About CHAI

The Center for Human-Animal Interaction (CHAI) is a 501 (c)(3) charity that exists within Medical College of Virginia Foundation (assessed by Charity Navigator to be a 98%, 4- star rated charity). CHAI is generously housed within West Hospital by the Psychiatry Department of Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of Medicine. Many of CHAI’s staff and executive committee members are VCU professors and professionals with a passion for animals and the benefits of Human-Animal Interaction. Our Dogs on Call volunteers share the same passion and it shows as they visit staff and patients throughout the VCU Health System with their amazing dogs.
Vision And How We Achieve It

Mission

Improving health and well being through human-animal interaction.

To achieve our mission...

Our research goal is to increase knowledge of the benefits of the human-animal interaction through interdisciplinary research.

Our clinical goal is to enhance health and well being for patients and other members of our community through animal-assisted interventions.

Our educational goal is to improve understanding of the benefits of the human-animal interaction.
2023 Executive Committee

NANCY GEE, PHD, C-AISS
CHAIR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR
BILL BALABAN CHAIR IN HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION
PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY, VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
PRESIDENT AND FELLOW, INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
ANTHROZOOLOGY

SUZANNE WEAVER, MS
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND WELLNESS,
VCU AND VCU HEALTH

SHARON ALEXANDER, MPA
DIRECTOR OF WORKFORCE INITIATIVES,
VIRGINIA HOSPITAL AND HEALTHCARE
ASSOCIATION

Tina Mammone, PHD., RN,
FACHE, NEA-BC
CHIEF NURSING OFFICER, VCU MEDICAL
CENTER AND CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL OF
RICHMOND
CHIEF NURSE EXECUTIVE, VCU HEALTH

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PROFESSOR OF INTERNAL MEDICINE, VCU
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

KATHLEEN O’KANE KREUTZER,
M.ED.
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS AT FACULTY
AFFAIRS, VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND VCU
HEALTH

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ENTERPRISE COMMUNICATIONS

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VICE PRESIDENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES,
VCU HEALTH

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PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY AND OBSTETRICS
& GYNECOLOGY, VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VCU INSTITUTE FOR
WOMEN’S HEALTH

GARY SOUTHARD, JR., MBA
SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR, VCU HEALTH

2032 Research Affiliates

Randolph T. Barker, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Business, VCU
Sandra B. Barker, Ph.D., NCC, LPC, Professor Emeritus, Psychiatry, VCU
Gonzalo M.L. Bearman, M.D., MPH, Professor & Chair, Internal Medicine/Infectious Diseases, VCU
James Bjork, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Institute for Drug and Alcohol Studies, VCU
Pamela Dillon, Pharm.D., Associate Professor and Research Liaison,
Wright Center for Clinical and Translational Research, VCU
Jeffrey D. Green, Ph.D., Professor, Psychology, VCU
Lance J. Hampton, M.D., Associate Professor & Chair, Urology, VCU
Susan Kornstein, Ph.D., Professor, Psychiatry and Obstetrics and Gynecology, VCU
Ashlee R. Loughan, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Neurology, VCU
Gretchen N. McCandless-Neigh, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Anatomy, VCU
Shelby E. McDonald, Ph.D., Director of Research, ASPCA
Lisa Townsend, LCSW, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics -
Adolescent Medicine/Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Once again it gives me great pleasure to share in this report the achievements of the Center for Human-Animal Interaction over the past year. As you will read below, we continue to make meaningful contributions in all three aspects of our mission. In the coming year we will begin seeing the publication of results of our ongoing research projects; we have provided some unique educational opportunities both within and outside VCU; and our Dogs on Call teams have continued to increase their presence throughout the VCU Health System.

Below are my two Dogs on Call dogs, Allie (left) and the late Charlotte (right).
Meet Our Team

LISA TOWNSEND, LCSW, PhD
CLINICAL AND RESEARCH ASSOCIATE
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PEDIATRICS AND PSYCHIATRY
VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

KARL DORN, MEd
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

J.T. HOSACK, MA
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR, SENIOR
Our Volunteers

CHAI'S 48 VOLUNTEERS AND 57 THERAPY DOG TEAMS CONTRIBUTED OVER 1,500 HOURS OF SERVICE DURING 2023!

Administrative Volunteers

Our administrative volunteers (some of whom are also Dogs on Call team members) each bring unique skills to the table to support CHAI and Dogs on Call in meaningful ways.

Kathy Albers  Morgan Gossman
Dr. Randolph T. Barker  Barbara Klucik
Dr. Sandra B. Barker  Margaret Popik
Denice Ekey  Ivy Worsham

Research Teams

A number of our Dogs on Call teams help CHAI conduct randomized clinical trials in the hospital to examine experimentally the impact of therapy dog visitation in a hospital setting. We are grateful for their dedication to the additional training and time commitments this work requires.

George & Beth Adams & Maggie & Baylee
  Kathy Albers & Hairy Harry
  Marcie Apelt & Harry
  Anna Badgley & Murphy
  Emily Cooley & Matt
  Linda Flamm & Jag
  Nancy Gee & Allie
  Tracy Hartman & Missy
  Susie Higbie & Homer
  Simone Kschuk & Captain Jack
  Marcia LaMaskin & Phoebe
  Jeanne McNeill & Zeke
  Margaret Popik & Elsa
  Denise Russell & Wiley
  Wayne Sarkees & Maxwell
  Susan Sexton & Roe
  Carmen Vasquez & Weird Alf Yank-A-Leash
Dogs on Call delivers complimentary/no-cost therapy dog visits to patients, their families, and staff at VCU Health.

In addition to taking requests, Dogs on Call teams routinely visit a variety of areas of the hospital. These areas include pediatric and adult cancer clinics, the burn unit, palliative care, and the staff of the emergency department - just to name a few.

Dogs on Call teams also make appearances at VCU Health events throughout the year. The Center for Human-Animal Interaction is proud of its Dogs on Call therapy dog program and the amazing volunteers that make it a reality. **Take a look at these numbers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Visits/Requests Completed</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of requested Visits Met + Attempted</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Visits Completed (Requests + Visits During Rounds)</td>
<td>3,765</td>
<td>4,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Attended by Dogs on Call</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours Volunteered</td>
<td>1,403</td>
<td>1,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Dogs on Call Handlers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was an increase of 29% in total visits and 59% in the number of events from the prior year!
Around the United States gun violence is on the rise, and in 2023 VCU Health and VCU both experienced situations requiring crisis response. We are proud that Dogs on Call could be a part of the caring response to support team members, visitors, and students during those challenging times.

As you can see in the graph below, we were able to significantly increase Dogs on Call presence at key locations in need. Our response represented an increase of 375% in Dogs on Call visits to those locations in the days following the events.

When we are needed, we do everything we can to meet that need. We are proud to support our VCU Health and VCU family, especially in times of crisis.
Dogs on Call activities and events

While Dogs on Call continues to focus on serving VCU Health patients, families, and staff, our teams also love supporting the broader VCU community. More than 70 Dogs on Call dogs made appearances at 59 events in 2023. Here are just a few of the highlights:

**February 7, 2023**

VCU Valentine's Day 2023

Happy Valentine’s Day, Rams! 💛λ心意 Last week, we "let the dogs out", the VCU therapy Dogs On Call to be more specific. They also had Valentine cards for everyone too, each with a cute illustration of them for fans to take home! Our furry friends hung out with their fans at VCU Health and the VCU Student Commons and took in all the belly rubs and love possible as they greeted everyone with love and cuddles. The vibes were truly filled with UNCONDITIONAL love. 🐶❤

(From VCU’s official social media accounts)

**April 23, 2023**

Old Dominion Firefighters Burn Foundation & Evans-Haynes Burn Center at VCU Health’s Burn Survivor Sunday

**April 25, 2023**

Take Back the Night at VCU

**May 12, 2023**

Dogs on Call Polaroids - DOC Celebrates National Hospital Week

For National Hospital Week and Week of the Nurse, our pawesome four-legged friends at @DogsOnCall and colleagues from the Center for Human-Animal Interaction joined us for Polaroid Pics with Pups! Team members were able to stop by and say hi to the pups and take a polaroid picture with them!

(From VCU Health Social Media)

**May 17, 2023**

VCU Health Palliative Care Memorial Service

**October 3, 2023**

VCU Counseling Services’ Mental Health Resources Fair

**October 16, 2023**

VCU Health’s LifeEvac (Helicopter) Communications & Support Staff Destress

**October 18 & 20, 2023**

Dogs on Call Pharmacy Rounds for National Pharmacist Appreciation Week

**December 19, 2023**

Ryan White center at VCU Health’s Winter Holiday Party
Annual Fundraisers

The Center for Human-Animal Interaction is sustained in no small part by the generosity of the VCU Health community. We are grateful that so many friends and allies showed their support for our dogs and our mission at our fundraiser events.

**Pups on the Plaza.** This block party style fundraiser occurred in the street and plaza just outside the McGlothlin Medical Education Center. VCU Police closed the street, large speakers were put up for music, Food & Nutrition Services set up grills, and over a dozen Dogs on Call teams made an appearance. Funds were raised by selling meal tickets, Doggie Bunch t-shirts, and other Dogs on Call-themed merchandise. Thanks to everyone who attended, as 2023 was one of our most successful years.

**Calendar Sales.** Our Dogs on Call calendars, presenting photos of our Dogs on Call teams in action, were once again extremely popular. We had 28 sponsors for this year’s calendar, and fans of the Dogs on Call program purchased nearly 1,000 copies in total.

**Close at Heart.** Throughout the year, members of the community make donations in memory, or in honor of, a pet or a human who played a valuable part in their lives. Both the donor and the honoree, or family of the honoree, receive signed letters from CHAI’s Director, and the honorees also have their names memorialized in the Close at Heart book that we display prominently in our main office. Large donations are honored with a name plate, which we post on plaques hanging in the CHAI main office.

CHAI wishes to thank everyone who has supported and continues to support our mission!
Our educational goal is to improve understanding of the benefits of the human-animal interaction. We accomplish our mission by teaching students and engaging in public education.

Students

Fifteen students participated in educational experiences at The Center for Human-Animal Interaction in 2023.

Five medical students in their fourth year (M4s) completed 1-month elective rotations at CHAI. While at CHAI they split their time between working with CHAI’s Director on research projects and helping with CHAI’s daily functioning. They supported Dogs on Call teams in the hospital, helped prepare and distribute stuffed animals for children, and performed a variety of other tasks.

Four undergraduate Independent Study students came to learn at CHAI. These students both assisted with the Center’s research and worked on their own projects with CHAI’s faculty.

Six PhD students or medical residents worked with CHAI’s Director on various research projects and presentations.

CHAI hosted a PhD student from Denmark during the fourth quarter of 2023. In addition to her research collaboration with our Director, she and her family shared multiple cross-cultural experiences with CHAI staff.
CHAI
research and academic accomplishments

3 Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) Experiments

5 Conference Presentations & Leadership Roles

5 Journal Publications

11 Edited Books & Chapters
In recent years, the use of companion animals in treatments for mental disorders has been increasingly accepted by clinicians and the public. Written by top researchers, this book provides a much-needed overview of the current state of knowledge of animal-assisted interventions. The chapters integrate theoretical perspectives with the latest research and offer practical guidelines for the incorporation of animals into evidenced-based treatments. The book is an invaluable resource for both researchers and mental health practitioners.

—Hal Herzog, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Western Carolina University Author of Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard To Think Straight About Animals
2023 Journal Publications


2023 Book Chapters


2023 Book Chapters (cont’d.)


2023 Conference Presentations


2023 Keynote and Invited Presentations (cont’d.)


The Center for Human-Animal Interaction creates new knowledge by conducting rigorous research. Three randomized-controlled trial (RCTs) examining the impacts of therapy dog intervention on loneliness, depression, anxiety, and related health outcomes are currently underway for three vulnerable inpatient populations: older adults, adults with mental illness, and children. In conjunction with the pediatric study, some of Dr. Townsend’s internal VCU startup funds are being used to assess the effects on the intervention on levels of salivary cytokines.

The Center for Human-Animal Interaction is grateful to the following external funders for supporting our ongoing research:
CHAI
social media
reach

Reach (Followers)

Instagram: 3,411
Facebook: 5,000+
Twitter: 1,500

Top Posts of 2023

1st Post: 188 Likes, 2,074 Impressions
2nd Post: 145 Likes, 1,544 Impressions
CHAI faculty and programs have again garnered a steady stream of media coverage for VCU and VCU Health in 2023, locally, nationally, and internationally.


VCU Health. [@VCUHealth]. (2023, February 20). Though we love all our furry and not-so-furry friends, we can’t help but love a little extra on [Social media post]. Instagram. [Link](https://www.instagram.com/p/Co5MXhbuUi0/)


https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/dogs-call-visit-cbs-6-150419862.html


https://blog.personalizationmall.com/celebration-ideas/celebrate-national-dog-day/


https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0g7jxtd

https://original.newsbreak.com/@margaret-minnicks-158731452689-an-anthrozoologist-at-virginia-commonwealth-university-explains-how-dog-therapy-works-with-students


CHAI's gratitude

It truly takes a village, and we are grateful to the community of people who have come together in supporting CHAI's mission. We give our thanks and deep appreciation to the following:

Our Calendar Sponsors:

Allen, Allen, Allen, & Allen
Anonymous
Children's Hospital Foundation
Dr. Ashley and Mr. Adam Shustak
Balanced Veterinary Wellness
BluePearl Pet Hospital
Dr. David and Mrs. Denice Ekey
Finale Inventory
Mr. and Mrs. Greg & Rebecca Felton
Holiday Barn
Kemin Pet Food & Rendering Technologies
Level Up Dog Sports
Drs. Lisa Townsend and Bob Findling
MCV Foundation
Dr. Nancy Gee
Drs. Randolph & Sandra Barker
Mr. Richard T. Robertson
The Oncology Service – Richmond
Ridge Dog Shop
River City Veterinary Hospital
School of Medicine
Town & Country Veterinary Clinic
VCU Medical Center Auxiliary
VCU Police Department
VCU Department of Psychiatry
Veterinary Referral & Critical Care
Virginia Veterinary Medical Association
Wellesley Animal Hospital

Other Program Sponsors:

Children’s Hospital of Richmond
Petsmart
VCU Medical Center Support Services
Tony Stewart Foundation
VCU
VCU Health
VCU Department of Psychiatry
VCU Medical Center Auxiliary
Contact Us

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