



Gabriel's Angels Impact Evaluation - Sites

February 2020



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ASSOCIATES, INC.

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About LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc.:

Founded in 1991, LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc. (LMA) is a consulting firm specializing in social services and education program evaluation and training that is comprehensive, research-driven and useful. Our goal is to provide effective program evaluation and training that enables stakeholders to document outcomes, provide accountability, and engage in continuous program improvement. With central offices located in Tucson, Arizona, LMA has worked at the local, state and national level with a broad spectrum of social services, criminal justice, education, and behavioral health programs.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
In this Report	4
Results.....	4
Facility and Visit Descriptions	4
Core Competency Impact	6
Attachment.....	7
Confidence	7
Self-regulation	7
Affiliation	8
Empathy	8
Tolerance	9
Respect.....	7
Discussion	9



Introduction

Gabriel's Angels, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, founded in 2000 in Phoenix, Arizona, is dedicated to improving the lives of children through interactions with animals. Gabriel's Angels' core service is delivering pet therapy¹, or animal assisted activities², to at-risk children throughout the state. The program recruits and trains volunteers to achieve their mission to "inspire confidence, compassion, and best-behaviors in at-risk children through pet therapy." Gabriel's Angels pet therapy teams consist of a handler and their child-friendly, predictable, and well-mannered pet, which is most often a dog. The volunteer pet therapy teams visit crisis nurseries, domestic violence and homeless shelters, therapeutic group homes, after-school programs, Title 1 and other various schools in order to impact children's lives by enhancing their social-emotional development. The focus is directed toward building core behaviors of attachment, confidence, self-regulation, affiliation, empathy, tolerance, and respect.

Each handler must be at least 18 years old and possess a Department of Public Safety Level One fingerprint clearance card. To qualify for certification the pet must be at least one year of age. The pet therapy teams must pass a health, skills, and aptitude test for certification and insurance offered by a national organization. In addition, Gabriel's Angels' staff conduct screening, orientation and placement support for pet therapy teams who are accepted as volunteers in the program.

Gabriel's Angels has consistently and actively sought out evaluative feedback to improve its services, a quality of critical value in the growing area of animal-assisted therapy (e.g., Burch, 2000). The program has also developed a logic model where its services and key activities are linked with its intended outcomes. This report extends that work and provides new data from the sites³ on the program's impact.

¹ Gabriel's Angels uses the term "pet therapy" due to it being easily understood by the general population as animals visiting with human clients. Note: Pet Partners uses the terms "animal-assisted activities" and "animal-assisted therapy". These are the terms that human service providers and volunteers use when referring to the involvement of animals in human treatment programs. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) involves working directly with a licensed healthcare or human service provider to help a patient meet specific goals to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning; the results of each AAT session are recorded.

² Pet Partners defines animal assisted activities (AAA) as casual "meet and greet" activities that involve pets and their handlers visiting people to provide opportunities for motivational, educational and/or recreational benefits to enhance quality of life.

³ The term "site" and "facility" are used interchangeably throughout this report.



In this Report

The purpose of this report is to estimate the impact of the program on core competencies of the children that are served. These competencies included the following:

1. Attachment
2. Confidence
3. Affiliation
4. Self-regulation
5. Empathy
6. Tolerance
7. Respect

The evaluation included facility surveys used to collect this data in January 2020. The facility surveys asked questions such as, “To what extent did you see changes in this category?” Staff responded using a 4-point scale with the following four categories: a great extent, some extent, a small extent, none. The final section of the report includes recommendations based on the results and suggestions for future evaluations.

Results

Services provided by Gabriel’s Angels are delivered at a variety of different facilities. A summary of these facilities and the visits conducted by Gabriel’s Angels are included below, followed by key findings from surveying these organizations.

Facility and Visit Descriptions

Descriptive information was obtained from 78 of the 107 agencies that have received services from Gabriel’s Angels. These agencies provided information about the geographic areas and children served as well as observations of impacted core competencies in the children. In a separate survey, 112 of the 187 Gabriel’s Angels’ volunteers provided information on their participation, years of service, demographics, preparation, training, and recommendations.

Many of the facilities are in the Phoenix Metro area (including Phoenix, Mesa, Glendale, Apache-Junction, Chandler, Goodyear, Scottsdale, Tempe, etc.), as well as the Tucson, and Prescott areas. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019) reported that there were approximately 332,000 children living in poverty in Arizona, and the State of Arizona ranks the fourth worst in overall child well-being⁴. The estimated number of children served by the agencies responding to the LMA evaluation was 24,212. However, Gabriel’s Angels teams visit approximately 12,500 children per year.

⁴ <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-2019kidscountdatabook-2019.pdf>



Exhibit 1 presents the demographic information reported by the facilities for the children they serve.

Exhibit 1: Age Groups Served by Partner Agencies

Age of Children	Percent & Count of Children Served (N=135)
Birth to 18 months old	4.4% (n=6)
18 months to 36 months/3 years old	5.2% (n=7)
3 to 5 years old	8.1% (n=11)
5 to 9 years old	36.3% (n=49)
9 to 13 years old	26.7% (n=36)
13 to 18 years old	19.3% (n=26)

Gabriel's Angels requested each site to report the approximate percentage of children they serve by ethnicity. Exhibit 2 show averages obtained from the reporting sites; however, only 1/3 of sites responded. This data shows that Hispanic/Latin American children are the primary ethnic group served by Gabriel's Angels (40.6 percent), following with 28.9 percent White/Caucasian children, and 14.6 percent Black/African American children.

Exhibit 2: Children Served by Ethnicity: Of the children served by your agency, approximately what percentage would identify as the following ethnicities (Average of reported ethnicities) *

Ethnicity of Children	Percent & Count of Children Served (N=100)
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.0% (n=13)
Black/African American	14.6% (n=26)
Hispanic/Latin American	40.6% (n=25)
Native American/Alaskan	9.9% (n=15)
White/Caucasian (Not Hispanic)	28.9% (n=21)
* This data is not self-reported and based on estimates given by sites, given the low response rate data is limited	

Core Competency Impact

The following Exhibit details results about the children's improvements observed in Gabriel's Angels' targeted core competency areas. Quantitative and qualitative findings are included for each competency.

Exhibit 3: Level of Changes Observed by Core Competency Area

Core Category	Not Sure /Don't Know	No Improvement	Some Improvement	Moderate Improvement	Significant Improvement	Total Improvement (Some, Moderate or Significant)
Confidence (N=62)	4.8% (3)	-	21.0% (n=13)	38.7% (n=24)	35.5% (n=22)	95.1% (n=59)
Attachment (N=62)	12.9% (n=8)	-	14.5% (n=9)	43.6% (n=27)	29.0% (n=18)	87.1% (n=54)
Respect (N=58)	8.6% (n=5)	5.2% (n=3)	22.4% (n=13)	32.8% (n=19)	31.0% (n=18)	86.2% (n=50)
Self-Regulation (N=61)	14.8% (n=9)	-	23.0% (n=14)	39.2% (n=24)	23.0% (n=14)	85.2% (n=52)
Affiliation (N=59)	11.9% (n=7)	3.4% (n=2)	22.0% (n=13)	25.4% (n=15)	37.3% (n=22)	84.7% (n=50)
Empathy (N=60)	16.6% (n=10)	1.7% (n=1)	26.7% (n=16)	18.3% (n=11)	36.7% (n=22)	81.7% (n=49)
Tolerance (N=59)	25.4% (n=15)	3.4% (n=2)	20.3% (n=12)	33.9% (n=20)	17.0% (n=10)	71.2% (n=42)

Key findings for each of the core competencies are summarized on the following pages.



Confidence

When a child demonstrates self-assurance in their own abilities s/he exhibits confidence. Facilities working with Gabriel's Angels have noticed improved confidence levels in the children they serve, with 74% reporting moderate or significant improvements. The confidence competency showed great improvement compared to the other target areas. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "Confidence is one of the greatest factors from Gabriel's Angels. Students that are withdrawn find this (pet therapy visits) to be a safer space to share ideas and communicate with others."
- "For some girls there are significant confidence boosts, but for the majority the Gabriel's Angels boosts relationships more. Certainly, the level of confidence with dogs is increased significantly for each girl."

Attachment

Healthy attachments allow a child to establish and maintain healthy emotional bonds. Facilities working with Gabriel's Angels have noticed improved attachment in the children they serve and increased ability to get along with peers, with 72% reporting moderate or significant improvements. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "Students are friendly to peers and teachers. They seem happier and eager to be at school."
- "Children know the day the dog is coming; some are very attached to the dog."

Respect

Respect enables children to appreciate the value in themselves and in others. Facilities working with Gabriel's Angels have noticed improved respect in the children, with 63% of reporting moderate or significant improvements. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "Students normally not showing respect for staff/peers do show respect for the therapy dog and owners."
- "I have absolutely seen improvement with respecting one another. Before Dude [our therapy dog] came, students were taking others' things, destroying my activities, not cleaning up after themselves and generally being interested only in themselves. Dude has brought great compassion to my students, and I am seeing the class gel."

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is a critical skill, which includes having the ability to recognize and control feelings such as anger and frustration, as well as understanding why it's important to think before acting. A total of 63% of respondents indicated the children showed moderate or



significant improvements in these areas. The facilities reported that the group-based nature of many Gabriel's Angels visits is beneficial in improving self-regulation skills. Therapy pets are very emotionally responsive, and many sites noticed that children try to be more conscious and self-regulate their behaviors in order to keep the therapy pets relaxed and happy. Putting the focus on the therapy pet helps begin the conversation around behaviors. The therapy pets served as a positive motivator for successful behavioral self-regulation. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "This was very easy to rate because the students were verbal about this improved strength, they noticed it too."
- "For our younger students especially, discussing self-control has been very important and helpful when working with a therapy dog. Many of our students are very impulsive, but learning about self-control, and also applying that to how we interact or treat others, has made a difference for our students."

Affiliation

When a child masters the capacity to join others and contribute to a group s/he is affiliating. Facilities working with Gabriel's Angels have noticed improved affiliation levels in the children, with 62% reporting moderate or significant improvements. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "Students normally not interested in working well with peers are willing to do so with inclusion of the therapy dog."
- "Through the interactions the children must learn to take turns and be patient so as not to overwhelm the dog."

Empathy

The ability to imagine how someone else is feeling or what they are thinking in a situation is empathy. Facilities working with Gabriel's Angels have noticed improved empathy in the children they serve, with 54% reporting moderate or significant improvements. Overall, these agencies rated empathy as a difficult skill to improve and assess but noticed improvements with the therapy pets onsite. The therapy pets were a good starting point to explore and discuss empathy with the children—including empathy toward both the therapy pets and other people. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- "Connecting the emotions that we have to the emotions dogs have has been a great way for students to connect the dots and start experiencing levels of empathy. Although, this can be difficult in the middle of more extreme escalation, it is a great space for students to safely discuss their own emotions."



- “Through the stories read and the dog’s history the kids started to connect with others’ feelings. They were particularly interested in the stories that were based on real life situations.”

Tolerance

When children can understand and accept how others are different from themselves, they are exhibiting tolerance. Facilities working with Gabriel’s Angels have also noticed improved tolerance in the children, with 50% reporting moderate or significant improvements. Tolerance showed the least improvement of the core competencies that were rated. Although, the facilities still felt the therapy pets provided a positive impact in this area. Patience is often required in these group settings and tolerance is positively reinforced by getting to spend time with the therapy pets. Some descriptive responses in this category included:

- “All students that have participated are more sympathetic and willing to persevere in making friends.”
- “Tolerance is increased in the majority of our students as the dog has a distinct personality and they have to learn different ways to communicate.”

Discussion

Overall, this program serves over 12,500 youth at multiple facilities. According to the contacts at these agencies, children who engage with Gabriel’s Angels pet therapy teams increased their core competencies in all targeted areas, including 95% increase in confidence, 87% increase in attachment, and 86% increase in respect. The program relies heavily on volunteers, most of whom see great value in the work that they are doing with children.

It should be noted that these findings relied on facility observations, rather than on direct assessment of youth participants. However, those working with youth are well-positioned to observe changes in the children they serve. In addition, they have important insight into the frontline work of the organization, which may benefit Gabriel’s Angels leadership as they look toward future program planning.

Overall, sites have felt Gabriel’s Angels is making effective improvements in the lives of the children they serve. It is important to continue to measure the impact of core competencies on children in the program. The overall positive consensus on the program value is critical to retaining Gabriel’s Angels’ volunteers and adding new sites for expansion.

