizing this potential but being mindful of professional scope, an undergraduate social work student sought to develop a service project within community animal welfare efforts in conjunction with CBHS. Volunteering to photograph adoptable companion animals and write descriptions for shelter use, the student supported shelter efforts through adoption profile development.

**Animal Adoption Profile Service Project**

In an increasingly technological society, the importance of formulating effective adoption profiles has become evident. The introduction of online sites such as PetFinder enables animal welfare organizations to post adoptable animals for free virtual viewing. Since its national introduction in 1998, the PetFinder platform has grown to become the world’s number one pet site for animal adoption. Serving as an intermediary between animal welfare groups and potential adopters, PetFinder populates a stream of animals available for adoption based on proximity to adopter, species, age, and other selectable characteristics (PetFinder, 2022). Currently, CBHS utilizes PetFinder to formulate and distribute all of their animal adoption profiles.

Throughout 2021, CBHS served over 3,000 companion animals (J. Christensen, personal communication, March 25, 2022). Committed to reducing pet overpopulation and serving a high number of stray animals - speed of adoption is essential to operation success. The development
of effective adoption advertisements contributes to decreased length of stay (LOS), increasing CBHS’ aptitude to serve. At CBHS, the initial stages of adoption and animal selection are done virtually. To view an animal listed for an adoption in person, prospective adopters must first apply for adoption online and then schedule an appointment.

Adopters depend primarily on adoption listings to determine interest in animals, and schedule appointments to view the pets that pique their interest from online listings. Animal adoption profiles consist of two components uploaded by CBHS - photographs and a description. Pet photographs provide insight into a pet’s personality and allow adopters to form opinions about an animal’s temperament and mannerisms. Descriptions provide information about a pet, and may contain additional care needs, ownership history, personality observations, or other components.

In a survey determining reasoning for pet selection, pet owners identified traits contributing to their adoption decision. Appearance of the animal, animal interaction with the adopter, and personality were found to be the top reasons for adoption across all species. Health and behavior information was indicated to be extremely important in making an adoption decision as well. When reporting why the adopter chose to adopt their companion, many responded that they felt a connection, wanted to help the animal, and interacted well with the pet (Weiss et al, 2012). Recognizing the role empathy and connection play in adoption, profiles can be cultivated to prioritize forming a connection with prospective adopters.

Appearance serves as a primary consideration in pet adoption, so the potential of a pet’s listing picture to impact their adoptability is profound. The structuring of PetFinder’s interface contributes to this phenomenon as well. Initially scrolling through the PetFinder page of adoptable pets, only the image and name of each animal is viewable. Descriptions are only
viewable if an individual clicks on an adoptable pet’s profile to see additional information. Adopters screen pets initially based on looks alone, and further explore profiles that attract their interest. Photographs uploaded to adoption profiles send implicit messages to adopters about personality, temperament, and compatibility (Isgate & Couchman, 2017). Identifying photographs contributing to positive perceptions aids in the development of effective adoption profiles.

In an examination of previous adoption advertisements, canines posted making eye contact with the camera, in the presence of toys, or being handled by a handler in the frame were found to have the shortest length of stay (LOS) (Isgate & Couchman, 2017). Standing while maintaining eye contact was found to be the pose contributing to the overall shortest LOS – with dogs standing in photos being adopted 14 days faster than those sitting. Additionally, canine adoption photographs taken in an outdoor location, with the dog appropriately sized in the frame wearing a bandana have been found to be well-received by adopters and contribute to positive perceptions (Isgate & Couchman, 2017; Lampe & Witte, 2014). Trends observed in canine adoption photos hold true amongst other species as well (Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2019).

Animal adoption descriptions provide a unique opportunity to directly convey messages to potential adopters. The language chosen in adoption advertisement descriptions set the stage for how an animal is viewed, and the impression made. Analyzing personality adjectives used within over 70,000 online canine adoption advertisements, Nakamura et al (2019) found that several phrases were found to correlate with shorter LOS. Adjectives such as ‘independent,’ ‘eager,’ ‘clever,’ ‘lively,’ ‘make you proud,’ contributed to shorter LOS across all breeds. Potential adopters are influenced by adoption wording, and an animal’s likelihood to fit well in their home environment. However, not all wording is positively received. Terms such as
‘dominant,’ ‘sensitive,’ and ‘only dog’ were found to consistently accompany longer LOS. Adopter confidence in canines described using this language was not as high, and interest in adoption suffered (Nakamura et al., 2019). Establishing confidence in animal adoption is essential, while also accurately identifying ownership needs.

Aside from adjectives, anthropomorphic language plays a role in animal perception. When human characteristics are attributed to non-human entities, an increase in moral concern is exhibited (Gray et al., 2007). Within animal descriptions, anthropomorphic language places an increased emphasis on human qualities. For example, an adoption advertisement may describe an animal as a good listener, or as having a good sense of humor. When examining adoption advertisements featuring anthropomorphic characteristics in comparison to those with non-anthropomorphic traits, advertisements denoting human characteristics were found to increase willingness to adopt, and pro-animal attitudes. (Butterfield et al., 2012). Indicating the importance of relatability for adopters, the correlation between human qualities and beneficent intentions within animal welfare highlight the importance of connection.

Within language, attention should also be paid to the emotional weight of verbiage. The connotation of words contributes to perception - whether positive, negative, or neutral. Even when used in the correct context, denotation alone cannot guarantee positive impact. Similar to other advertisements, animal adoption advertisements should seek to entice adopters, exciting them about the potential of the product (Emodi, 2011) For example, consider how the adoption advertisement below depicts Sophie, a senior dog.

This sweet 11-year-old girl has been overlooked by many and hopes that her forever family is out there! Sophie is an absolute sweetheart, and a very happy, goofy gal. She is eager to adventure with you and LOVES to pick out her toys. Sophie has mastered the art
of 'sit' and 'lay down' and takes treats nicely from you. She doesn’t let her age slow her
down and has plenty of pep in her step! We found that Sophie has a few touch
sensitivities and can become nervous, so a home with older children may be best for her.

Focusing on wording attributes positively, this description displays Sophie in a positive light.
Introducing her positive demeanor and personality first, adopters can begin to understand the
mannerisms Sophie has. However, the same information can be conveyed in a less positive
manner.

Sophie is not good with small children and could not live in a home with them. She
doesn't like her muzzle being touched and would need a home with people old enough to
respect her boundaries. She likes to play and knows how to sit and lay down. She is very
sweet, and energetic for her old age. She doesn’t have any major health issues yet and
likes to play with toys.

Although sharing similar content about Sophie, the connotation of this advertisement is
overwhelmingly negative. Starting with Sophie having touch sensitivities, leading with
negativity influences perception of the rest of the advertisement. The emotive overtones carry
through the advertisement, affecting the final stance on the product (Emodi, 2011). Potential
adopters may come away with a skewed sense of Sophie’s persona, impacting their likelihood of
pursuing adoption

Within animal welfare, promotion of animal profiles is led by an understanding of an
animal’s demand among adopters. Given the limited labor capital within animal welfare
agencies, time committed to photographing an animal and writing adoption descriptions is a
commodity of sorts. Breed, age, gender, and animal size impact demand within the adoption market. At CBHS, small dogs and puppies are generally adopted quickly. Even when met with additional environmental or health care needs, adopters are more willing to adopt small dogs and puppies. Medium and large adult dogs with specific home needs and dogs with high energy take the longest to find adoptive homes - sometimes in excess of a year. For cats and kittens, desirable breeds such as Siamese and Maine Coon are quickly adopted alongside kittens. However, older cats with additional care needs, single family homes, and black and orange cats experience challenges in finding adoptive homes (J. Christensen, personal communication, March 25, 2022).

Working alongside CBHS, adoption profile descriptions and images were created for shelter use (see Appendix A). Recognizing the power of relational support present in human-animal relationships, the facilitation of pet adoption in animal shelters is a cause worthy of social work support. Forming positive, affirming support networks for their owners, companion animals contribute to physiological and psychological well-being (Black, 2011; Piper & Utley, 2019; Turner, 2005). Assisting in the development of animal adoption profile production both advocates for the formation of human-animal connections and offers assistance in animal welfare.

This hybrid research/service project hopes to illustrate the potential for social work connectivity within animal welfare. Examination of CBHS programming illustrated the role animal shelters play in the community. Supporting the social work values of service, social justice, and importance of relationships, the intersectionality between social work and the animal welfare field is readily apparent. Guided by a drive to change and a call to empathy, both realms’ commitment to perpetual advancement within human systems demonstrates partnership
potential. Acting on the overlapping initiatives, both fields address poverty and the support of vulnerable members of the population.

Within social work practice, client support requires acknowledgement of self-identified support systems. The determining factor in bond relevancy is client perception. Viewing companion animals as family members or close companions, the roles of pets in social systems must be considered (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2018). Recognition of support systems and nurturing bonds are crucial within social work, serving as important vehicles for change. Throughout the human lifespan, interspecies relationships offer individuals support, empowerment, and guidance. Consideration of these relationships enable practitioners to administer support in newfound ways. Although this project has identified the positive nature of companion animal relationships, additional research is needed to guide practitioner support of pet relationships.

Moving forward, further examination of working relationships established between animal welfare organizations and social work practitioners would be needed to inform practice. Sharing efforts to counteract poverty, offer community support, and enhance well-being, both fields exhibit partnership capability. In-depth examination of social work service agencies may reveal opportunities to coordinate community involvement, identify additional client support needs, and examine pet ownership prevalence amongst the client base. Within social work practice, career opportunities within animal welfare have begun emerging. For example, veterinary social work involves the support of pet owners obtaining veterinary services, and additional supports for pet illness and grief following pet death (University of Tennessee, 2022). Development of shared efforts could increase community support within both industries but should be led by evidence-based practices.
References


https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2019.00087


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2011.04.003

https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1998.82.1.191


Uchino, B. N., Cacioppo, J. T., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (1996). The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanisms


Animals, 2(2), 144–159. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani2020144


Appendix A

Animal Adoption Profiles

Sophie – 11-year-old lab/Australian shepherd mix

This sweet 11-year-old girl has been overlooked by many and hopes that her forever family is out there! Sophie is an absolute sweetheart, and a very happy, goofy gal. She is eager to adventure with you and LOVES to pick out her toys. Sophie has mastered the art of 'sit' and 'lay down' and takes treats nicely from you. She doesn’t let her age slow her down and has plenty of pep in her step! We found that Sophie has a few touch sensitivities and can become nervous, so a home with older children may be best for her.

“Hello! I call myself a bundle of love and am looking for my forever home! I love walks, playing with squeaky toys, and have lots of love to give. If you’re looking for a furry friend, please consider me. I would be happy to snuggle up on your couch with you and watch all your favorite shows! I can also show you ALL the greatest smells in your yard!”

- Sophie

Mariah – 7-year-old American Staffordshire terrier mix

You DONUT want to miss out on the opportunity to adopt this precious pup! Mariah is a very sweet girl who likes being close to her people. You'll always know when Mariah's around because she isn't shy to let everyone hear her beautiful singing voice! She loves being the center of attention and would do best in a home with older siblings because of this. Mariah is a super
affectionate lady and would gladly snuggle up with you for some pets. She's very smart and treat motivated- she'd be happy to show you her nice "sit" for a treat! She is a very expressive girl and has super animated facial expressions. Mariah is a joy to be around and will bring lots of laughter to her forever family’s life!

“Hello there, I hear you’re looking for a dog! Well, I’ve got hugs, kisses, cuddles, and a heck of a smile. I’ve even got 4 little white socks on my feet, what else could you want? If you’re looking for a fun-loving gal that puts a smile on your face, I’m the dog for you! Please schedule an appointment to meet me today, so I can give you a snuggle in person!”
- Mariah

Hercules – 6-year-old pit bull terrier mix

Behold Hercules! A favorite among staff at CBHS, this boy knows how to brighten your day. With an infectious zest for life, this handsome fella has a tail that never stops wagging. His good looks have made him everyone’s muse - he’s even had his portrait painted! A happy guy with a heart of gold, Hercules has never let life get him down. He’s full of snuggly love and is a sucker for back scratches.

Hercules is the type of guy to love every toy. Whether it squeaks, rolls, or tugs - he’s happy to be playing! Despite his size, this fella thinks he has the grace of a ballerina. So much so that he’d love to show off his twirls and leaps when playing with toys. If you’re looking for someone to help you perfect the game of fetch, Hercules is your guy.

Like his doggy ancestors, Hercules is a smart boy. He thinks hanging with his humans is the best thing ever, and gladly obliges to sit and shake if you have a treat in hand. This food-motivated pup is very trainable, especially given his happy-go-lucky demeanor and love of all things treat related. Rumor has it if you have a piece of bacon, Hercules will know every trick in the book. Because Hercules is so full of love and excitement, a home with older children would be best for him. He doesn’t always understand his size. He would love for someone to continue working with him on leash training and manners.
Hercules enjoys loving his people but does not feel the same way about furry felines. We’ve tried explaining to him that cats are friends, but Hercules still insists on terrorizing any kitties in his vicinity. In the interest of keeping the peace in your household - we would suggest this handsome hunk find a cat-free home. Hercules should meet any doggy siblings before adoption!

If you’ve got room in your heart for this lovable hunk, schedule an appointment to meet Hercules today!

**Kiwi – 4.5-year-old pit bull mix**

Kiwi arrived at Cedar Bend Humane Society as a stray in May of 2020. Many of you might remember her first photos... her eyes told a story of sadness, and she needed a lot of time to open up to new people. Kiwi spent some time in a foster home which really helped her decompress and we learned that our sweet lady grows to be protective of the people in her life she loves.

Kiwi was adopted and then heartbreakingly arrived back here after being found wandering again as a stray. We were devastated that her family did not return for her. To our delight, Kiwi's true personality started to shine through at the shelter. She is now one of the happiest, cuddliest, booty-wagging, rope-tugging, lap-sitting pitties for miles around. We even found out that the right squeak noise can encourage her to hit the loveliest contralto notes.

Her next two adoptions did not work out due to her protective nature and rough playstyle with the other dog in the home, so she has once again found herself searching for a home she can call forever. With time and help with socialization, this 4-year-old lovebug may be able to do better with having company at her home, but she will need a quiet home and neighborhood until then.

Kiwi is excited and happy to meet with other dogs and shows dominant qualities and a rough, in-your-face playstyle. Because of this, we ask that Kiwi meets any potential dog siblings prior to going to her new home but may shine best as the only pet.

“Hello, nice to meet you! I may have had a rough start so far, but I still have plenty of love left to give! I’m looking for a home that will be patient with me, and let me warm up to my new environment.

- Kiwi
Artemis – 3-year-old pit bull mix

This happy girl can't wait to meet her forever family! She's looking forward to spending the day running around in the yard and playing with any squeaky toys she can get her paws on. She would make a great running partner! Artemis is still working on understanding her size, so an adult home or home with older children would be the best fit for her. She listens very well and would be happy to continue working on her training! She is a happy-go-luck type of gal that will gladly stick by your side. If you’re looking for a loyal companion to add to your family, schedule an appointment to meet Artemis today!

“In case you haven’t noticed, I’m best friend material! I’ve got the looks, the love, and tail wagging down. I’m looking for a family that has lots of energy like me and would love to go on adventures together! I’d be happy to go on walks and soak up all the belly rubs you can offer. I’m the type of gal that isn’t afraid to get her paws dirty – and would love to explore with you! If you’re looking for a partner in crime and an adorable snuggle buddy, look no further! Because I’m the one for you.”

- Artemis

Paisley – 2-year-old rottweiler mix

Paisley’s goofy personality and her big, sweetheart are sure to catch the attention of anyone who meets her! Whether you have some yummy treats, a squeaky toy, or some nice head scratches to offer; Paisley is easily won over by just about any human. She deserves a loving home where she can soak up all the attention and be treated like the queen she is! Because of this, Paisley would
do best in a home as the only pet. Paisley LOVES carrying toys around, and even enjoys taking them on walks with her! She’s an affectionate girl on the lookout for her future best friend.

“Hello! I hear you’re looking to add a pup to your family. Well, I’ve got all the cuddles and charisma you could ask for! I’d be happy to snuggle up with you and get some head scratches. We could go on walks together, and I could show my tricks – sit and laydown! I’d love to find a family to spend the holidays with, so that we can play in the snow together! Please schedule an appoint at CBHS to meet me in person, so that I can give you a hug and a kiss!”

- Paisley

Karma – 3-year-old pit bull mix

This gorgeous girl’s name is Karma! One of the happiest gals we’ve ever met, her positive attitude is infectious! Her quirky personality always puts a smile on our faces here at CBHS. She is one of the snuggliest pups around, and will gladly cuddle up for some pets. She’s happiest around people, when she can be the center of attention! Karma is a very intelligent lady, and knows how to sit, shake, high five, and lay down.

Karma is a very playful gal who enjoys lots of toys! Her favorite toys are stuffed plush toys, and tennis balls. She’s an expert in the game of fetch, and would be happy to show you the ropes. If you’re looking for an adorable addition to your family, Karma is the gal for you!

“Hello there, I hear you’re looking for a dog! Well, I’ve got hugs, kisses, cuddles, and a heck of a smile. I’ve even got plenty of tricks up my paw. If you’re looking for a fun-loving gal that puts a smile on your face, I’m the dog for you! Please schedule an appointment to meet me today, so I can give you a snuggle in person!”

- Karma
Binx – 8-year-old tiger & domestic short hair mix

Binx is the most loving, loyal guy you’ll ever meet! This 8-year-old fella doesn’t let his age slow him down and loves to play! He is very curious and enjoys exploring, especially when there’s a box to be found! He’s a very affectionate guy who would be happy to cuddle up on your couch and share all his love. He’d gladly help you write that grocery list, finish an assignment, or pick out your next show – he’s a loving boy who will light up someone’s life. Binx’s laid back personality would make him a perfect fit in just about any home!

“I heard you’re looking for a fur-ever friend! I think we may be the purr-fect match. If you’re looking for snuggles, and a quirky companion – I’m the guy for you! We could hunt the mysterious red laser dot together, and I could show you how to play in my water bowl. Come check meowt at Cedar Bend Humane Society!”

- Binx

Layla – 11-year-old dilute tortoiseshell & domestic short hair mix

Layla is a very sweet, senior lady with lots of love to bring to her new home! The shelter is a little scary for her, but she loves meeting new people! This 11-year-old queen has lots of love to give and enjoys soaking up all the pets she can get. She would love to curl up next to you and share your favorite blanket. She is eager to meet new friends and would love to be your best friend! This calm lady would make a wonderful cuddle buddy and would happily join you for naps! If you’re looking for a good movie-watching pal, consider Layla!
“Hello, nice to meet you! I call myself a bundle of love. I enjoy making new friends, and love to snuggle! If you have pets to give, I’ll gladly take them! I’m looking for my forever home, somewhere I can lounge around and be part of a family. If you’re looking to add a friendly feline to your family, please give me a chance!”
- Layla

**Tina – 6-year-old calico & domestic short hair mix**

We aren't sure how Tina is still at the shelter because she's one of the friendliest cats you'll ever meet! Her loving and affectionate personality would make her the perfect companion. She won't hesitate to melt right into your hands or lap when you come near. Tina would be happiest in a home where she can get lots of love and attention! Her favorite things are soaking up pets, curling up for an afternoon nap, and showing off her good looks. Tina is a laid-back gal and gets along well with her kitty roommate at CBHS. If you’re looking to add a furry sweetheart to your family, schedule an appointment to meet Tina today!

“Hello, you seem like you would make a great friend! We could hang out together, and I can show you how to get the PERFECT stretch. If you’re looking for love, I have lots of it! I’m hoping to find a family that has plenty of pets, and some good napping spots.”
- Tina

**Ernest – 13-year-old medium hair mix**
Ernest is a very laid back and sweet boy. He is a charming fella that enjoys meeting new people and will wait patiently for some pets. He’s a cuddly boy and would love to keep you company. Ernest enjoys looking out windows and will gladly lounge in any empty box you have. He would also be happy to snuggle up and watch movies with you. He is declawed on his front paws and gets along well with his kitty roommate at CBHS! If you’re looking for a delightful addition to your family, please consider Ernest!

“I heard you’re looking for a charmer! Well, I’m your guy. I’ve got the softest fur in town and looks for days! I’d be glad to share all my love with you in exchange for some pets. You seem like best friend material, so please schedule an appointment to come meet me today!”

- Ernest

Martin – 13-year-old Tiger & Domestic Short Hair Mix

This sweet, senior boy is on the search for his forever home. Martin is very laid back and enjoys taking life at his own pace. Because of this, he would fit best in a calm home. This cuddly boy enjoys lounging around and soaking up as many pets as he can get. He would enjoy cozying up with you on the couch, and binge watching your favorite show. He’s an affectionate fella who be glad to keep an eye on all the birds outside your window. Martin is declawed on his front paws and gets along well with his kitty roommate at CBHS.

“I have been in retirement for some time now, which means I know how to enjoy all the good things in life. Naps, sunshine, movies and snuggles. I still have lots of love left to give and am looking for a home to give me plenty of cuddles and the perfect spot to curl up and nap. If you’re looking for a handsome hunk to snuggle up with, I’m your guy!”

- Martin
Quinn – 7-year-old tortoise shell & domestic short hair mix

Quinn is a sweet senior lady who loves being the center of attention! She is a gorgeous girl that would be happy to sit by your side and soak up the pets all day long. Quinn is a bundle of love who can win anyone over! She is declawed on her front paws and gets along well with her kitty roommate at CBHS. If you’re looking for a charming, affectionate addition to your home schedule an appointment to meet Quinn. Believe it or not, she’s even prettier in person.

“I hear you’re looking for a new best friend! Well, what about me? For starters, I’ve got a heck of a wink. Love and affection? Check. Excellent sunbather? Check. Professional napper? Check. I even know that one of the comfiest places is the couch. We could curl up there together, and I’d be happy to make you some biscuits!”

- Quinn

Amelia – 7-month-old domestic shorthair mix

Amelia is a very sweet and cuddly girl. She loves being involved in whatever's going on and being around her people. She is visually impaired, but it doesn’t slow her down at all! Amelia is a very curious, outgoing little gal. She is an absolute sweetheart and has lots of love to give. Her antics are very fun to watch, and she is a little bundle of joy. Amelia is a spunky little lady that would gladly join you on adventures. She takes everything in stride and would love to go through life with you! Schedule an appointment to meet Amelia today!
“Nice to meet you! My name’s Amelia and boy am I excited to hear you’re looking for a furry family member! I love cuddling, playing, and all things fun. I’m hoping to find a home that loves me for who I am. I may not be able to see all that great, but I’m still a spunky gal! I get around well and would be happy to explore with you.”

- Amelia

**Priscilla – 6-year-old tiger and domestic shorthair mix**

Priscilla is a beautiful girl ready to be treated like a queen in her new home! Although Priscilla doesn't love being around other felines, she enjoys soaking up all the pets from her people. Priscilla is very independent and enjoys doing her own thing. She can normally be found curled up for a nap and would be glad to show you the coziest spots in your home! Priscilla has had some bumps in her life and was hit by a car prior to coming to CBHS. Because of this her back legs are a little stiff, and she prefers to move at her own pace. But she has a heart of gold, and everyone deserves a second chance!

“Hey there, my name’s Priscilla! I’m glad to hear you’re looking for a furry friend because I need a home! It might take time for me to come out of my shell, but I am a very sweet girl once you get to know me. I am a laid-back lady that would like to take things at my own pace. I’m looking for a home that has plenty of love and cozy napping spots. Please give me the chance I deserve and schedule an appointment to meet me today!”

- Priscilla

**Ed Sheeran – 7-year-old domestic short hair**
While he might spend his afternoons napping instead of writing songs... this sweet guy is sure to make the "Perfect" addition to your home! With the ginger locks and the patch of scruffle on his chin, Ed Sheeran here is regularly mistaken for the English popstar. But, we get it. This handsome fella has got the moves and paparazzi routine figured out. Ed Sheeran is laid back, taking life at his own pace. He's always "Happier" when people come around, and he'll soak up the pets all day long! He gets along well with his kitty groupies at CBHS and is a real crowd pleaser.

“If you’re looking for an autograph, you’ve got the wrong guy. But, I’ve got plenty of affection and am hoping to find a family to “Give Me Love.” I might not be able to build a “Castle on the Hill” for you, but I can give you plenty of snuggles! If you’re looking for a kitty companion, please consider me! Please schedule an appointment at CBHS to meet me, because I think “I Was Made for Loving You”!
- Ed Sheeran

Bread – 7-year-old tiger & domestic short hair mix

This senior guy has lots of love to bring to his new home! He's easily pleased and can spend his days lounging on any comfy blankets you might have. This cuddly loaf enjoys watching out windows and would gladly keep an eye on the birds in your neighborhood. Bread’s favorite hobbies include napping, squeezing his way into boxes, and making biscuits! He’s an affectionate companion who is looking for a family that will give him plenty of pets. If you’re interested in adopting this handsome charmer, schedule an appointment to meet him today!

“I hear you’re looking for the purr-fect addition to your family! Well, look no further. I’m soft, super handsome, and am honestly the best thing since sliced bread. I’ve got this napping thing down and would be happy to show you how it’s done! My friends tell me I’m a big softie, and they’re not wrong. When you’ve got the personality of a teddy bear, it’s hard not to be. If you’re looking for an affectionate, loving companion to your home – I’m your fella. Please come by and meet me so we can really hit it off!”
- Bread
Clam Chowder – 5-year-old domestic medium hair mix

Clam Chowder is a sweet man with lots of love to give! He's very vocal and would be happy to meet you and tell you all about himself. He’s a friendly companion who takes pride in taking good care of his people. This snuggly boy would be happy to cuddle up on the couch and hear all about your day! Clam Chowder would gladly soak up all the pets you have to offer and is hoping to keep you warm this winter. If you’re interested in bringing this bundle of love into your home, please set up an appointment to meet him today!

“Glad to meet you! They call me Clam Chowder because I’m as comforting as a bowl of chowder! Whether curled up with a good book or lounging around watching your favorite movie – I would love to cuddle up with you. Life’s all about learning to relax, and I’ve got that down. I’m looking for a family that has plenty of pets and napping spots to spare. If you’re hoping to add a friendly feline to your family, please consider me!”

- Clam Chowder

Riley – 2-year-old rabbit mix

Riley is a precious gal with lots of curiosity! She enjoys making friends but takes a bit to warm up to new folks. Riley enjoys nesting in blankets and playing with her toys. When she is out of her cage to explore, she happily hops up to be close to people. She doesn’t enjoy being picked up but will hop into your lap for a cuddle. Riley is a very entertaining little lady and would make an excellent addition to your family!
Rabbits are wonderful family pets. They require daily exercise outside of the cage and ideally a larger living space than a typical kennel. Rabbits need a balanced diet of hay/grasses, leafy greens, pellets, and occasional veggies and treats.

“If you’re looking for a fuzzy, spunky companion - I’m your gal! I may be small, but I’ve got a large personality and loads of love. I enjoy being close to people and hopping around to explore. Carrots are my go-to snack, but I’m always down for a salad. Please, schedule an appointment to meet me so you can feel how soft I really am!”

- Riley

**Twix – 1-year-old domestic short hair**

Twix arrived at the shelter about 6 months ago as a tiny kitten. Since being with us, Twix has grown into a very sweet and handsome young boy who is more than ready to find his forever home! Aside from his dashing good looks, Twix has a charming personality that has won over staff at CBHS. He’s a spunky guy who LOVES to play. From feather wands to stuffed mice, Twix enjoys it all! This outgoing boy enjoys meeting new people and would be happy to be held in your arms. Twix would make a great cuddle buddy and new best friend! If you’re looking to add a cuddly, loving companion to your family - schedule an appointment to meet Twix today!

“If you’re on the search for your future best friend, I’m the fellow you're looking for! I’ve got unlimited snuggles, and a bit of spunk! I’d be happy to cuddle up with you for a night-in and would love to show you my pouncing skills when we get the chance to play. Thank you for giving me a chance, and I hope to meet you soon!”

- Twix
Valentine’s Day Event