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**The Experience of Animal Therapy in Residential Aged Care in New Zealand:**

**A narrative analysis**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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### **Abstract**

Volunteer-led animal visitation programmes are common within Aged Residential Care facilities in New Zealand. Visits by animals and handlers, often referred to as Animal Therapy, are primarily social and intended to improve the quality of life of people in residential care. Animal Therapy has been shown to have both physiological and psychological benefits for older people, including improvements in outlook and social interaction. Very little research has been conducted in New Zealand, particularly on the informal animal visitation programmes typical in care facilities in New Zealand. This project examined the experience of animal therapy in aged residential care. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven older people about their experiences of animal therapy, and analysed using narrative analysis. Older people in residential care do value animal therapy, but it is narrated as a fleeting pleasure, rather than having a long-lasting or far-reaching impact on the daily experience of residential care. In some ways, the structure of the AAA programme may underscore the challenges to everyday autonomy and identity in the everyday lived experience of residential aged care. This can be used to develop services that acknowledge the context of living in aged care for residents.

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“The problem with the world is that we draw the circle of our family too small.”

- Mother Theresa

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