

ELDERS' BIRD PETS IMPROVE SELF CARE IN RESIDENTIAL FACILITY

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PURPOSE OF PROJECT

- Phase I of longitudinal demonstration project
- exploring the impact of caring for a bird on self-care
- developed by nursing students
- Incorporates leadership in co-creating policies/procedures
- Includes a teaching model for care of birds
- with elders, staff, and students from other health sciences disciplines.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Eden Alternative® philosophy of care:

- well-being of elders improved by promoting connection, resilience, engagement,
- all decisions elder-centered.

Appreciative inquiry: Faculty promoting student behaviors that work well through discourse.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

- Students, faculty, staff, and elders revised bird care procedures that promote self-care
- Students:
 - got donations of birds, cages, supplies from pet stores
 - educated elders who requested a companion pet bird, in an afternoon session.

OUTCOMES AND APPLICATION TO PRACTICE

Elder Outcomes

Pet care was shown to encourage self-care by elders in residential care facilities. A care partner noted: *"Students stopped by resident's apartment to assess how the resident was adapting to caring for the finch. Resident stated that she has had birds her whole life and feels comfortable caring for the finch. The finch is in a cage by the window and has food and water. Resident states that she would like mirrors, toys and a shallow bath for the bird."*

[Insert photo of woman kissing bird]

One elder stated: *"I have had my bird for two weeks and I enjoy having him. I feel like he is my responsibility and it is something for me to take care of. When he whistles, I feel like he's talking to me, and now I want to get a female bird to go with him."*



Student Outcomes

In recognizing the students' service, one of the goals of service learning was met: to get students jazzed about service to the community.



FUTURE STEPS IN LONGITUDINAL PROJECT

St. Luke's Home will continue to evaluate social, psychological, and health benefits of caring for a pet.

Nursing students will continue this project: bringing in 4th-year BSN students and graduate students, to evaluate effectiveness and sustainability.

DISCUSSION

Retention of at-risk elders through care of self impacts all who live and work in assisted living communities.

Elders who are not directly involved in pet care benefit from exposure to health education taught by student nurses.

Elders have the opportunity to mentor nursing students, establishing a sense of purpose and giving back to the University.

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