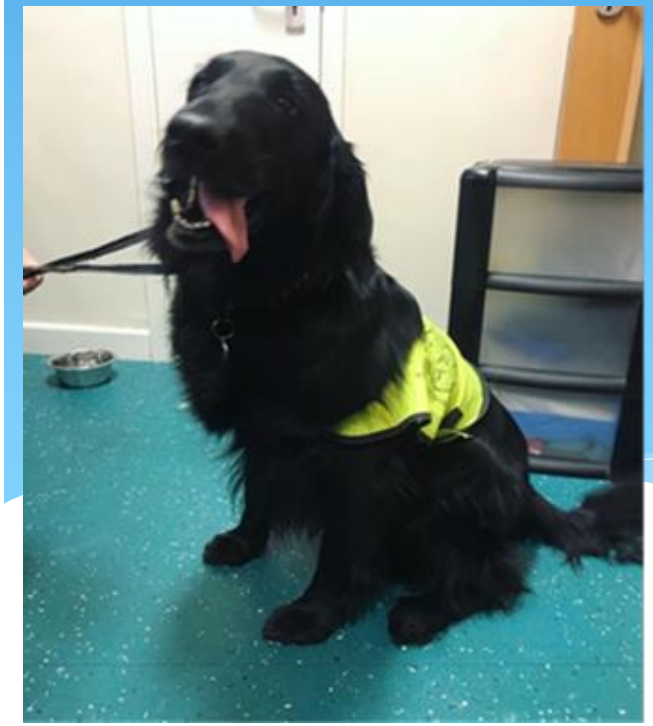
Therapy With Dogs



Animal Assisted Interventions

Animal Assisted Activities

An activity usually led by volunteers and their temperament assessed dogs that have no fixed goal other than to bring joy, relaxation and build relationships.

Animal Assisted Therapy

Goal orientated interactions engaging the client with a highly trained and confident happy dog. The interactions will have goals that have a therapeutic or mental health target.

Animal Assisted Education

Goal orientated interactions engaging the client with a highly trained and confident happy dog. The interactions will have goals that have an educational target.

All of these are known as Animal Assisted Interventions

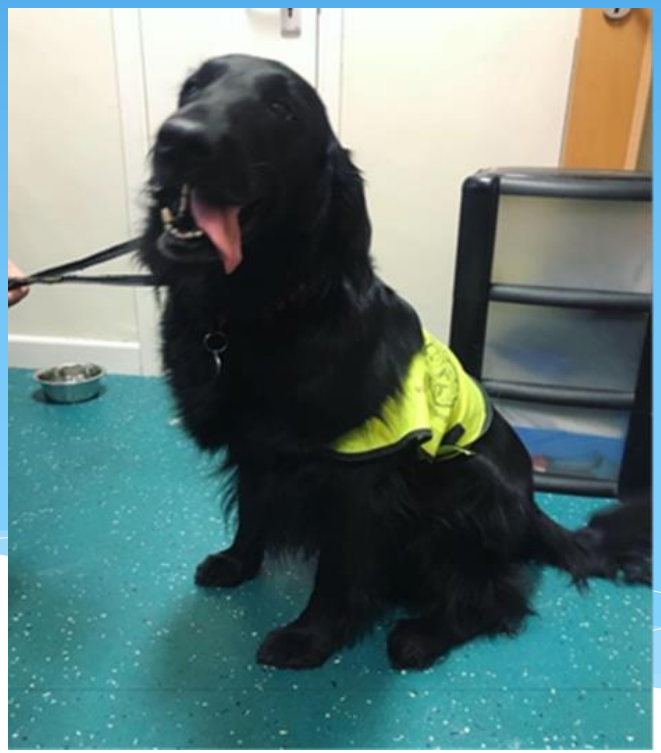
Physical Benefits

- Lowers heart rate
- Increase in oxytocin (love hormone)
- Increase in dopamine (happy hormones)
- Increase in endorphins (stress and pain reliver)
- Lowers cortisol (stress hormone)

Emotional Benefits:

* Relationship between practitioner and Dog is key to success.
* Builds relational bridges between service user and practitioner.
* Co-regulation between Dog and service user allows them to process information.
* Can encourage therapeutic progress to happen quicker.
* Removes focus from the service user.
* Service user's are able to cross the threshold as they are greeted by a friendly happy animal that isn't judging them.
* Sessions can be themed around their special interest if it is animals or dogs.

Exploring the impacts of the presence of a registered Pets as Therapy (PAT) dog in a therapeutic group setting for young people aged between 11 and 14 expressing or experiencing anxiety.



Why?

* Why the idea? – Limited research – outdated.
* Why that group and age?
* Why our team? Calm Forum Anxiety Management Group – well established – biggest waiting list, written manual - Content and delivery the same as usual.
* Alice not used as a therapeutic tool.

How

Approached R&D

Penny & Alice (Dog) – PAT and now NELFT volunteer.

Selections – not randomised.

Total 35 – across 2 cohorts, September 2019 –March 2020. 2 groups with Alice 2 groups without – Delivered in the same week.

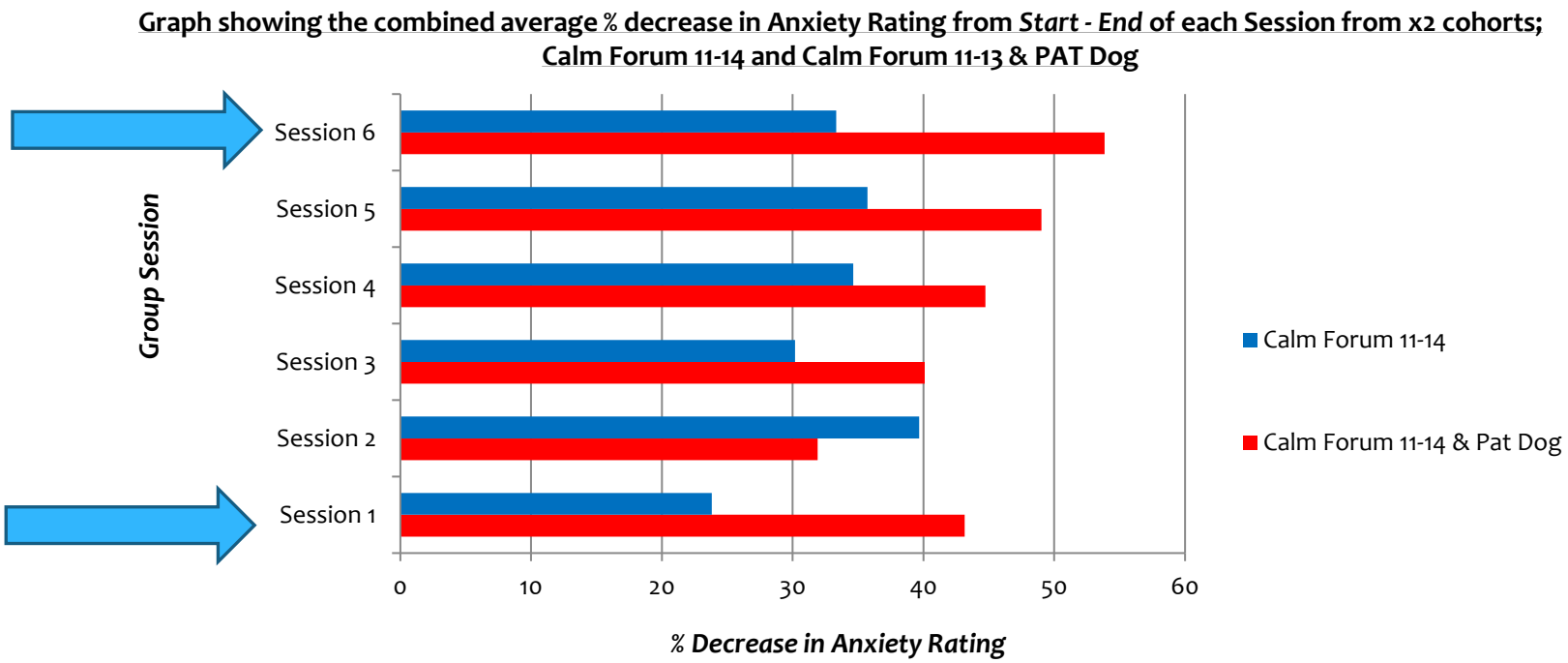
Gained consent from parents for the group with Alice.

6 sessions – 1 group review

Data Collection and Aims

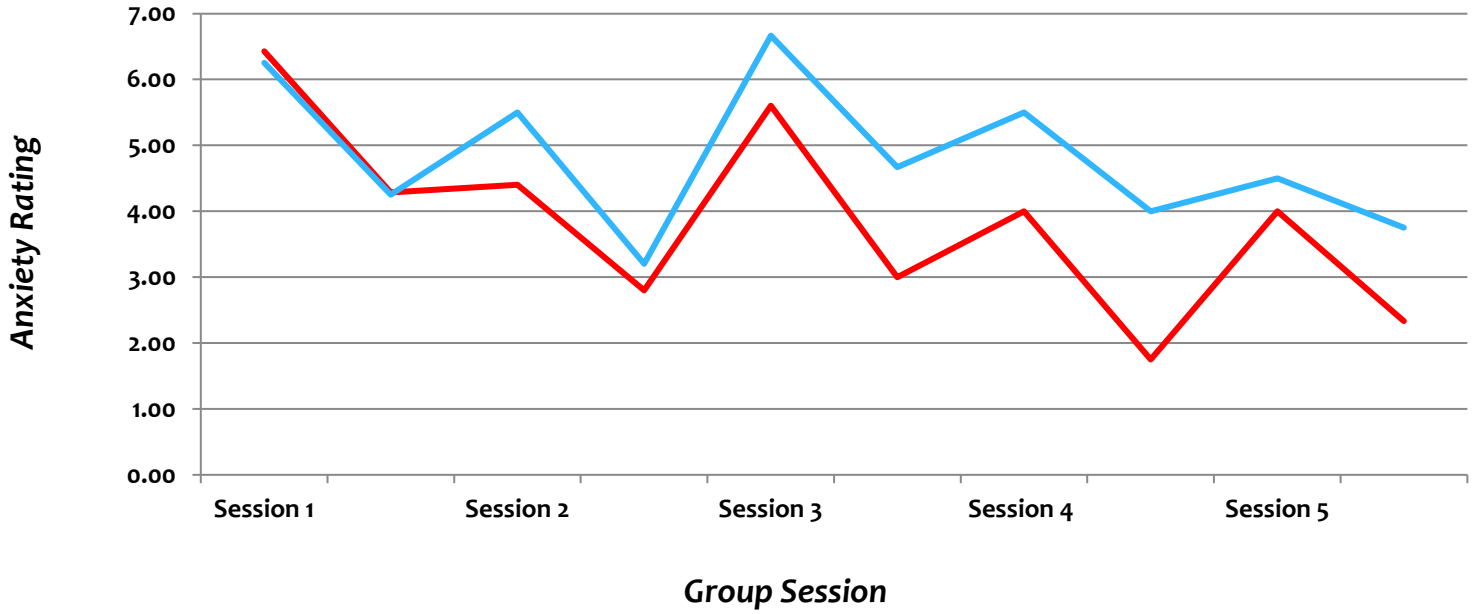
- ROMS
- Weekly anxiety rating sheet
- Attendance rates
- Discharge rates
- Clinician observations with engagement
- Young people's qualitative feedback forms

Anxiety Rating

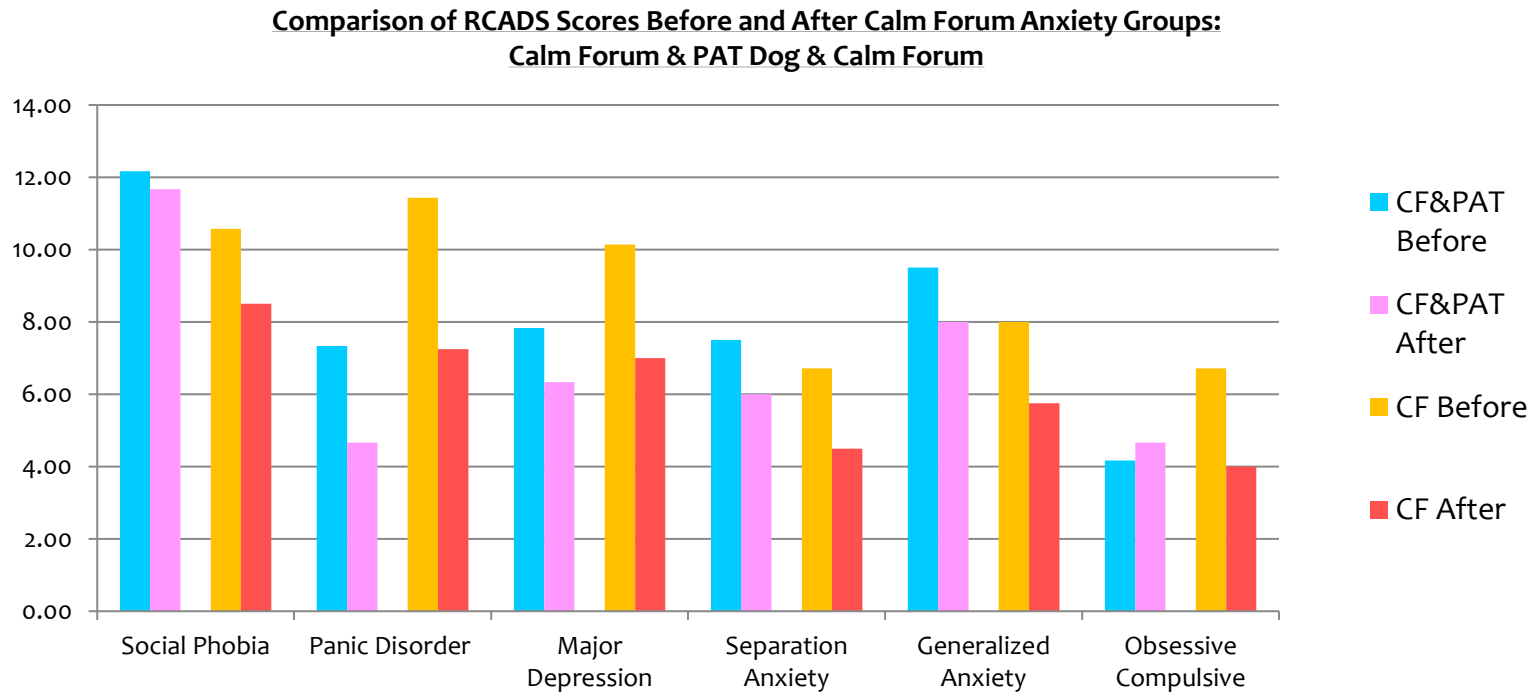


Anxiety Rating

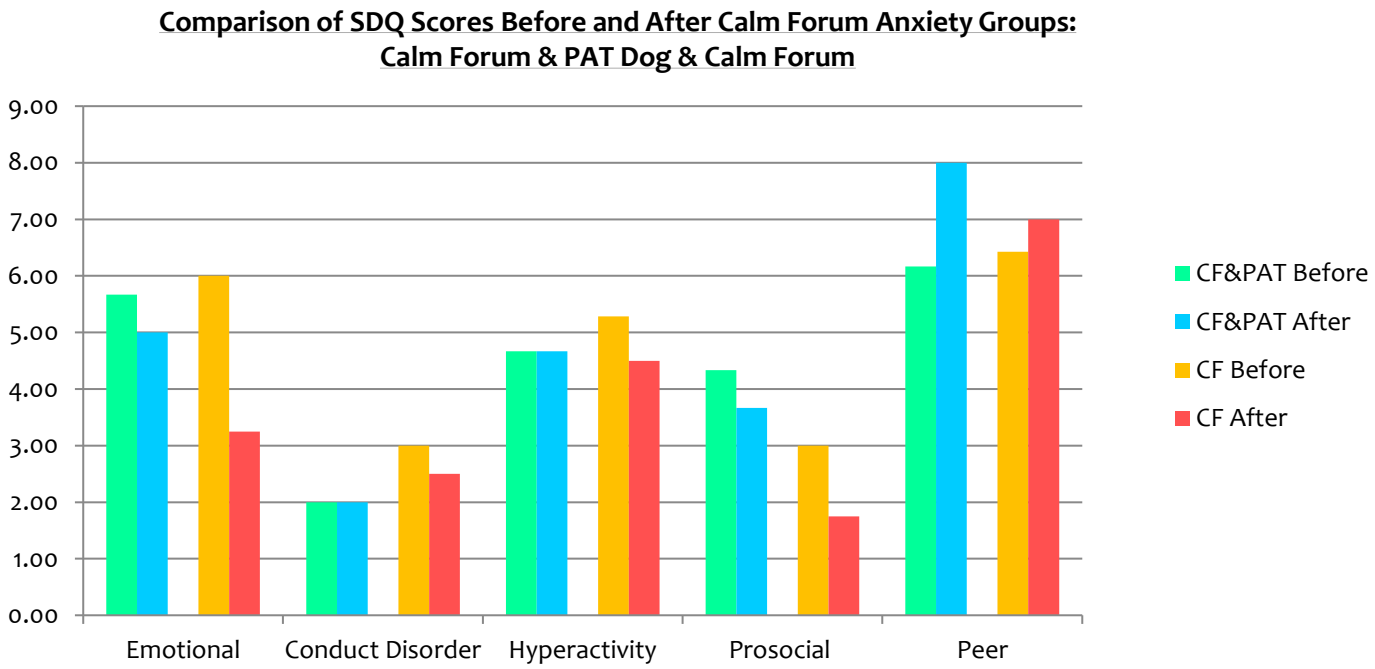
Graph displaying the average reduction in Anxiety Rating from *Start - End* of each Group Session; Calm Forum 11-14 & PAT Dog and Calm Forum 11-14



Routine Outcome Measures – Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale

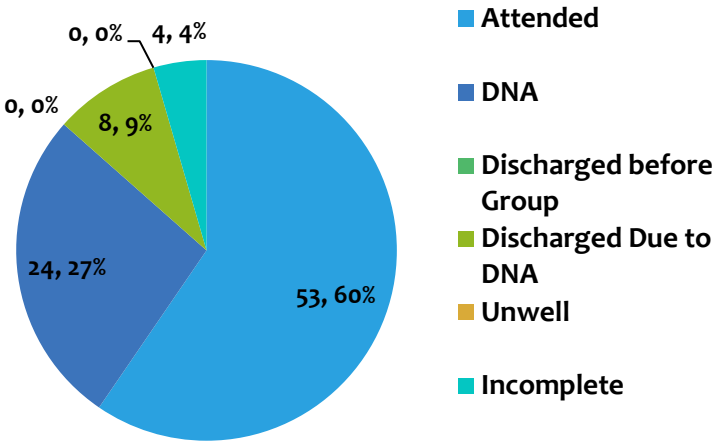


Routine Outcome Measures – Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

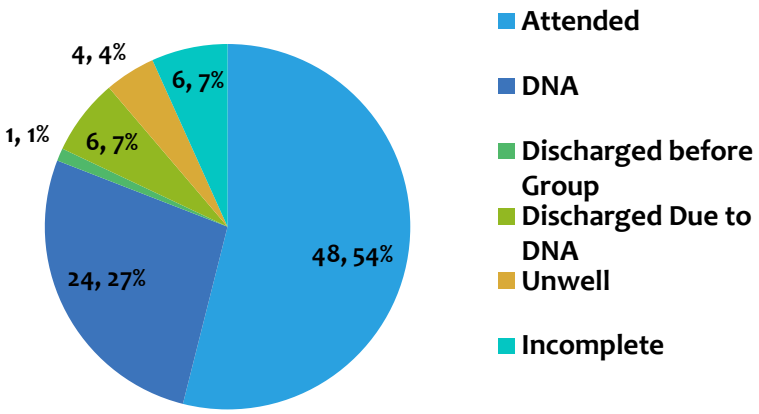


Attendance Rates

Breakdown of Attendance rates for x2 cohorts for Calm Forum 11-14

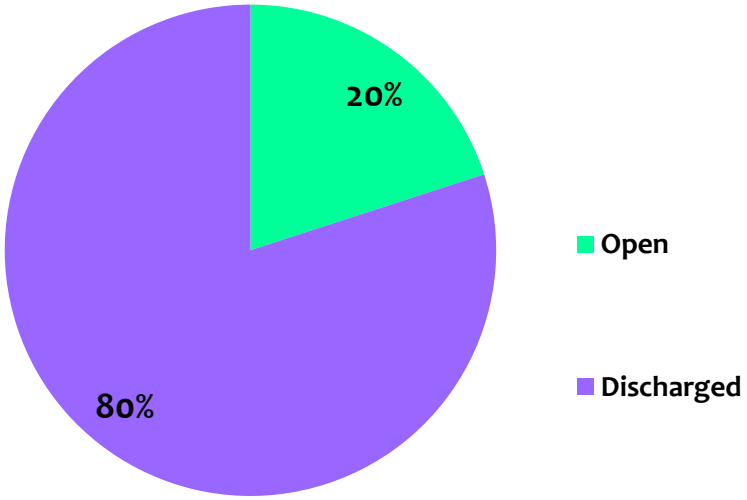


Breakdown of Attendance rates for x2 cohorts for Calm Forum 11-14 & PAT Dog

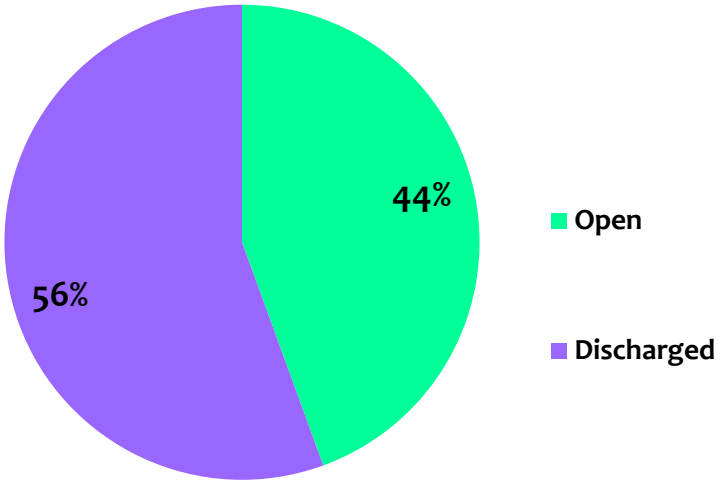


Discharge Rates

Outcome of Calm Forum 11-14 & PAT Dog intervention for x2 cohorts



Outcome of Calm Forum 11-14 intervention for x2 cohorts



Clinician observation and feedback results

* We saw:
  - Differences in engagement of the young people
  - Alice responding to a young person's distress
  - Differences in our own energy, excitement, and ease of building rapport with young people

Riechert (1994); where therapists are not able to offer physical comfort to a patient during therapy, animals can.

Prothmann et al., (2006); in individual therapy sessions with a therapy dog children and young people showed greater attention, alertness, openness and desire for social contact than in sessions without a therapy dog.

Young People's Feedback

"She is amazing, friendly and when you cuddle her it feels like you could let your worries be free"

"I would have probably not opened up as quickly, Alice made it a warm and cosy environment"

"She made me open up more and feel more comfortable"

"I think she made me want to come each week, and made the group work better together. Also made me more confident to speak to everyone"

"Alice helped all the other people in the group talk to each other when she first arrived, she took away the worry of the session."

"The Group wouldn't be as relaxed if Alice wasn't there."

"Alice made the group better and more relaxed than other groups that I have been in."

"Alice is a good distraction and makes the group seem calm and relaxing."

Summary

* **ROMs scores** between interventions didn't show a notable difference, but important that scores do improve.

* No notable differences in **attendance rates**; might have been if there had been more data collected/more cohorts.

* **Anxiety ratings** for the intervention with Alice showed a greater and quicker (most notably in session 1 and 6). Spike in anxiety rating for week 3 of the second cohort.

* PAT groups indicated both **higher completion and higher discharge rates.**

Main Points About What We Learnt

* Having a PAT dog can be a distraction for some young people – therefore we would recommend an introductory workshop.
* Explain specifically to the young person, not just the parent/carer, and that there will be an alternative option if the young person does not want to attend a group with the PAT dog.
* Having the PAT dog present in a therapeutic group for young people experiencing anxiety has had a promising impact, which included reduced feelings of anxiety during the group sessions, as well as higher engagement levels and discharge rates at the end of the group.
* This service evaluation has shown that there is feasibility for using the PAT dog in therapeutic groups for young people experiencing mental health difficulties.

What's happened since…

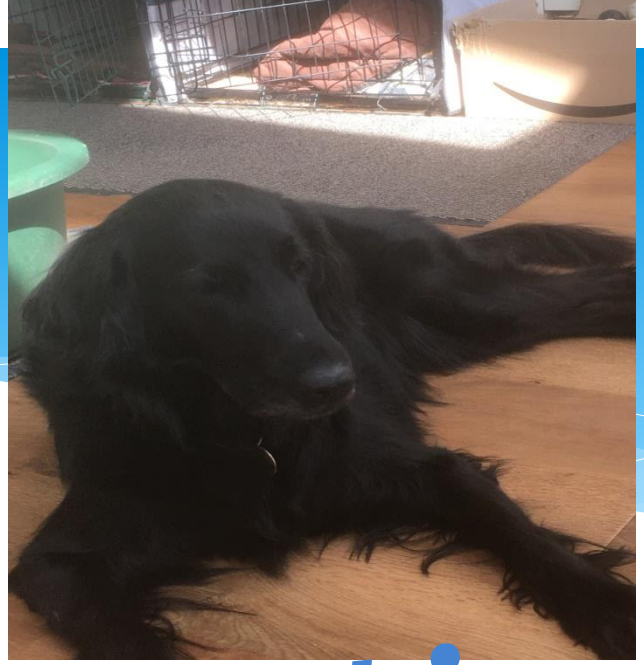
- Peaches.
- NELFT Make A Difference Award: Improvement to services.
- Spoken at various NHS conferences.
- Presented at an international conference for Anthrozoology.
- Guest speaker for the trust celebration of International nurses day 2023
- Findings were published with the Royal College of Nursing in October 2022.
- I have been awarded a research fellowship with UCLH to continue the research.

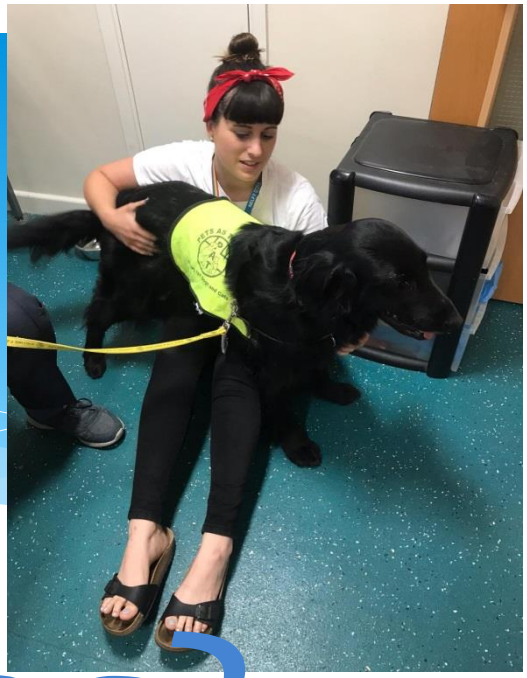
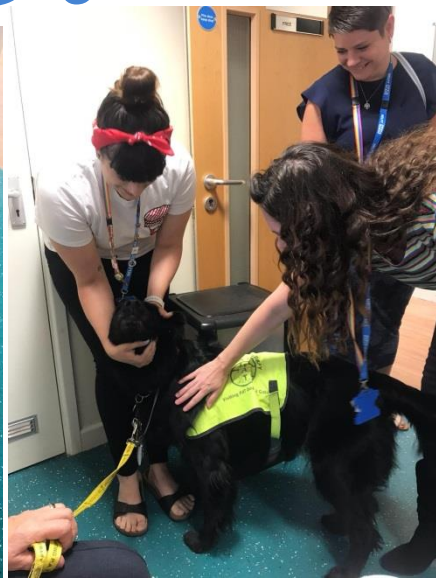
The most I ever talked to my CAMHS therapist was when we met to walk my dog in the woods, not at a clinic. I really hope we can make people see that animals can save your mind and even your life.

"With normal therapy I had to have my mum speaking for me, but with a dog I was able to go into therapy by myself"

"For me animal assisted therapy worked really well, I was able to engage with Cara and have peaches around to soothe me and make me feel more relaxed when speaking about my issues. It worked very well and was the first time I engaged well since being under CAMHS."

"I'm autistic and struggle to interact with others and Cara was the only therapist I was able to open up to. Having a dog in the room during therapy makes me forget about my worries and gives me the ability to open up"





Questions?