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# Enhancing Quality of Life for Individuals with Dementia through a Virtual OT Based Equine-Assisted Activities Program

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## BACKGROUND

Equine-assisted activities (EAA) is commonly used to benefit individuals with a multitude of conditions. However, there are minimal EAA programs for individuals with dementia. Research demonstrates that there are potential benefits of EAA for individuals with memory deficits and there is a need for an accessible program for the dementia population. (Gabriels et al., 2015; Guerino et al., 2015; Sergiou et al., 2017; Ungermann & Gras, 2011; Zadnikar & Kastrin, 2011).

## PROBLEM

There is very limited research on the benefits for individuals diagnosed with memory deficits including dementia and Alzheimer's (Lai et al., 2019). With the use of EBT, OTs will be able to tailor treatments that provide benefits in physical, mental, and emotional elements for individuals with dementia.

## PURPOSE



To determine how OTs can use EBT to benefit individuals with memory deficits to enhance functional performance in daily routines and activities and improve overall quality of life.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### Needs Assessment

It was determined through interviews and observations that the most common conditions that EBT facilities see were those other than dementia. A need for an EAA program to benefit individuals with dementia was discovered. The site chosen to complete the program was NDR Therapeutic Riding in Norco, CA.

### Participants

To participate in the program, individuals were required to have a diagnosis of dementia and have an interest in horses. Six individuals were selected to participate from The Gardens of Riverside.

### Program Development and Implementation

A six-week virtual EAA program was developed from an OT perspective to improve the quality of life of individuals with dementia. The Allen's Cognitive Placemat Test was completed to determine each participant's cognitive level and tailor activities to their unique level. The program consisted of videos of horse related tasks and hands-on activities related to horse care.

### Program Activities

WEEK	ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION
1	Orientation Day	Introduction video; coloring pages
	Grooming	Grooming video; groom simulated horse
2	Tack	Tack video with worksheet to follow along; tack up simulated horse
	Horse Anatomy	Horse anatomy video; puzzle activity; group labeling activity
3	Horses Diorama	Horse environment lesson; build horse pasture dioramas
	Planting Carrots	What do horses eat video; plant carrots
4	Horse Markings	Horse markings video; markings activity; horse bingo
5	Making Treats	Review what horses eat; make oat treats
	Painting Horseshoes	Paint horseshoes in group setting
6	Scrapbooks	Combine activities completed throughout the program
	Feedback/Goodbye	Collect feedback from activities coordinator/participants during goodbye party

### Outcome Data Collection

Data was collected through surveys and an interview completed by the activity's coordinator at The Gardens of Riverside. The surveys were completed after each week of the session and asked questions regarding quality of life. The elements of quality of life that were measured included mood, energy level, engagement, communication, and socialization.



## OUTCOMES

- Improvement in mood, energy level, engagement, communication, memory, and socialization.
- The quality-of-life improvements lasted throughout the entire day on days that the sessions were conducted.

## DISCUSSION

The virtual program allowed for flexibility which increased likelihood of participation because clients were able to engage from their homes. The focus on horse care occupations were meaningful to the participants and could translate to an in-person experience. The tangible activities permitted family and friend involvement which increased socialization, communication, and memory. Activities were designed at an individual cognitive level, which highlighted a client-centered approach with an adequate but achievable challenge. The program was designed to be easily adaptable so that participants of all cognitive levels could attend.

## OT IMPLICATIONS

- Combine the Allen's Cognitive Frame of Reference for dementia cognitive levels and the Person Environment Occupation Model for EAA to create optimal plan
- OT involvement in future EBT programs for the dementia population improve quality of life to develop occupation-based horse care activities for people with dementia
- Virtual program for individuals with dementia to improve quality of life
- OT involvement in emerging practices.

