

LEE LI MING  
PROGRAMME IN  
AGEING URBANISM

# Animals Living with Seniors

## Recreational Initiatives for Seniors<sup>1</sup>

Penny Kong

Owning a pet can potentially influence health and wellbeing. Pet ownership has been associated with a range of positive health outcomes including lower blood pressure and reduced stress.

Pets can offer companionship and affection to older people, who are prone to social isolation and loneliness. Seniors with dogs tend to be more active through regular playtime and walks. The following case studies illustrate a variety of ways to accommodate a pet in an older person's home environment.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

## Pets at Home

### *Seniors for Seniors*

A number of animal shelters across the United States and Australia offer variations on the Seniors for Seniors programme, which connects older shelter dogs and cats with senior adults. There are benefits for both human and animal in this arrangement.

Mature dogs and cats are especially suited to older owners for a number of reasons: the dogs and cats are usually already housetrained and are mellower and gentler than puppies and kittens.

In shelters, older animals tend to be less popular with potential adopters, so the programme gives them a greater chance at finding a permanent home. Adoption fees are generally reduced or waived for senior citizens who adopt mature cats or dogs. Some programmes offer post-adoption services which aim to support older adopters in caring for their pets.

Box 1 showcases some of the Seniors for Seniors programmes available in the United States and Australia.

#### Box 1: Seniors for Seniors Programmes

##### PAWS – Washington, USA

- Potential adopters undergo a matchmaking process with staff to select the most suitable animal companion.
- Seniors (60 years and over) who adopt an older cat or dog (7 years and over) pay a reduced adoption fee.
- Post adoption, owners are mailed a follow-up survey to share their experiences about how the cat or dog is settling in.
- If the senior is unable to care for the pet due to long-term hospitalization or stay in a nursing facility, they may return the animal to PAWS.

##### SAVE – New Jersey, USA

- Seniors complete a pre-adoption questionnaire and meet with an adoption counsellor who will match them with the most suitable mature animal for their situation.
- Adoption fees are waived for senior citizens (65 years and over) who adopt senior cats or dogs (8 years and over).

##### Furry Friends Rescue – California, USA

- Seniors fill in an online application to find a match based on the dog's personality and daily exercise needs, and arrange for a home visit.

- Adoption fees are reduced for seniors (62 years and over) who adopt Golden Dogs (7 years and over).
- Potential adopters are encouraged to designate a backup caregiver for the dog, but in the event of extended medical care or ailing health, Furry Friends Rescue will care for the dog for life.

#### Animal Aid – Victoria, Australia

- Adoption fees are reduced.
- Adopters receive discounts on the shelter's merchandise, veterinary clinic, and grooming and boarding services.
- For owners living within a 50km radius, there are free transportation services annually to and from the shelter to use their services.
- A pet rehoming service is available in the event the senior is unable to continue caring for the pet or passes away, and there is no backup caregiver.

Sources: Seniors for Seniors, <http://www.save-animals.org/seniors-for-seniors.html>, Accessed 27 February 2017; Seniors for Seniors, <https://www.paws.org/cats-and-dogs/adopt/seniors-for-seniors/>, Accessed 27 February 2017; Golden Dogs for Senior, [https://www.furryfriendsrescue.org/how\\_to\\_adopt/golden\\_dogs\\_for\\_senior](https://www.furryfriendsrescue.org/how_to_adopt/golden_dogs_for_senior), Accessed 27 February 2017; Seniors for Seniors, <http://www.animalaid.org.au/index.php/pet-adoptions/seniors-for-seniors>, Accessed 27 February 2017.

### *Dog Care Support for Seniors, Elderdog – Canada*

The Dog Care Support for Seniors programme provides free assistance to older pet owners who have difficulty caring for their pet, so that the senior can continue benefiting from the animal's companionship. Volunteers visit seniors at home to help with basic dog care activities. These volunteers have to complete criminal record checks before starting any home visits, and must wear approved photo identification during the visits.

Box 2 covers a sample of the services provided.

#### **Box 2: Elderdog Dog Care Support for Seniors**

- Assistance with obtaining pet food and feeding
- Assistance with maintaining the pet's hygiene
- Minor grooming such as nail clipping or fur brushing
- Transportation to and from the vet or groomer
- Temporary care during the owner's hospitalization
- Assistance with exercising the pet

Sources: Dog Care Support for Seniors, <http://www.elderdog.ca/Programs/DogCareSupportforSeniors.aspx>, Accessed 27 February 2017.

## Pets in Assisted Living Facilities

There have been increasing requests for pet-friendly nursing facilities, according to the United States' largest senior housing placement company, A Place for Mom. Older people who are unable to continue caring for themselves may be reluctant to move into nursing facilities if they are unable to bring their pets with them.

A growing number of nursing facilities in the United States recognise this trend and now accommodate seniors with pets. Facility staff share positive stories of house pets helping to ease loneliness and boredom and instil a sense of purpose. Steve Winner, co-founder of the Silverado Senior Living network, says that new residents can be withdrawn and uncommunicative, but interacting with the animals helps to draw them out of their shell.

Some senior living communities go beyond allowing pets in the facilities: they have a Pet Care Coordinator to ensure the care and health of the animals if the owners are unable to carry out these responsibilities. Other facilities rely on volunteers to help senior residents care for their pets.

Box 3 introduces some case studies of pet-friendly assisted living communities.

### Box 3: Features of Pet-Friendly Assisted Living Communities

#### Silverado Senior Living network – USA

- Assisted living communities manage a variety of animals from dogs and cats to miniature horses and llamas.
- Senior residents are asked to help care for the animals, which builds self-esteem.

#### Sunrise Senior Living Home – Washington D.C., USA

- A former shelter dog and cat roam freely in the facility, where they live together with older human residents.
- Seniors who are capable of caring for their pets are encouraged to bring them to the facility when they move in.
- At each of Sunrise's 300-odd facilities, at least two communal pets – usually a rescue cat and dog – live in-house and offer non-pet owners furry companionship.

#### Sakura no Yamashina – Yokosuka, Kanagawa, Japan

- The facility has a dog unit and a cat unit for those who want to live with these animals. They also have floors with no animals.
- Among the 6 dogs living in the facility, some were adopted from shelters, while the rest moved in with their owners.

- To alleviate the concerns of residents about what would happen to their pets when they die, pets are allowed to continue living at the facility even when their owners have passed on.

Sources: *How Pet Therapy Has Changed Assisted Living*, <http://www.aplaceformom.com/senior-care-resources/articles/pet-friendly-assisted-living>, Accessed 1 March 2017; *The Senior Living Home Where Shelter Pets Get A Second Chance*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/11/nursing-home-pets\\_n\\_5717495.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/11/nursing-home-pets_n_5717495.html), Accessed 1 March 2017; *The Nursing Home in Japan Where You Can Live With Your Pets*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/yumikosato/the-nursing-home-in-japan\\_b\\_7193686.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/yumikosato/the-nursing-home-in-japan_b_7193686.html), Accessed 1 March 2017.

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