

## Is that a Beard on His Neck? Bearded Dragons as Therapeutic Animals

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### **Abstract:**

Assisted Therapy (AAT) is the utilization of animals as a therapeutic method; it is the deliberate inclusion of an animal in a treatment plan. Animal-assisted therapy has been practiced for many years and can be a useful intervention for individuals or groups. Studies found positive outcomes and overall improved emotional well-being in individuals with autism, (Redefer and Goodman 1989), medical conditions (Havenar et al. 2001), compromised mental functioning (Kanamori et al. 2001), emotional difficulties (Barker and Dawson 1998), undesirable behaviors (Nagengast et al. 1997), and physical problems (Nathanson et al. 1997). Additionally, AAT has been used with individuals across the lifespan; including children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Florence Nightingale - the founder of social work, first identified the therapeutic potential of animals in the 1800s, through observations and surveys conducted by psychiatric institutions that small pets helped reduce anxiety in patients — children and adults alike. Sigmund Freud noticed, during a session with a patient, that the dog recognized the patient's stress level and kept his distance; however, when stress level reduced, the dog came closer to the patient. There are many researches in animal assistive therapy which focus mainly on “mainstream” animals; such as: dogs, cats, bunnies, Guinee pigs, parrots, horses etc.

This proposal will explore reptiles in general as therapeutic animals and bearded dragons in particular. I wish to work with elderly people who are in poor physical, cognitive and mental state. Taking their vital signs while taking care of a bearded dragon in order to determine if patient's blood pressure decreases, reading stories to it, petting and nurturing it, giving it warm baths and feeding it; even sitting with it in the sun can help relax and get the right amount of vitamin D needed for both reptile and patient. Connecting with such reptile is not common however, bearded dragon's nature is basking therefor there very calming and still, making everyone comfortable.