



# An Occupation Based Program for Caregivers of Children Receiving Animal Assisted Therapy



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## Introduction

- Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a health intervention, meant to improve physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning, with animals as an integral part of treatment (Bert et al., 2016).
- Therapy animals play significant roles in assisting people with disabilities as part of therapeutic activities.

## Site Description

**Mission:** "We help individuals with special needs who are not engaging, complying, or progressing in their therapy by providing animal-assisted therapy, thereby supporting and encouraging them through the unconditional love of an animal-human friendship" (Pawsitive Friendships, 2022).

- A non-profit organization located in Maricopa County, Arizona
- Specializes in AAT services to help people with various disabilities in the school, clinic, and day program settings



## Literature Review

- Therapy animals facilitate children's **engagement, enjoyment, and motivation** in therapy (London et al., 2020).
- Addressed **motivation**, anxiety, and communication to support the clients journey toward functional goals (Mendonca, 2017).
- Parent coaching enhances self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, **participation** and an increase in child outcomes (Little et al., 2018).

## Identified Needs

- Parent and Caregiver Carryover Program
- AAT Resource Guide for Novel Therapists
- Restructure of AAT Program Curriculum



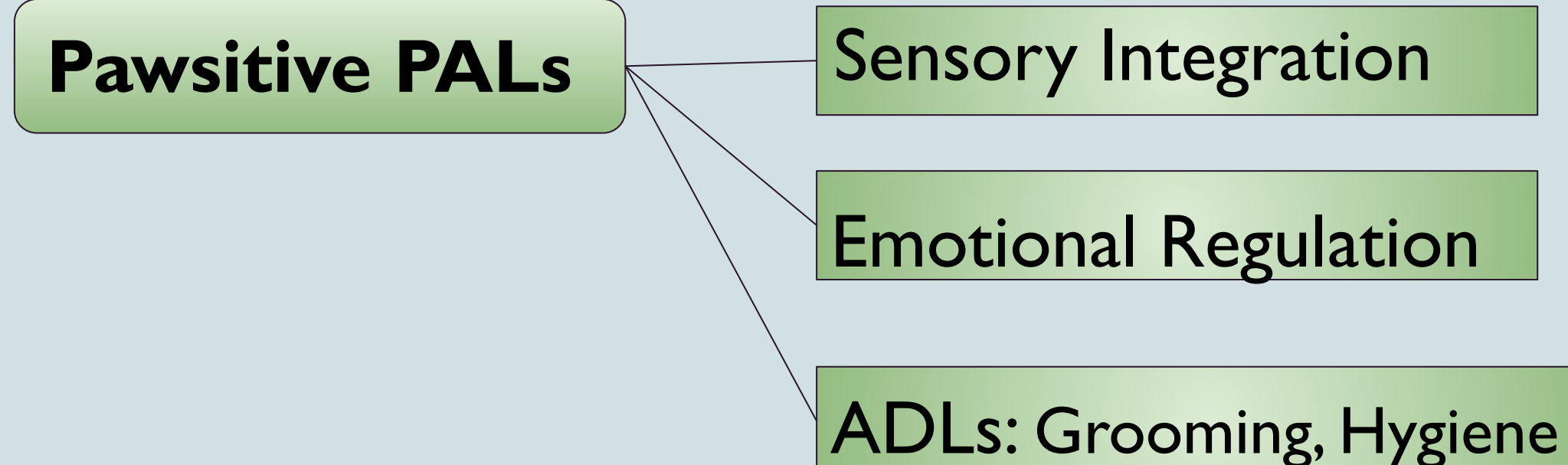
## Learning Objectives

- Create and implement a parent program that promotes healthy habits, independence, and quality of life, in roles and routines to address the needs of their special needs child.
- Develop an AAT resource guide for novel therapists to incorporate animals into therapeutic interventions.
- Update the curriculum "skills" handbook to ensure that it meets the needs of the clients by utilizing appropriate upgrades and downgrades.

## Program Description

### Pawsitive Pals

- Six-week occupation based program for caregivers of children receiving AAT services
- 30 minute virtual sessions, 1x/ week



## Methodology

### Recruitment

- Caregivers of children receiving Pawsitive Friendship services

### Project

- Program Development
- Qualitative Data Analysis

### Evaluation

- Open-ended survey
- Caregiver feedback forms

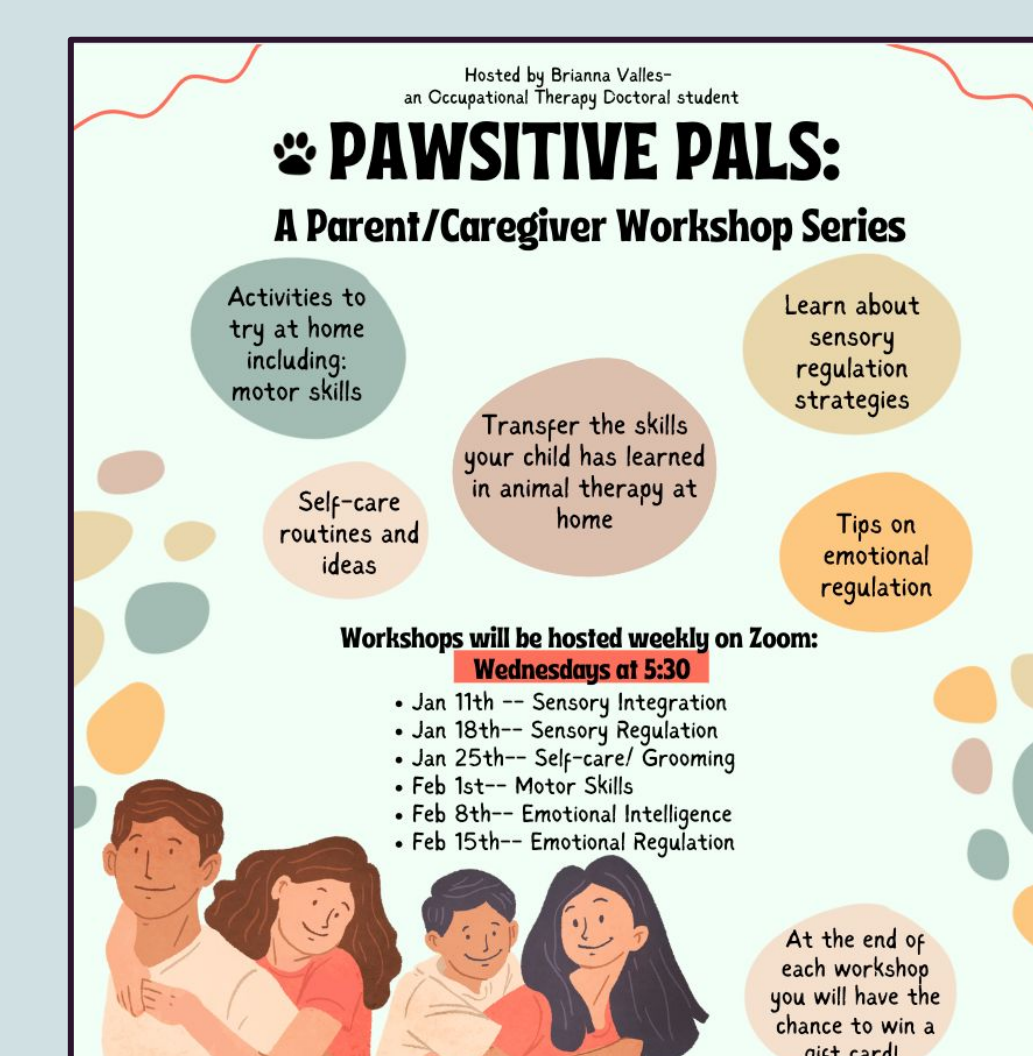
## Outcomes

Emerging Qualitative Data from Caregivers

- Theme 1:** Improved understanding of the topics and perceived benefits of program resources.
- Theme 2:** Caregivers felt empowered to address their child's challenges in ADLs (specifically grooming and hygiene skills).
- Theme 3:** Increased participation= increased awareness of their child's sensory and emotional challenges.

## Deliverables

- Updated program curriculum handbook
- PowerPoint presentations
- Digital AAT resource guidebook
- Parent program protocols
- Newsletter to parents / caregivers on Pawsitive Pals program



## Implications

- The occupation-based program was shown to positively influence parent and children's activity participation.
- Pawsitive Pals advocated for occupational therapy in a non-traditional setting.

## Future Directions

Future students can direct the Pawsitive Pals program to respite habilitation service workers and/ or aides that work directly under the care of children with special needs. Due to limited participation from parents and caregivers this population will benefit from this occupation based program since these workers have limited training before working directly with children with special needs.



## Acknowledgements

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## References

