

Petlinks - a new service for home and community care

Meyer Eidelson

In 1995 the Victorian Department of Human Services funded a community organisation (Southport Daylinks Inc.) to carry out a research project to explore a model of providing support services to people experiencing frailty and disability in the community and their companion animals.

Daylinks is a Home and Community Care (HACC) social support service in Port Melbourne with strong community connections to consumers, community organisations and local Government. It has won a number of awards for innovative practice.

The project was funded through the HACC program, which is jointly funded by the State and Federal Governments. The program provides a wide variety of support services to assist the frail elderly and younger people with disabilities to remain in their own homes. In Victoria one of these types of service is called social support. It aims to meet the social and emotional support needs of consumers and is intended to be flexible and innovative. Most social support projects utilise a co-ordinator and volunteers.

The research report called Companion Animals - A Model for Providing Companion Animal Social Support Services in the Community, recommended that the HACC program fund an Animal Companionship Social Support project. It also recommended a brokerage fund to assist consumers and social service providers with funds for items such as veterinary expenses, medication and fence repair. Another key recommendation was that a resource manual be prepared and that HACC workers around Victoria be provided with opportunities to be trained in developing animal companionship support services for people experiencing frailty and disability.

These recommendations were implemented by the Victorian State Government. According to the research report this was the first time that Government funding had been used to set up a community based animal companionship program. On Sunday September 1st 1996 the Minister for Human Services, the Mayor of Port Phillip and the President of the Victorian RSPCA officially launched the Petlinks project before a large audience.

The support throughout the project from the community, media and consumers has been extraordinary. The project has been universally lauded as an essential and important service. The Steering Committee for the project was overwhelmed with offers of support and assistance.

During the course of the project a successful partnership between the state government, a non-government organisation, the local council, private enterprise and consumers was forged through the Steering Committee. A mutual love and respect for companion animals was a common bond and interest. The Pet Care Information and Advisory Service (privately funded) was an important contributor with advice, financial assistance and enthusiastic involvement.

The project currently employs a part time coordinator who recruits volunteers to provide a number of services, primarily to the frail elderly, including pet walking, washing and grooming, transporting, foster care and financial assistance. Future goals include the development of a training and resource kit and implementation of a training project for HACC providers throughout Victoria.

During the launch the Minister for Human Service Rob Knowles said the HACC program would welcome further applications to set up animal companionship programs in other parts of Victoria. The future for this vital type of support service seems very promising.

REFERENCES

Grant, J. and Miller E., *Companion Animals - A Model for Providing Companion Animal Support Services in the Community*, Victorian Home and Community Care Program, 1995.

For further information contact:

Georgie Hearne
Petlinks Co-ordinator
333 Bay Street
Port Melbourne 3207
Phone (03) 9646 9186

Meyer Eidelson
Special Needs Officer
Home and Community Care Program
Department of Human Services

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meyer Eidelson
6/27 St. Vincent St.
Albert Park 3206
Melbourne
Phone: 96909584
Fax: 9616 8682

Meyer Eidelson is the author of two books on the subject of conservation: 'Secrets of the Seaside Suburbs - A Guide to the Wildlife of Port Phillip' and a children's book 'Alfreda the City Penguin' (English and Japanese). He was a founding member of Earthcare, an environmental organisation in Port Phillip. In 1986 he established an animal visiting program to schools using young offenders. As a social worker he assists in the development of HACC programs for high needs groups such as ethnic communities, Aboriginal communities and the homeless. In 1994 he was given the task of developing a model of animal companionship HACC services by the Manager for Service Development, Maureen Dawson-Smith.

[UAM 96 Index Page](#)