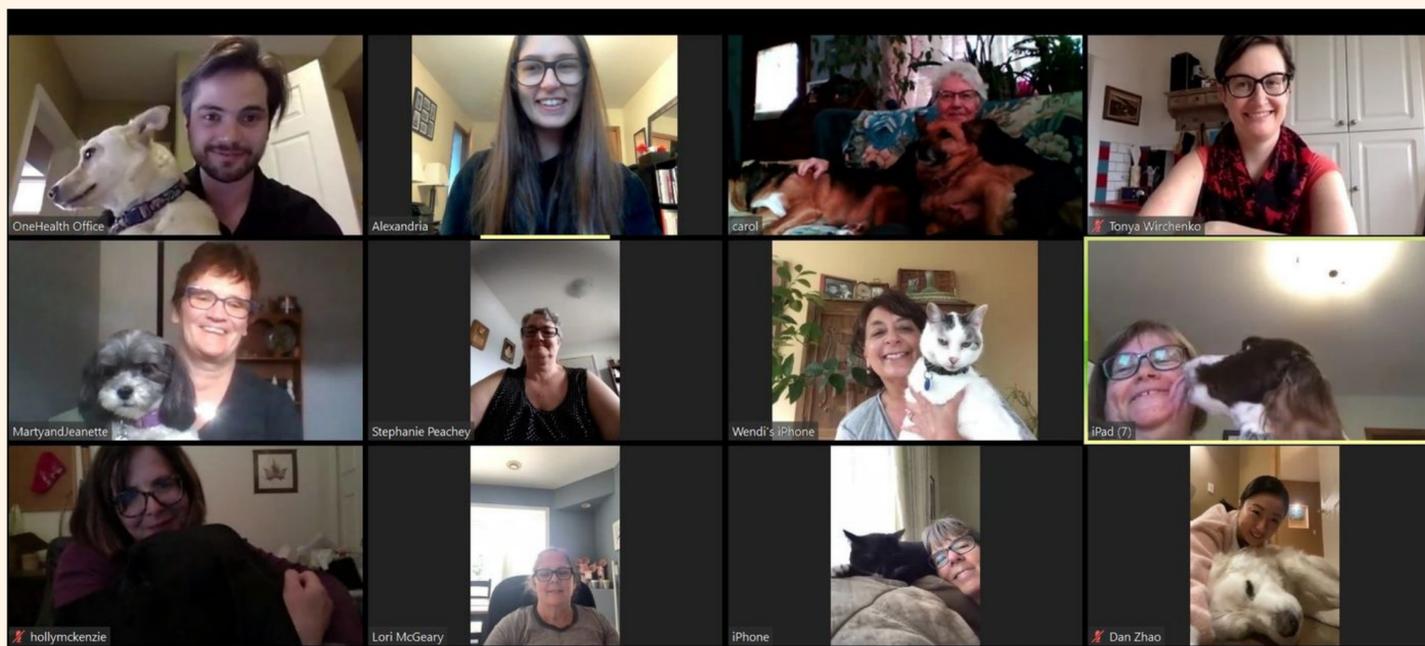


The Human-Human Connection Among Therapy Dog Handlers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In qualitative interviews, some therapy dog handlers expressed that seeing and talking with other handlers during online Zoom visits, St. John Ambulance Zoom monthly meetings, and watching therapy dog handler-dog teams' live and recorded videos, provided a sense of connection with individual handlers and the broader therapy dog community and program. These interviews were part of a broader study *Fostering Pawsitive Wellbeing and Support: A Qualitative Study With Therapy Dog-Handler Teams and Service Providers*.



Connection: Handlers' and dogs' shared experiences during the pandemic

"The virtual stuff has meant that [therapy dog visiting] has been able to continue even though we can't meet in person right now. Those connections were maintained and we were able to share some of our frustrations."



It's not only about connecting, but also about knowing "what is going on" with the program.

"...[I] got to interact with the other handlers which was lots of fun which we don't normally get to do and because of the structure of this virtual visit we spent a lot of time talking to each other...."



Handlers expressed wanting further opportunities to connect with other handlers.

"I think it would be good if we could just debrief for a bit or have a coffee after the session just to visit, or ask each other how was that experience for you, or what could we have we done to make it better..."

"Zoom meetings are a big part of the support. Like, we all do the same thing, and we get to share. We get to share the frustrations and the joys of what our current situation is, so yes I would say they are a part of the support."

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