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A Plan for Your Pets: Education and Outreach through the Perpetual Care Program

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Author Note

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### **Abstract**

With the number of older and senior adults increasing in the United States, and specifically in Monterey County, there is a growing demand for services that support aging adults. However, many pet owners, especially those of older age, fail to realize the importance of estate planning for their pets due to technology gaps, lack of knowledge and education regarding estate planning, and poor physical and mental health. Consequently, the lack of an estate plan results in the burden being placed on family and friends, the abandonment of pets, and the euthanization of pets. Peace of Mind Dog Rescue (POMDR) strives to be an advocate for senior people and address this issue through their Perpetual Care Program (PCP). The purpose of this project is to increase awareness in the community about the Perpetual Care Program and the number of registrations for the program among senior pet owners. Social media flyers were created and posted on POMDR's Facebook and Instagram pages to inform followers about PCP. Physical flyers were also developed and distributed to local businesses and organizations frequented and utilized by senior pet owners. The findings from this project illustrate the need for PCP and estate planning resources among pet owners in Monterey County. The recommendation for POMDR would be to continue publicizing information about PCP in the community and establish connections with local businesses and organizations for outreach.

*Keywords: Pets, seniors, estate planning, pet ownership*

### **Agency & Communities Served**

In October of 2009, Peace of Mind Dog Rescue (POMDR) was founded by Carie Broecker and Monica Rua in Pacific Grove, California. The two founders started this 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a love and passion for senior dogs, years of experience with animal rescue, and a mission, “to be a resource and advocate for senior dogs and senior people on California’s Central Coast” (Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, 2021a). This nonprofit dog rescue, composed of hardworking office and veterinary clinic staff, volunteers, and board of directors members, who are dedicated to upholding POMDR’s mission and helping to find the best homes for dogs who enter into their care. POMDR provides a variety of programs and services to help pets and supports pet owners in Monterey County.

The Helping Paw Program at POMDR supports pet owners who are struggling physically and financially to care for their pets. In the past year, 532 seniors, hospice patients, and low-income pet guardians received financial and/or volunteer assistance from the Helping Paw Program (Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, 2021c, pg.3). Helping Paw provides pet owners with volunteer assistance services such as dog walking, foster care or boarding for pets, and transportation assistance to groomer or veterinary appointments for senior and disabled owners. Helping Paw also provides pet owners with financial assistance of up to \$500 to cover urgent medical expenses for both cats and dogs.

The Guardian Surrender Program and intake services at POMDR focus on taking in dogs from shelters and from people who are considering the tough decision of giving up their pet to find them a new home. According to the Peace of Mind Dog Rescue Annual Report (2021c), the agency completed 340 intakes with 169 dogs surrendered from guardians who were unable to

care for them and 171 dogs surrendered from shelters (pg.3). Through the program, senior citizens, chronically or terminally ill patients, and deceased guardians are guaranteed that their dog will be cared for by the agency upon being surrendered. The Guardian Surrender Program and intake services then work to place the dogs into loving forever homes that are the best fit for them.

The Perpetual Care Program works to help prepare owners for the unexpected, whether that is an illness, injury, or death. Through advanced planning, pet owners will not have to worry about what happens to their pets once they are gone. In 2020, POMDR had a total of 96 pet guardians signed up for the Perpetual Care Program (Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, 2021c, pg. 3). By setting up a legal pet trust through Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, owners can ensure adequate resources and expenses for their dogs. Dogs who are enrolled under perpetual care receive placement in a loving foster home or permanent home and a lifetime commitment from POMDR to care for the dog.

### **Problem Description**

There are too many senior pet owners without estate plans. With the rate of older and senior adults, the need for estate planning and pet trusts will significantly increase in time. However, *Pet Trusts: Estate Planning for You and Your Pets* (2009) discovered that “It is estimated that between 20 to 25 percent of US pet owners have established pet trusts” (pg. 1). While a percentage of the pet owners have established pet trusts, it brings to light that a majority of pet owners do not have a pet trust. Without a pet trust, pet owners do not have a formal and legal plan in place for their pets. This results in the sudden burden of pet care on their families

and possibly leaves their beloved pets with no future care. This can result in negative outcomes for pets such as abandonment at shelters or in the community and the pets being euthanized.

### **Contributing Factors**

#### *Technology*

The rapid growth and constant changes to modern-day technology can limit the aging senior population from seeking information and resources online. Satariano et al. (2014) highlighted that the older generation encountered unique difficulties and barriers to technology that varies from the younger generation. With the increase in new technological changes, senior adults are less likely to use technology because they are unfamiliar with it and are unable to readily access devices such as a mobile phone or a computer. A majority of information technology devices fail to accommodate conditions such as vision problems or loss, hearing impairments, motor loss or impairment, and mental capacity, which further limits the senior population. And, the appearance, form, or use of technological devices that cater to the senior population are associated with negative stigmas (Satariano et al., 2014, pg. 1379). For many seniors, using technology can be daunting, scary, and overwhelming. The negative feelings about social media and mainstream technology stem from the fear of using technology and of the unknown. It is important to note that elderly people are more susceptible and vulnerable to online threats and scams. This is why many senior people often need assistance with learning how to work newer devices, such as a tablet or smartphones, or social media sites to connect with family, friends, and other people. These varying and complex barriers are creating a digital gap for the older generation. Moreover, the need for accommodations and the inability to keep up

with current technology hinders older and senior adults from finding the information they need for estate planning.

*Lack of knowledge and/or education about estate planning*

The misconceptions and information surrounding estate planning are impacting older and senior adults. Caring.com (2021) along with the YouGov organization, discussed that a majority of adults 55 and older were less likely to have a will and that there are a variety of reasons why this is. The main and most common reason that older and senior adults did not have an estate plan established was due to procrastination and not getting around to doing it. The second reason that older and senior adults did not have an estate plan was due to the belief that they did not have sufficient or valuable assets that were considered “enough” to leave to anyone. The third reason that older and senior adults did not have an estate plan was due to the idea that estate planning was for the wealthy and was “too expensive to set up.” The fourth and final reason that older and senior adults did not have an estate plan was due to the confusion and lack of understanding about how to set up a will or trust (Caring.com, 2021, para. 16). These common misconceptions, which are misleading, are resulting in many older Americans delaying taking action on the subject for a more convenient time or not taking action at all (until it is too late). The high rates of adults without a will or trust is particularly concerning because senior adults are at a point in life where the potential effects of aging will hinder their quality of life. The effects of aging make it progressively harder to ignore the importance of an estate plan, especially for senior pet owners. Older and senior people are more likely to procrastinate on estate planning and not make any plans for their pets because they lack the proper knowledge and education around estate planning and its importance for their pets.

*Physical and mental health*

The deterioration of physical and mental wellbeing among the senior population affects the process of estate planning. Frolik (2007) revealed that those who are considered “very old,” have physical and mental disabilities, and unfortunately, these disabilities can complicate the estate planning process. Frolik (2007) argued that, “Most of the very old have diminished short-term memory, with the result that they have difficulty recalling information... For some very old clients, the problem of grasping and remembering complicated estate planning proposals is compounded by a loss of vision and hearing” (pg. 4). The author argues that these physical limitations can make it difficult for a very old client to be able to grasp and understand the information that is being presented and discussed. While professional estate planners are advised to accommodate for the physical and mental deficits of their very old clients, many fail to do so. Some estate planners do not keep meetings involving clients short or ask their clients whether they can see or hear, or prepare materials in larger fonts so clients can see them. This is particularly concerning as many clients experience these difficulties during meetings: and as a result, clients are unable to address these concerns effectively. While the estate planning process is a lengthy process for estate planners and clients, estate planners fail to assist their clients’ physical and mental needs. Consequently, estate planners and their clients, who are very old and dealing with physical and mental health problems, are more likely to experience communication issues and conflicts.

**Consequences***Burden on family members and friends*



Without a pet trust for the pet of a senior guardian, the guardian and their loved ones cannot predict how long they will live for and what they will do with the pet once their owner is gone. Smith (2013) argued that while pets provide a great number of physical and emotional benefits, there is a lot that a senior pet owner and their family has to take into consideration before welcoming in a furry friend. For those close to an older person, one should take into consideration what should happen in the event an owner can no longer care for the pet. For many older and senior adults, there comes a point where they can no longer care for themselves and have to move into an assisted living facility. While some assisted living facilities and nursing homes are accepting of pets, a majority do not allow pets. (Smith, 2013, para. 9). Due to this, senior pet owners are faced with a tough and heartbreaking decision. Senior pet owners have to choose whether or not they should give up their pets so they can receive help and care from a nursing home or facility. Oftentimes, senior pet owners place the responsibility of their pets onto their friends and family, in hopes that their pets will be well taken care of; without considering what the additional stress will do to friends and family members.

### *Abandonment of Pets*

Senior pet owners who do not have a pet trust in place are likely to abandon their pets at shelters. Towell (2018) noticed that there are three common reasons why pet owners abandon their pets or give them up. First, it is common for owners to be separated from their pets due to sickness and the inability to adequately care for them. Second, many animals end up in shelters because owners fail to realize the significance of advanced planning. And third, pet owners, unfortunately, pass away without any plans or preparations for their animal companions. Consequently, these animals, many of which are old and elderly themselves, struggle to adjust to

their new environment in the shelter. These animals are often passed by possible adopters and never end up leaving the shelter because they are seen as “unfriendly” or “scared” (Towell, 2018, para. 3). Also, for many senior pets that are surrendered to shelters, they are more likely to have a longer length of stay in the shelter than other pets in the general population (Hawes et al., 2018, pg. 9). Due to their age, lack of socialization, and lack of desirable behaviors, abandoned pets that belonged to senior owners are more likely to remain in shelters for longer periods of time. To conclude, seniors who do not make arrangements in advance for their younger or older pets, often end up leaving their pets in the care of shelters. Unfortunately, these pets are unable to adapt well in shelters and struggle to find a loving home with a potential new adopter.

#### *Euthanization of Pets*

Without a plan in advance, senior pet owners give up their pets to shelters thinking it is the best choice, but these pets are vulnerable to be euthanized. Vokolek (2008) describes the societal burden that pets whose owners passed and were turned over to shelters faced. Vokolek (2008) addressed that, “Unfortunately, thousands of pets end up in shelters every year because their owners’ did not make prior arrangements for their care... The reality is that a significant number of the four to six million animals euthanized in the United States every year are pets left without care when their owners die” (para.5-6). Many pets are turned over to shelters by seniors themselves or their loved ones with good intentions, thinking that they are doing what is best for the pet(s). However, senior pet owners and their loved ones are unaware that they are doing more harm than good. Many of these pets are given to shelters with the thought that the pet will be well taken care of and ready to find a new, loving home. However, the pets left behind end up being put down or euthanized by shelters because they are unfit to be re-adopted. Furthermore,

with advanced planning and care, pets of senior owners do not have to worry about their beloved companion being at risk for euthanization.

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Technology	There are too many senior pet owners without estate plans	Burden of pets is placed on family and friends
Knowledge and/or education about estate planning		Abandonment of pets
Physical and mental health		Euthanization of pets

## **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

### **Capstone Project**

The project will provide these resources to pet owners and the senior population (who are affected the most) through public relations efforts. The public relations efforts will be implemented through two separate stages: creating social media posts for POMDR's social media platforms and creating promotional flyers for local agencies and animal hospitals or clinics. The digital media materials will be published on Facebook and Instagram platforms upon approval for followers to see. The printable flyers will be distributed to local agencies and animal clinics that serve pet owners in their community and have been contacted. The publicity from these social media posts and flyers will further promote the Perpetual Care Program, with the goal of increasing registrations.

### **Project Purpose**

The purpose of this capstone project is to spread awareness to the community about POMDR's Perpetual Care Program and to establish pet trusts for their estate plans. Many pet owners, especially those in the senior population, have no knowledge about the Perpetual Care Program and fail to realize the importance of creating a pet trust. The lack of knowledge and misconceptions about estate planning is resulting in many elderly and older adults delaying and avoiding implementing this program. Senior people greatly benefit from the Perpetual Care Program and what it can do for them and their pets. Dog owners are guided through the process of creating a pet trust by designating lifetime expenses and making pre-arrangements with the Perpetual Care Program. This program gives owners the peace of mind that their dog is in good hands.

### **Project Justification**

As stated earlier, 75-80% of pet owners in the United State have not established pet trusts and older and senior adults make up a large percentage of pet owners. This is due to the fact that the Perpetual Care Program is not widely known among the senior population as it is only mentioned on one section of the agency website and receives no promotion or publicity elsewhere. Over the years, social media use has increased among senior citizens. According to Anderson and Perrin (2017), “34% of Americans ages 65 and up say they ever use social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. This represents a seven-point increase from 2013, when 27% of older adults reported using social media” (pg. 9). With more older people turning to social media, there is a higher likelihood that seniors and community members would follow POMDR’s social media pages. Sharing updates and details on social media can help nonprofit organizations enhance communication and engagement with members of the community (Campbell et al., 2014, pg. 656). By creating and advertising social media posts that are informative and eye-catching, POMDR will be able to reach out to senior followers and others followers who would benefit from the Perpetual Care Program. Furthermore, the promotion of the program on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram will engage senior pet owners and expand the Perpetual Care Program.

While technology and social media have become more popular in recent years, physical prints are still popular and effective. The American Press Institute (2017) observed differences and trends or patterns among digital and print subscribers. When it comes to print subscriptions, older adults are the largest age demographic. Older adults prefer to pay for print over digital and those 65 years and older are five times more likely to buy print news than digital news. Older

people prefer the format of print over digital because they find it easier to read; 68 percent of adults between 50-64 and 71 percent of adults 65 and older agree that print is simpler and effortless to read. In addition, print subscribers engage with their sources differently from digital subscribers. The surveyed print subscribers interact with the sources by visiting the news source's website (38%), using coupons (51%), regularly sharing the news content with others (55%), and saving the print copies to read later on or share with others (55%). Also, 79 percent of those who pay for print are not too likely or not at all likely to switch to a digital subscription and 85 percent of print payers 65 years or older are certain that they will not transition to a digital-only subscription (American Press Institute, 2017, para. 3-35 and chart 5). Since more older and senior adults prefer print over digital information, developing physical and printable advertisements would be an effective method to reach the senior population within the community. The distribution of flyers would expand awareness about the program in sources or places where senior people would see them and increase registrations for the Perpetual Care Program.

### **Project Implementation**

This capstone project aimed to raise awareness about the Perpetual Care Program on social media and in the community. To start this project, marketing materials were developed. Developing these marketing materials personally was completed by the end of July 2021 through sharing information about the Perpetual Care Program and familiarization with graphic design programs. The public relations efforts, which consisted of social media posts and printable flyers, were created through the graphic design programs Canva and Snappa. These flyers were designed and completed before the end of July, 2021. Along with the creation of posts and flyers,

communication and collaboration was established with local animal hospitals or clinics and agencies or programs that serve the senior population. From September to November 2021, local animal hospitals or clinics, and agencies or programs that serve the senior population, were contacted and received follow-up messages through email and phone calls.

Then, the drafts of social media posts and flyers designed on Canva were submitted to the Executive Director, Operations Manager, and Volunteer Coordinator for feedback by the end of July 2021. The feedback provided by the Executive Director was applied to the public relations materials for finalization and approval. The final versions of marketing and public relations materials were then sent to the graphic designer and re-created on Snappa to match the POMDR brand and look. The flyers created then went to the Executive Director for approval during September 2021. Once the designs were created and approved, the digital and print materials were distributed. The social media posts were sent to the Operations Manager who then posted and shared the posts with followers on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) during September 2021. The printable flyers were provided through email and by postal mail (if requested) to the local agencies and programs that assisted senior adults and animal hospitals or clinics that were contacted and showed interest.

The publicity from these posts and flyers was used to promote monthly registrations for the Perpetual Care Program from September 2021 to November 2021. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Assessment Plan and Expected Outcomes**

The expected outcomes were to raise awareness among the senior population in Monterey County about the Perpetual Care Program and increase the number of registrations for the

program. The registrations for the Perpetual Care Program were entered into a spreadsheet that will keep track of the number of registrations from September to October 2021. The spreadsheet containing the monthly Perpetual Care Program was reviewed to see if the monthly registrations increased and the goal was met. The goal was to have at least 4 community members register for the program between the months of September and October 2021. Upon registration for the program, community members were to be asked a set of questions regarding how they heard about the program and the process for registering. The answers received were to be taken into consideration and used to make recommendations to effectively advertise and further improve the program. By providing pet owners with information on social media and printable flyers about the pet trusts, pet owners were able to become more familiar with the Perpetual Care Program and utilize the program as a resource for future planning for their pets.

### **Project Results**

From August 1, 2021, to November 14, 2021, the Perpetual Care Program received interest from 8 individuals who wished to learn more about the program and register. This project was able to achieve its expected outcomes and goals because more than 4 people signed up, resulting in a 200% increase in registrations over the course of implementation. Many of those who showed interest in the Perpetual Care program were seniors, aged 60 years and older. Additionally, there was one younger individual (aged 30-35 years old) who showed interest in the program as well.

While the expected outcomes were achieved, there were unexpected barriers that affected the planned implementation for this project. There was a lack of consideration for the creation



and approval process for physical and social media flyers. The flyers were initially created through Canva, a graphic design software program that was familiar and user-friendly, especially for those who lacked digital media skills. The draft flyers that were created were submitted to the Volunteer Mentor and the Executive Director for feedback and approval. However, the Executive Director wanted the flyers to be done through a different graphic design program called Snappa. The Executive Director took over developing the initial draft flyers from Canva onto Snappa in order to fit the agency image and branding. The changes to the flyers stalled the project and impacted the planned timeline. This resulted in the timeline for the initial scope of work for the project being pushed back until the flyers were approved and sent out by the Executive Director.

Another barrier to success was the lack of communication from local businesses, agencies, and organizations that were contacted. Primarily animal hospitals or clinics, local businesses and organizations that served seniors, and local businesses and organizations with a strong relationship with POMDR were easy to get a hold of. However, there was little to no communication back from other businesses and organizations (due to a multitude of reasons). For some of the businesses and organizations that were hard to reach, it took (weekly) follow-up attempts to get a response. Additionally, it is important to take into account the impact of COVID-19 on programs and services that serve senior clients. In the U.S. and specifically Monterey County, many agencies' protocols were changed or altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, many animal hospitals and clinics were having owners drive up and staff from the hospital and clinic come to grab the pets from the owners care.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The implementation and results of this project demonstrated the importance and need for the Perpetual Care Program in Monterey County. With an aging population (especially in Monterey County) and the COVID-19 pandemic, senior pet owners are now realizing that an estate plan should be established to prepare for the unexpected, worst-case scenario. A recommendation for this project would be to continue publicizing information regarding PCP. Consistent postings on POMDR's Facebook and Instagram pages for PCP will grab the attention of current and newer followers. Sharing information about PCP through social media platforms helps further engage followers through awareness about agency resources. This can lead to followers sharing the information with others through their own personal social media page or through word-of-mouth advertising.

Another recommendation would be to gear outreach and promotion towards young and middle-aged adults. Senior citizens were the target population for this project because of the community demographic and the effects of aging such as limited mobility and mental capacity. However, young and middle-aged adults who are pet owners would also benefit from the PCP. While young and middle-aged adults are less likely to worry about the possibility of serious injury, illness, or death, they still make up a number of pet owners across the U.S. By generating materials and outreach towards these populations, POMDR can further increase awareness about the Perpetual Care Program. Distributing information and resources to younger and middle-aged adults can educate them on the importance of advanced planning and the creation of an estate plan, even at a young age as adults. This will further result in POMDR expanding their services to not just the senior population and will increase the number of registrations for PCP.

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## Appendix A

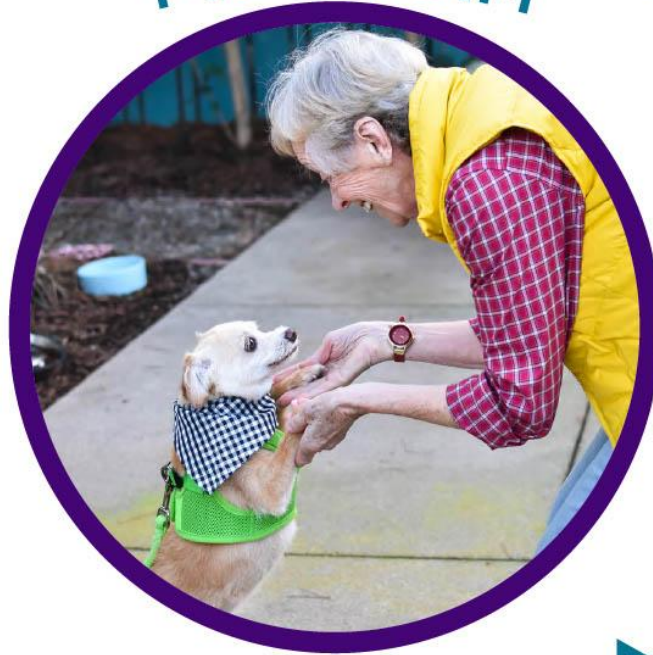
### Scope of Work

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Timeline/Deadlines</b>	<b>Supporting Staff</b>
Learn more information about the Perpetual Care Program	Completed by end of July 2021	Perpetual Care Program staff member
Learn and become familiar with Snappa program	June-July 2021	
Learn and become familiar with Canva	June-July 2021	
Create marketing and public relations materials	Completed by July	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member
Communicate and collaborate with local animal hospitals and clinics and agencies or programs that serve the senior population	September-November 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member, Executive Director
Submit marketing and public relations materials to mentor and Executive Director for feedback	Completed by end of July 2021	Mentor, Executive Director
Apply feedback to marketing and public relations materials for finalization and approval	Completed by end of August 2021	
Submit finalized versions of marketing and public relations materials to Executive Director for approval	Completed by end of July 2021	Executive Director
Distribute marketing and public relations materials for POMDR social media	September 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member, Social Media Manager
Distribute physical or printable marketing and public relations materials to local agencies, programs, animal hospitals, etc.	September 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member
Collect monthly data on Perpetual Care Program registrations	September-November 14 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member
Generate questions for community members who register for Perpetual Care Program	Completed by September 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member
Collect answers from community members about Perpetual Care Program	September & October 2021	Mentor, Perpetual Care Program staff member

Appendix B: Approved Instagram Flyers



PERPETUAL CARE PROGRAM



Swipe right to learn more!

## POMDR's Perpetual Care Program Offers....

- Placement in a loving foster home at any point that you are no longer able to care for your dog.
- A lifetime commitment from POMDR. We will ensure that your dog will be taken care of for the rest of his/her life as acherished member of a new family.

LEARN MORE AND  
ENROLL TODAY!



Please call us at (831) 718-9122  
or email us at  
[info@peaceofminddogrescue.org](mailto:info@peaceofminddogrescue.org)