The Meaning of Dogs in Seniors’ Lives

Ardra Cole
Old age is the period when people are most strongly and deeply attached to their animals.

Companion animal may be only friend.

A vital part of daily existence.

(Hart, 2006; Huss, 2014; Suthers-McCabe, 2001)
ElderDog Canada

- national non-profit and registered charity
- dedicated to senior people and senior dogs
- national office in NS
- operational since 2012
- 100% volunteer run
- Pawds (chapters) coast to coast
- no fees for any of our services
ElderDog Canada
Beginnings

Ageing People
Ageing Dogs
ElderDog Pawds

- local chapters
- coordinated clusters of volunteers
- reflect ElderDog goals and programs
- supported by community groups, organizations, and local businesses
Our Mission and Values

To honour and preserve the animal-human bond based on guiding principles of:

- dignity and respect
- health and well-being
- comfort
- quality of Life
- tribute
- integrity
- sustainability
What We Do

Dog Care Support for Seniors

Older Dog Care and Re-homing

Education, Outreach, and Research

1-855-336-4226 or info@elderdog.ca
Research Says

- **physiological benefits**: improved heart health; increased physical activity; lowered levels of hypertension

- **mental health benefits**: enhanced well-being, self-worth, and overall happiness; reduced stress, anxiety, and depression; countering loneliness

- **social benefits**: enhanced social interaction and civic engagement
Older Adults Say

She is my best friend.
I don’t know what I would do without him.
I can’t imagine life without her.
He is my one true companion.
She is always there.

Beyond benefits...
What does it mean for a senior to live in the company of a canine companion? How can such a relationship be adequately described? What happens in those quiet moments of being in relationship with a canine companion?

Participants and Process

- 14 older adults, mid 60s to 99
- 16 dogs, 4 to 16+, small (e.g., Havanese) to mid-sized (e.g., Australian Shepherd) to large (e.g., Greyhound)
- rural, town, urban

Phenomenological study:
- in-depth conversations
- shadowing
- photographs
Beloved Attachment
Unconditional Love
Steadfast Friendship
Joyful Responsibility
Call to Action

Perhaps the happiest and most beneficial relationships between pets and people are realized when the community as a whole recognizes the value of a companion animal and offers ... assistance to [those] who want to promote this vital dimension of living.

Cusack & Smith, 1984, Pets and the Elderly: The Therapeutic Bond

www.elderdog.ca
1-855-336-4226
Become Involved

• Join
• Volunteer
• Register
• Adopt
• Donate
• Purchase
  • www.elderdogcanadastore.ca
• Spread the word