

Homelessness and Animal Companionship in Bloomington, Indiana

Christine H. Kim

This study is the first to examine Bloomington, IN's subpopulation of people experiencing homelessness with animals. To understand this subpopulation's basic demographics, social service needs, and existing resources, eight families were recruited for the study from a service fair offering free veterinary care, pet supplies, and grooming to companion animals of people experiencing homelessness. The event was intended to be an isolated kick-off for a pilot year of capacity building programming in partnership with local homeless service providers. This article presents information which was collected from the first service fair through semi-structured interviews and the administration of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale. The data from this study reveal participants' high attachment to their animals and a need for more pet-friendly overnight shelters. Other themes that emerge include homeless animal guardians' restricted access to day-time services, a struggle to find temperature controlled places to sleep in extreme weather, and an absence of documentation supporting emotional support animal claims. Bloomington's homeless advocates, direct service professionals, and program developers can ground efforts to assist people experiencing homelessness with companion animals using findings from this study.

Keywords: homelessness, shelter, pets, companion animal, emotional support animal, social services

Acknowledgements

The following organizations and businesses partnered with My Dog is My Home to sponsor and implement the service fair from where this data was collected: Monroe County Humane Association, Pets Alive, Pets of the Homeless, The Road Dog Mobile Pet Grooming, Furever Family Inc., and Shalom Community Center.

The organizations and business did not have any bearing on the research design or interpretation of the gathered information. Furthermore, this report has been written and published independent of these organizations and businesses and may not reflect their views.

For someone who has lost a home, a companion animal can provide an important sense of emotional support, responsibility, and constant companionship (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007; Irvine, 2013a; Irvine, Kahl, & Smith, 2012; Labrecque & Walsh, 2011; Rew, 2000; Rew & Horner, 2003; Slatter, Lloyd, & King, 2012). This is consistent with recent research that has extended the idea of adult attachment theory to pets. It has been shown that pets can provide a dependable source of attachment security, and thereby are likely to contribute to greater resiliency during negative life circumstances and stressful transitions (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Sable, 1995; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2012).

Unfortunately, the very same animal who provides a lifeline can be a barrier to accessing services that secure the most basic of human needs--animals are rarely accepted inside of shelters, soup kitchens, and other aid facilities--and people will often choose to forego these services rather than surrender or separate from their animal (Blue Cross, 2001; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Singer, Hart, & Zasloff, 1995). Moreover, the constant rejection of a companion animal, which can be a homeless person's most beloved support, may add to feelings of isolation (Donley & Wright, 2012; Thompson, McManus, Lantry, Windsor, & Flynn, 2006). Prior research shows that service providers' adoption of pet-friendly attitudes elicit favorable responses and better service utilization among clients which are traditionally difficult to engage, like the

chronically homeless or homeless youth (Brennan, 2011; Thompson et al., 2006).

New and innovative strategies to increase engagement and subsequently decrease homelessness may be of particular interest to a community like Bloomington, IN, which was seeing increasing median rents and a steady uptick in homelessness as shown in their point-in-time count reports from 2014 - 2016. (Department of Numbers, 2016; Indiana Balance of State, 2014; Indiana Balance of State, 2015; Indiana Balance of State, 2016; Indiana Balance of State, 2017). As the homeless community in Bloomington within this time period grew, homelessness and animal companionship is also became an increasingly visible phenomenon. Yet the lack of location specific data on this subpopulation of the homeless hampers our understanding of the problem and its potential solutions.

Future research using methods to more accurately quantify homeless animal guardianship in Bloomington is necessary to complete a full assessment of the problem. Using Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) has been identified as an effective tool for systematically counting people experiencing homelessness with companion animals (Cronley, Strand, Patterson, & Gwaltney, 2009). Additionally, the point-in-time (PIT) count is another tool that select cities have employed to count homeless animal guardians. Indianapolis, IN; Toledo, OH; and Los Angeles, CA have all added questions about pet ownership to their 2017 PIT count surveys, Indianapolis being the

first to pioneer such a question in their 2016 survey (*My Dog is My Home*, 2017). In addition to including the number of homeless individuals with animals, Indianapolis, IN's 2016 PIT count report interprets the data and acknowledges that leaving a companion animal may become a barrier to accessing shelter. According to the report, ten unsheltered people reported a total of twenty-two animals between them (Indiana University Public Policy Institute, 2016).

The 2016 PIT count for Monroe County--the county in which Bloomington is located--found 246 households (which include both individuals and family units) experiencing homelessness, or 340 individuals experiencing homelessness (Indiana Balance of State, 2016). Unlike Indianapolis, Bloomington's neighbor to the north, the Monroe County PIT count did not specifically enumerate pet owners experiencing homelessness. Assuming that the service fair from which the research participants were recruited was well advertised and compelling enough to gather the majority of homeless animal guardians in Bloomington, attendance numbers provide a loose estimate of the size of the subpopulation without adding a question to the PIT count survey or to HMIS. There is a possibility that the attendees of the event were an underrepresentation of the population, given the difficulty of confirming the rigor of outreach performed by outreach workers and other social service employees who were asked to help advertise the event to their clients.

Eleven family units were in attendance, which is about 4% of homeless

households. Entry qualification for the service fair were slightly more expansive than federally accepted definitions of homelessness, which is an added difficulty to quantifying homelessness and animal companionship from the service fair research findings.

Methods

Sample

The researcher drew a purposive sample of people experiencing homelessness with companion animals who lived in Bloomington, IN at the time the study took place. All participants were recruited from a service fair which offered free veterinary exams, vaccines, minor medical treatment, spay/neuter vouchers, pet supplies, and grooming for companion animals of the homeless. Homeless animal guardians also had the opportunity to receive snacks, clothing, winter items, and social service referrals. As far as the researchers know, this event was the first of its kind and was organized by the nonprofit *My Dog is My Home* - a national organization which aims to increase access to shelter and housing for people experiencing homelessness with animals. Although organized by *My Dog is My Home*, the services were delivered by local animal welfare groups and businesses. This service fair was intended to be an isolated event in order to kick off *My Dog is My Home*'s year of capacity building services in partnership with other local non-profits. There was one additional follow-up service fair approximately ten months later.

During the intake process, attendees were given the option to participate in this

research study. Of the eleven family units that attended the service fair, eight agreed to participate in the study. Participants were interviewed inside the community center where the service fair took place and were made aware that their responses would be published without identifying information, unless participants signed audio and photo releases. Participants were informed that if they signed the audio and photo releases, some identifying information may be used for educational or advocacy purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary and did not have any bearing on attendees' ability to access services during the fair or subsequently with any of the partnered service providers. No monetary incentive was offered for participation, and all activities and methods for collecting data were approved by an institutional review board.

Service fair attendees were also screened upon entry and were asked to "check all that apply" when presented with the list of entry qualifications. Entry qualifications were informed by definitions of homelessness set by the US departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health and Human Services (HHS). Based on the key findings of data collected from a prior MDIMH service fair that took place in Los Angeles in 2013¹ and

upon consultation with WisCARES², researchers added one non HUD or HSS informed entry qualification--any attendee who was formerly homeless; entered into permanent housing within the past two years; and had not had any change in their income was allowed access to the service fair.

In order to create low-barrier entry to the event, attendees were not required to present proof of homelessness. This low-barrier system of entry was chosen by the researcher in an attempt to include homeless individuals who did not have a history of utilizing services. However, the lack of written "proof" of homelessness may also raise concerns about sampling validity, which researchers attempted to mitigate by offering no monetary incentive or bearing on service fair entry for research participation.

The sample included 8 households, of which 5 women and 3 men were the primary interviewees. The majority of research participants (5) described the length and type of homelessness as chronic. The age of respondents was evenly split between the 18-39 (4) and 40-59 (4) categories. The majority of people who participated were Caucasian / White - Non-Hispanic (5). The single person who identified as multiracial reported a racial or

¹ Findings from the LA 2013 service fair showed that most attendees were formerly homeless and were living in permanent supportive housing at the time of the event. However, the vast majority of attendees were on a fixed monthly income, suggesting that their lack of financial mobility in addition to paying 30% of their income towards rent actually decreased their ability to pay for veterinary care upon becoming housed.

² WisCARES is an outreach partnership at the University of Wisconsin that provides basic veterinary medical care, housing support and advocacy, and other support services to Dane County pet owners who are currently experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, as well as those who are unable to pay for veterinary medical services needed for access to housing.

ethnic background of Caucasian / White - Non-Hispanic and Asian / Pacific Islander. None of the participants (8) were employed, four participants had no income, and four participants received fixed, monthly payments from a government source of about \$733.00.

Data Collection

The data was collected through two methods: (1) semi-structured interviews which allowed for in-depth responses and (2) the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale, a 23-question survey instrument which asked the participants to respond on a scale of agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly, or don't know/refuse. The Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale has been proven to be internally consistent ($\alpha=0.93$) for the assessment of both male and female attachment to dog and cat pets (Johnson, Garrity, & Stallones, 1992; Singer, et al., 1995). The semi-structured interviews were conducted by two interviewers using an interview guide for each participant. Interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participant. Regardless of audio recording consent, interviewers took detailed notes of each response by hand on the interview guide.

The study questions were divided into categories: entry qualification, demographics, domestic violence, pet information, service animal and emotional support animal (ESA) information, accessing social services and community resources with animals, housing and shelter, and the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), which measured pet attachment. All 23 questions of the LAPS

were administered at the end of the interview by the interviewer, who read the questions and possible answers aloud. The interviewer checked the box which corresponded with the participant's verbal response.

Questions about domestic violence were included based on research finding that women who are homeless due to domestic violence are one of two types of people experiencing homelessness who may be more likely to be caring for animals (Cronley, Strand, Patterson, & Gwaltney, 2009). Data from the domestic violence questions was inconsistently gathered due to the interviewers' sensitivity to participants who came with their intimate partners; thus, the information has been omitted from the findings.

Analysis

Five of the eight participants agreed to have their interviews audio recorded. Recorded interviews were transcribed, but computer software was not used to analyze the transcriptions or other written notes. All notes and transcriptions were analyzed by two reviewers, and all participants quoted in this article have been assigned pseudonyms. The reviewers applied a grounded theory approach to the qualitative data analysis procedure, which allowed the researchers to discover emerging patterns in the data and generate theories. Words or phrases that conveyed salient meaning were highlighted and interpreted into codes. Reviewers then determined patterns through the constant comparison of interview transcripts. To achieve this, codes noted on each transcript were listed and grouped together for overlap or

interrelation. Groups, or topics to arise in more than one transcript, were considered a theme.

Results

Companion Animal Information

All respondents had brought dogs to the service fair. The majority of people brought only one dog (5), but some brought two dogs (3). There did not appear to be any breed preference or prevalence among the participants--various dog breeds and sizes were represented. Dog ages ranged from less than one year to nineteen years old, although the most common dog ages were five (2), six (2), and seven (2) years old.

Only two of the participants reported having one other animal that they did not bring to the fair, one of which was another dog and the other being a cat. Dogs appear to be the most prevalent type of companion animal among people experiencing homelessness. No other species (rodents, birds, etc.) were reported.

Most of the participants' dogs (6) had not been spayed or neutered at the time of the service fair. A total of seven spay/neuter vouchers (5 canine and 2 feline) were distributed at the event. However, it is difficult to know if the number of vouchers distributed reveals any information about the desirability of spay/neuter services. According to verbal reports from animal welfare partner organizations after the event, only one of the seven vouchers was actually used.

The majority of participants (7) stated that their animals had been vaccinated. Two participants clarified that

their dogs had received vaccines in the past, but they were either behind schedule or they needed a specific type of vaccine, such as the rabies vaccine.

Five out of seven people answered that they had their companion animal(s) before they became homeless. Most animals (5) were obtained through a friend or family member. While only two people explicitly identified their animals as "rescues", two other participants who stated that their animals came from a friend or family member had elements of rescue in their narrative. Namely, they provided the animal with stability and care when their original guardians either became homeless or went to jail. One participant, Bob³, became his dog's caretaker when his friend was incarcerated. The dog was transported by an acquaintance from a city nearly 100 miles outside Bloomington to be in Bob's care. Bob was already homeless at the time.

Alice, one of the participants who rescued her dog, shared the following narrative when she recounted the events.

"I was dating someone who had her. He was a really bad drug addict. She was badly physically and emotionally abused by him and his ex. He went to jail last year and I took it upon myself to put her in my name so she would be safe. Then I wrote him a letter saying that he couldn't see her anymore. I would call her a rescue."

Three out of ten animals had been obtained either through a professional breeder or through conscious breeding

³ All names of individuals who appear in this report have been changed.

practices in which the caregiver was engaged. Mentions of breeding were contained in the answer categories “from a friend or family member”, “from a previous animal’s litter”, and “breeder”. In all three instances of breeding or obtaining from a breeder, the human caregivers reported that they acquired their dogs prior to becoming homeless.

Service Animal and Emotional Support Animal Information

Participants were asked if their animals were trained service animals or emotional support animals. Alice responded that while her dog is not a service animal, she is an emotional support animal although she did not have a letter from a mental health provider to “prove” such a claim.

“I have PTSD. I would like to get her certified [to be an emotional support animal], but we don’t have money for that.”

Alice’s comment provides insight into her understanding of the ESA process, which includes a belief that her dog must meet certain criteria to receive a “certificate” and that the undertaking requires payment or fees that are out of reach for her financial situation.

Hardship

When the participants were asked if they experience any hardship because of their animal, four stated “yes”, three stated “no”, and one person stated “other”. The term “hardship” was not defined in order to capture a broad range of issues that may not already be represented in the literature. One

such example comes from Carol, who stated that having companion animals was a hardship for her as well as her immediate support system.

“I have [experienced hardship because of my animals], and that’s why I’ve had to take them to family members and say, ‘Look, I’m in a situation that has me down.’ So yes, it has caused a lot of hardship for me. Not just hardships for me, but for my family members as well.”

Alice also suggested that having a dog was a strain on her personal relationships, mostly due to people’s inability or unwillingness to help the entire family.

“Right now, since we’re homeless, we’ve asked family or friends for help. They say, ‘We can’t help you because of your dog.’ Like I said before, we can’t go to the shelter or to the library. It’s like we’re a burden because we have her. She’s a part of our family. [If they say,] ‘She can’t come,’ well sorry--we’re not coming either then. I’d like to leave her with someone but I’d have to know and trust the people.”

Alice’s narrative shows that her lack of engagement with a shelter provider is not due to a refusal to be separated from her dog. Alice states that she would, in fact, separate from her dog and access shelter if someone she knew and found trustworthy would agree to care for her dog. Unfortunately, Alice’s social supports were not able or willing to bridge this gap. Without such a resource, her priority remains to care for this animal to whom she

committed herself to when she rescued the dog from abuse.

Alice also identified her inability to enter the library as a hardship, echoed by other people's responses throughout the interviews. The library as an inaccessible resource is explored in greater depth in the "Social Services and Community Resources" section of the article.

Additionally, more than one participant pointed out a specific discomfort of being an animal guardian experiencing homelessness whose primary residence is a vehicle. Although Emily and Emmitt's response to this question was "other", they bring light to this issue in using two different occasions:

Occasion 1:

Emily: "[I]t's hard to go to the shelter with them. That's the only hardship."

Emmitt: "When I met with the case worker on Friday, I told him that too. Because they had mentioned some places to go, and I told him that we can't take our dogs in there. They're like my kids and if they can't go, I'm not gonna leave them in the truck. If they get cold, I get cold."

Occasion 2:

Emmitt: "[W]e went to [The Soup Kitchen]⁴ that one day. We left our dogs in the truck, and it really wasn't that hot out, although it was a little bit. But I mean, we

just kinda made it a five minute shove it and go kinda thing.

And then we got a reputation about that. They had water and food in the car. And it was no longer than five minutes, and I left the windows cracked. They gave us a little slack. But I didn't go back on a hot day."

In occasion 1, the ability to leave the animals in a safe, contained space is not the stressor. The issue becomes the temperature and the shared experience of comfort and discomfort. Without a human present to create a temperature controlled environment in the car, Emmitt elaborates that it becomes an unsuitable living condition for the dogs, and one that he would rather share with them.

In occasion 2, we see that in the event that a person leaves their dog in their vehicle to run an errand or access services, they may be faced with confrontations about the welfare of their animal. Emmitt's act of making his time at the soup kitchen "a five minute shove it and go kinda thing" brings up questions about whether or not this behavior crosses over into other services. In this case, the question is not his ability to access services, but the quality of his services. How much can be accomplished in five minutes with a social worker, case manager, or primary care provider? While rushing through a meal may be unpleasant, it has minimal consequences compared to the

⁴ All human social service organizations mentioned in this article have been assigned pseudonyms.

compromised quality of services they may be receiving from other providers for fear of leaving their dogs for too long.

Other commonly referenced hardships were difficulty accessing shelter services and conflicts with landlords. As explained by Frank:

“Wherever I go, he goes. If he can’t go, then I don’t go. I had some trouble with a privately owned building who said they wouldn’t take service animals.”

And with some humor, Bob stated,
“[I] can’t go anywhere inside except for a pet store.”

Accessing Social Services and Community Resources with Companion Animals

Participants were asked to identify the services they frequently utilize. The most commonly cited type of services were meal services (4) and day services (4). Only one person reported using a shelter. In the “other” category, participants reported utilizing a rapid rehousing program, the Salvation Army, and the post office.

Interviewers also asked participants if they had ever been denied entry or access to a social services because of their animal. Half of the participants (4) responded “yes” and the other half (4) responded “no”.

One participant who responded “no” qualified that he simply does not access services at all. One participant who responded “yes” identified the library and churches, among other more traditional social service entities like meal services and shelters, as places she had been denied access or entry because of her animals.

When asked to elaborate on what effects denial of entry or access to social services has on her, again, the weather was a significant motif. Alice stated,

“It makes me mad and sad. [E]ven if it’s cold outside or raining we still have to keep our dogs out on the patio.”

In response to this question, Emily referenced the weather as well.

“[We get] cold. Very cold. Especially recently. The heat we can deal with. But in this time, they shake all the time.”

After describing their experiences of diminished access to social services, participants were then given an opportunity to share what services they would like to have access to or have available in their community. Participants unequivocally identified a need for co-sheltering--an emergency or transitional living facility which provides shelter or housing services to people and their companion animals at the same site. Emily and Emmitt stated,

Emily: “I would say to have a shelter where the pets can be accepted as well.”

Emmitt: “Yeah, cause they’ll sleep with me all night, or her.”

Emily: “I mean, I understand not all animals behave very well, but, they still get cold too.”

In the same spirit, Bob added,
“Basically shelters where you’re allowed with your animal. I mean, we spend our whole life with our animals, so you might as well spend the night with them too.”

Alice also spoke about the wish for more shelters that accommodate animals, and she praised a specific shelter currently filling the need. However, a pet-friendly nighttime residence alone may not resolve all the stress she experiences as an animal guardian experiencing homelessness. When asked if she would stay at a shelter if they would take her dog, Alice expressed some ambivalence.

“More shelters should let homeless people who have dogs actually have their dogs there, like [Sheltering Arms] does. I think that’s really awesome...[B]ut what’s the point if you have to leave during the day? We don’t have any place to go. We can go to the library, but [my dog] can’t. Maybe we’ll get a tent and have a lot of blankets. If we have to, we’ll go to [Sheltering Arms], but what’s the point when you have to be out in the day. We might as well stay in a tent.”

Again, Alice names the library as a community resource she would like to access with her dog. While the social work literature does not address libraries as a resource for the homeless, there is a body of research from the library sciences and sociology fields that acknowledges the “homeless patron” and advocates to close the access divide (Bardoff, 2015; Collins, Howard, & Miraflor, 2009; Gehner, 2009; Hodgetts, Stolte, Chamberlain, Radley, Nikora, Nabalarua, & Groot, 2008; Wong, 2009). However, the other place that homelessness is mentioned within the library sciences literature is in texts that address “problem patrons”. Articles about “problem patrons” focus on how to engage or contain difficult types of library users

(Blessinger, 2002; Bullard, 2002; Chattoo, 2002; Redfern, 2002). Within both sides of the library science field’s burgeoning awareness of library users who are experiencing homelessness, there are no articles that specifically address pet owners who are experiencing homelessness.

One thing that was not requested was assistance with feeding animals. Consistent with previous research findings, it seems that Bloomington’s companion animals accompanying people experiencing homelessness were fed often and fed well (Irvine, 2013b).

Emmitt: “They never run out of food. I’ve not ran out of food one time since I’ve been homeless. I got almost 100 pounds of food right now. Two 80 pound bags of Beneful in my truck.”

Emily: “Yeah. We’ve been lucky about having people help us with that.”

Emmitt: “My friend’s been giving me food, and everybody asks. They’ll feed my dogs before they feed me, and that’s awesome and that’s how I expect that to go. I would expect my dogs to eat before I do.”

In addition to the donations of compassionate people, the existing availability of pet food at specific human social service locations that are conscious of pet needs may explain why this was not a request. There were two places in particular that were mentioned consistently - a food pantry and a resource center for people living in poverty and/or experiencing homelessness. Also, the cost of pet food is relatively low and accessible

compared to solutions for other unmet needs, like the need for pet-friendly housing.

Housing and Shelter

Some participants spoke about how they had kept themselves and their animals warm in previous winter seasons. Grace stated,

“Get a lot of blankets and try to stay warm. It’s hard but you do it.”

Bob, on the other hand, was able to cobble together an informal arrangement for his dog with a church parishioner. He spoke of his experience entering a winter shelter--

“Well, I was staying in this shelter for a while, but when I got my dog I had a parishioner from [a church] house my dog while I was in shelter for the winter. Then she gave her back to me in the spring once it got warmer. [Being separated] was very hard. I cried every time I got to see her. I got to see her on the weekends if it was nice out. She let me keep her for the weekend and come back and get her on Monday. It was hard for me to let her go, but I had to think, you know, what’s best for her.”

Again, this narrative speaks to some individuals’ willingness to separate from their animal, as long as they feel the animal is receiving quality care. However, the separation is not without its emotional difficulties.

Four out of seven respondents stated that they had been denied access to shelter because of their companion animals. One person clarified that she had not been

denied access to a shelter with her dog because she has not yet attempted to do so. Another person responded “no” because he refuses shelter altogether, regardless of their pet policy.

Additionally, two people stated that they had been denied access to housing because of their companion animal. One person stated that she had not been denied access to housing with her dog because she has not yet attempted to access permanent housing. Two people responded “other”—one indicated that her inability to get housed had more to do with herself than her dog, and the other stated that he was initially denied housing due to his dog but the situation was resolved once he presented an emotional support animal letter from his doctor.

All respondents who were not already in permanent housing expressed interest in being rehoused. However, most participants stated that any housing or shelter situation would be unacceptable if their dogs were not allowed to join them. Two people specified that if their social supports would watch their dogs, they would access a shelter or housing situation with a no-pets-allowed rule.

Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale

Data concerning participants’ attachment to their animals was affirmed through interviews and through their scores from the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale. Qualitatively, individuals felt strongly enough about their companion animals to make statements like the following by Emmitt:

“He is my friend and my son.”

Respondents scored high on the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale. The mean score of the sample was 65.12 out of a possible score was 69. The average score from this sample is higher than average scores collected for a study of homeless

animal guardians from Sacramento, CA (Singer, et al., 1995) as well as average scores collected from various other groups to produce scale standards (Johnson, et al., 1992).

Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale Score Comparisons

Study	N	M
Bloomington	8	65.12
Sacramento (Singer, et al., 1995)	42	60.55
Scale Standards (Johnson, et al., 1992)		
Men	131	45.1
Women	191	50
Dog Owners	211	49.2
Cat Owners	89	45.1

Discussion

This is the first research study to examine the state of homelessness and animal companionship in Bloomington, IN. Largely through qualitative analysis, common themes in participants' experiences have been interpreted to show areas that can be strengthened within social services to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness with animals. Due to the small sample size, the collected quantitative data cannot be generalized. Rather, the qualitative themes which emerge from this study contribute to a depth of understanding of the experience of homelessness and animal companionship in this specific community. Researchers have

omitted tables summarizing the quantitative data for their lack of statistical significance.

The researcher infers that other participants and people experiencing homelessness with companion animals at large have similar misunderstandings of the definition and process of claiming that their animal is an ESA. Much like Alice, when other participants were asked if their animals were trained service animals, most stated that they were not. Immediately following, respondents were asked that if their animals were ESAs. Most responded (6) that their animals were ESAs, and they also stated that they did not have a letter

from a qualified health professional supporting their claim.

Unlike service animals, ESAs, a type of assistance animal⁵, support their human caretakers through companionship and are not specifically trained to perform a task. HUD defines an ESA as an animal that “provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person’s disability” and specifies that “[f]or the purposes of reasonable accommodation requests, neither the FHA nor Section 504 requires an assistance animal to be individually trained or certified” (HUD, 2013).

Documentation, or “proof”, that an animal is an ESA is only required in situations where the animal’s occupancy or presence must be justified, such as in a housing or shelter environment with a no-pets-allowed rule. To facilitate a reasonable accommodation⁶ to regular occupancy rules, the person must make a request to their landlord or property manager. HUD states that “[h]ousing providers may ask individuals who have disabilities that are not readily apparent or known to the provider to submit reliable documentation of a disability and their disability-related need for an assistance animal” (HUD, 2013).

The person requesting the reasonable accommodation is not required to disclose their disability. But, the requestor does need to provide documentation from a doctor or other health professional stating that the animal provides emotional support that alleviates at least one symptom or effect of their disability (HUD, 2013; Wisch, 2015). Provided that Alice has a network of health care providers, the cost of such a letter would correspond with the cost of meeting with her health professional. No other fees should be incurred. Also, given that all interviewees had an income of \$990 or less, Alice should qualify for some form of Medicaid with a low-cost co-payment for seeing a health provider.

Implications for Practitioners & Program Developers

Shelter and Housing

Some findings point to clear recommendations, such as the combination of the participants’ straightforward and emphatic request for shelters that accept animals, participants’ statements that they had been denied access to shelter and housing due to their animals, and further statements that almost any shelter or housing option would be acceptable if they are allowed to bring their companion

⁵ The HUD definition of "assistance animal" encompasses any animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. An ESA is one type of assistance animal that qualifies for a reasonable accommodation to a residence with a "no pets" rule (HUD, 2013; Wisch, 2015).

⁶ The HUD definition of "assistance animal" encompasses any animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. An ESA is one type of assistance animal that qualifies for a reasonable accommodation to a residence with a "no pets" rule (HUD, 2013; Wisch, 2015).

animals with them. Taken together, these findings suggest that program developers should create (1) more pet-friendly shelters and (2) more accessible, pet-friendly housing. The importance of pet-friendly shelters cannot be overstated, as shelters can be the first stop in a progression within homeless services. Resources found within shelters, such as access to case managers and linkage to other social services, are also crucial supports for securing permanent housing.

However, only one person who requested more sheltering options acknowledged that there is an existing shelter in the community that does take animals. This suggests that there may be a lack of knowledge or a lack of advertising that there is a shelter available that will welcome companion animals. Alternatively, participants may have identified a resource that they would like to have available but one that they may not utilize in reality.

Emotional Support Animals

There are still other variables that may affect the utilization of the shelter by homeless animal guardians. The official policy of the one shelter identified as "pet-friendly" is to allow service animals and ESAs, not pets. According to the findings, people experiencing homelessness with animals are not equipped with the proper documentation to show that their animal is an ESA, although it appears that if a person experiencing homelessness has an animal, their animal is very likely to be a source of emotional support. However, whether or not that emotional support ameliorates a

diagnosable disability should be determined by a mental health professional.

The co-residency of people with ESAs is legally protected by the Fair Housing Act. In light of the theme that has emerged from this study—that people experiencing homelessness who identify their animals as ESAs may not have an accurate understanding of the ESA definition or process—social service workers and other advocates should take special care to educate clients on their rights and the law. Proper documentation is crucial for animal guardians experiencing homelessness who are seeking housing or shelter services, particularly because the study also shows that housing and shelter services will be refused if their animal is not allowed to be with them.

Shelter and housing providers that are sensitive and compassionate regarding the human-animal bond, should consider if an ESA process is necessary for their program. In many cases, if not all cases, maintaining the bond was a priority for the study participants. Respondents clearly did not view their pets as possessions, but as confidantes, family members, and fellow travelers. Yet despite the uniformly positive emotional impact these animals had on the lives of their caretakers, at times their presence made access to material resources and social services difficult. Social service providers trained to understand the "person in environment" and the importance of attachment in a person's development and resiliency must honor that relationship and recognize that the success of an intervention can hinge on the inclusion of a client's animal.

Spay/neuter findings also suggest that a strong partnership between homeless service providers and veterinary providers should be explored. Spay/neuter is particularly important for homeless animal guardians attempting to access housing. Landlords and property managers may lawfully require proof of spay/neuter prior to renting to a tenant with a pet. ESAs and service animals are not a pet and are not required to be spayed or neutered, unless there is a presence of a spay/neuter city ordinance for all animals.

Species Specific Planning

Dogs were the most popular animal within the sample; thus, social service providers interested in making more pet friendly spaces should prioritize how to accommodate dogs specifically. Species-specific planning in shelter environments is discussed by organizations with successful co-sheltering models, such as Urban Resource Institute (URI), an organization in New York City which runs pet-friendly transitional housing units for survivors of domestic violence. URI piloted pet-friendly apartments by first allowing cats only. URI has expanded to accept dogs since their initial policy change. Their experiments and experiences are documented in their white paper (Urban Resource Institute [URI], n.d.).

Some species specific recommendations made by URI include providing muzzles and leashes for dog residents. Dogs must be on a leash, in a carrier, and/or muzzled while traveling through common areas. Leashes, carriers, and muzzles may be removed once the dog is outside or back inside the residents'

private room. All residents, both with and without pets, are also educated on appropriate interactions with animals in order to reduce animal stress and the likelihood that dogs will display aggressive or fearful behavior (URI, n.d.).

Veterinary Care

URI also suggests making a strong and immediate partnership with an animal welfare organization. URI will allow any animal onto the premises, regardless of its medical status, as long as it receives (or the human produces proof of) mandatory vaccination and spay/neuter within a certain time frame. All of these services were provided free of charge through their partnership with the ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals (URI, n.d.). In Bloomington, there are a number of animal welfare organizations specifically geared towards serving low-income populations, such as the Monroe County Humane Association, and Pets Alive.

Foster Care

Although several participants made statements such as "If my dog can't come, I can't come", there appears to be some nuance to the sentiment. All respondents showed an interest in being housed or sheltered, but several interviews showed that it would not be accepted at the expense of the *quality* of care for their animals. For some participants, it appeared that being physically separated from the animal would be difficult but bearable if *quality* care was ensured. In such instances, providing a form of foster care or boarding arrangements with significant trust building incorporated into the process would remove

barriers to shelter for human participants. At the time this article was written, the organization Furever Family was Bloomington's greatest resource for providing such a service.

Temperature

Temperature was a persistent theme throughout certain interviews, even prior to prompting responses to questions about the weather. Consistent with the general wisdom of providing additional services to people experiencing homelessness in extreme temperatures, extra attention must be paid during summer and winter seasons. For animal guardians, a lack of animal boarding options in these circumstances becomes an extra barrier to ensuring not only the comfort but physical safety of the person or family. Winter shelter providers in particular should consider the impact of denying access to companion animals accompanying people experiencing homelessness.

Day Services

This study also shows that it is not enough to provide sleeping arrangements for homeless human-animal families. Daytime services, including general community resources such as the public library, must also become accessible. Cross training to libraries for handling "problem patrons", which may include people experiencing homelessness with animals, may also be beneficial.

Providing people experiencing homelessness with the ability to either bring their animals with them or leave them in a safe space will help guardians avoid uncomfortable or unsafe separation, such as leaving their animals in extreme weather or

alone in a vehicle. Removing this barrier for animals also ensures that their people have equal access to services as well as assurance that the quality and duration of services is not compromised by their need to return to their animal quickly.

Limitations

Findings from this qualitative study cannot be widely generalized to the general subpopulation of people experiencing homelessness due to the qualitative nature of the study and several methodological weaknesses. First, sampling validity may have been compromised. The research participants were recruited from a service fair for which there was no proof of homelessness needed for entry. People self reported their homelessness status, which may or may not have been accurate. Fear of being restricted from accessing services for not meeting certain criteria may have led certain participants to mislead researchers about their housing status. Data collection rigor may have also been compromised. Interviews were conducted at the entry point to the service fair, causing a bottle neck effect at intake. Researchers may have felt rushed to collect data in order to move the entry line along, and research participants may have also rushed through the questions in order to get to the event. The question of rigor was verbally noted by one of the researchers who stated that she felt rushed in the interview process.

Next Steps for Researchers

Although this is a small sample size, the data from this pilot study is a starting point for understanding how to effectively address human-animal homelessness in

South Central Indiana. However, more location-specific data such as an accurate count of the population, services this population has used or denied, and demographic characteristics of the population, must be collected before it can be addressed in a systematic fashion. With

coordinated interagency outreach and word of mouth by past service fair attendees, a wider statistical sample could be obtained and the experience of human-animal homelessness in Monroe County would begin to come into focus.

References

- Bardoff, C. (2015). Homelessness and the ethics of information access. *The Serials Librarian, 69*(3-4), 347-360.
- Beck, L. & Madresh, E. (2008). Romantic partners and four-legged friends: An extension of attachment theory to relationships with pets. *Anthrozoös, 21*(1), 43-56.
- Bender, K., Thompson, S., McManus, H., Lantry, J., & Flynn, P. (2007). Capacity for survival: Exploring strengths of homeless street youth. *Child Youth Care Forum, 36*(1), 25-42.
- Blessinger, K. (2008). Problem patrons: All shapes and sizes. *The Reference Librarian, 36*(75-76), 3-10.
- Blue Cross. (2001). *A Dog's Life: Homeless People and Their Pets*. Oxford: Baker Oswin.
- Brennan, S. (2011). Pets our west: Housing rough sleeping pets in Western Sydney. *Parity, 24*(4), 13-14.
- Bullard, S. (2002). Gypsies, tramps and rage. *The Reference Librarian, 36*(75-76), 245-252.
- Department of Numbers. (2016). *Bloomington Indiana residential rent and rental statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/rent/indiana/bloomington/>.
- Chattoo, C. (2002). The problem patron: Is there one in your library? *The Reference Librarian, 36*(75-76), 11-22.
- Collins, L., Howard, F., & Miraflor, A. (2009). Addressing the needs of the homeless: A San Jose library partnership approach. *The Reference Librarian, 50*(1), 109-116.
- Cronley, C., Strand, E., Patterson, D., & Gwaltney, S. (2009). Homeless people who are animal caretakers: A comparative study. *Psychological Reports, 105*(2), 481-99.
- Donley, A., & Wright, J. (2012). Safer outside: A qualitative exploration of homeless people's resistance to homeless shelters. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice, 12*(4), 288-306.
- Gehner, J. (2010). Libraries, low-income people, and social exclusion. *Public Library Quarterly, 29*(1), 39-47.
- Hodgetts, D., Stolte, O., Chamberlain, K., Radley, A., Nikora, L., Nabalara, E., & Groot, S. (2008). A trip to the library: homelessness and social inclusion. *Social & Cultural Geography, 9*(8), 933-953.
- Indiana Balance of State (2014). IN-502 Balance of State - Point-in-Time Homeless Count 1/29/2014 (Continuum of Care - Point in Time & HIC). Retrieved from <https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b23>

- [0c4_ff919b8b671e414a984d08d1bc5820d5.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b230c4_ff919b8b671e414a984d08d1bc5820d5.pdf).
- Indiana Balance of State (2015). BOS Point-in-Time Homeless Count 1/28/2015 (Continuum of Care - Point in Time & HIC). Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b230c4_eb230289629a4528b249da308c36dcbe.pdf.
- Indiana Balance of State (2016). Balance of State ONLY Point-in-Time Homeless Count 1/27/2016 (Continuum of Care - Point in Time & HIC). Retrieved from media.wix.com/ugd/b230c4_79e3445bf9b643d1888b5cd3af3dd440.pdf.
- Indiana Balance of State (2017). Balance of State ONLY Point-in-Time Homeless Count 1/25/2017 (Continuum of Care - Point in Time & HIC). Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b230c4_b1db3e7a64e647a6825f94313ecce1c3.pdf.
- Indiana University Public Policy Institute. (2016). Ten-year trend shows slight decrease in number of people experiencing homelessness. Indianapolis, IN: Ashley Sankari & Laura Littlepage.
- Irvine, L. (2013a). Animals as lifechangers and lifesavers: Pets in the redemption narratives of homeless people. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 42(1), 3-30.
- Irvine, L. (2013b). *My Dog Always Eats First: Homeless People and Their Animals*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Irvine, L., Kahl, K., & Smith, J. (2012). Confrontations and donations: Encounters between homeless pet owners and the public. *Sociological Quarterly*, 53(1), 25-43.
- Johnson, T. P., Garrity, T. F., & Stallones, L. (1992). Psychometric evaluation of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS). *Anthrozoos*, 5(3), 160-175.
- Kidd, A., & Kidd, R. (1994). Benefits and liabilities of pets for the homeless. *Psychological Reports*, 74(3), 715-22.
- Labrecque, J., & Walsh, C. (2011). Homeless women's voices on incorporating companion animals into shelter services. *Anthrozoos*, 24(1), 79-95.
- My Dog is My Home. (30 January 2017). Surveying for Animal Companionship in the Homeless Point-In-Time Count (News). Retrieved from <http://www.mydogismyhome.org/news/2017/1/30/surveying-for-animal-companionship-in-the-homeless-point-in-time-count>.
- Redfern, B. (2002). The difficult library patron: A selective survey of the current literature. *The Reference Librarian*, 36(75-76), 105-113.
- Rew, L. (2000). Friends and pets as companions: Strategies for coping with loneliness among homeless youth. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 13(3), 125-40.
- Rew, L. & Horner, S. (2003). Personal strengths of homeless adolescents living in a high-risk environment. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 26(2), 90-101.
- Sable, P. (1995). Pets, attachment, and well-being across the life cycle. *Social Work*, 40(3), 334-341.
- Singer, R., Hart, L., & Zasloff, R. (1995). Dilemmas associated with rehousing homeless people who have companion animals.

- Psychological Reports*, 77(3), 851-7.
- Slatter, J., Lloyd, C., & King, R. (2012). Homelessness and companion animals: More than just a pet? *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 75(8), 377-83.
- Thompson, S., McManus, H., Lantry, J., Windsor, L., & Flynn, P. (2006). Insights from the street: Perceptions of services and providers by homeless young adults. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 29(1), 34-43.
- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2013). Service animals and assistance animals for people with disabilities in housing and HUD-funded programs (FHEO Notice: FHEO-2013-01). Washington, DC: Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.
- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.). Reasonable accommodations under the fair housing act (Fair Housing). Retrieved from https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/ReasonableAccommodations15.
- Urban Resource Institute: (n.d.) *Escaping domestic violence as a pet owner: Insights from survivors of domestic violence and recommendations from the Urban Resource Institute's URIPALS program*. New York, NY: Urban Resource Institute - People and Animals Living Safely.
- Wisch, R. (2015). FAQs on Emotional Support Animals (Animal Legal & Historical Center). Retrieved from <https://www.animallaw.info/article/faqs-emotional-support-animals>.
- Wong, Y. L. (2009). Homelessness in public libraries. *Journal of Access Services*, 6(3), 396-410.
- Zilcha-Mano, S., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P.R. (2012). *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46(5), 571-580.