

# Turning a New Leaf



Volume 14, Issue 3 - Promoting healthy relationships and personal growth from a Christian Perspective - Summer 2023

## I Love my Pet, and my Pet Loves Me

by Kiessa Hamilton, MSW, LSW

Pets mean vastly different things to different people. Some homes have a revolving door of goldfish, some have “fur-babies”, some have medically important support animals. The level of attachment can vary from family to family and individual to individual.

Even within the same family a pet can be one person’s annoyance and another’s best friend. It’s common to see financial sacrifices made in order to care for an ailing pet, just as if it were a member of the family.

Owning a pet can provide joy, companionship, and let’s not forget: mental wellness. Despite adding some stressors and responsibilities, pets can make a positive therapeutic impact on an individual’s mental health. The benefits can include a sense of unconditional love, stability & routine, reduction of stress & anxiety, more opportunity for socialization, improved mood, and a heightened drive to increase physical activity.

Since they are non-judgmental, in the typical sense, pets can provide unique emotional support - through their own brand of unconditional love. They don’t care about your flaws or failures, and they are always present. They are there for you unwaveringly -when you are happy, angry, sad or sick. Research has shown that interacting with pets releases oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and feeling love.

This means that an emotional connection with a pet represents a steady companionship that can decrease symptoms of loneliness, depression and anxiety.

Research has determined having a pet can decrease blood pressure, lower heart rate, and lower cortisol levels. Petting and playing with an animal can be a healthy coping strategy when experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety and anger. Simply watching your pet - even a fish - can provide a good distraction from negative thinking and intrusive thoughts.



Unlike other healthy distractions (new art supplies, a bike, etc.) animals provide guaranteed stability and routine because most require daily care. They’ll seek you out when they are in need or want to play.

Pets counteract feeling isolated by increasing socialization through neighborhood walks, grooming, even the occasional vet care.

When necessary, the family pet can be made an ESA (emotional support animal) through a process that typically requires your mental health professional provide a letter stating the need/reason for the ESA. With ESA designation, your animal can be taken most places, and housing cannot deny application approval based on the presence of your ESA.

The bond created between humans and animals can heal, nurture and transform life by offering a sense of purpose, well-being, companionship and unconditional love.

Kiessa Hamilton, MSW, LSW is based in our Crown Point Office, call 708-895-7310 for appt.



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**Our Mission:**

To promote healthy relationships, personal growth and healing through professional counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.



As I write this, I have not officially started my role at New Leaf Resources, nor have I left my role where I'm currently working. It's an interesting time of transition, and I'm glad to have a chance to connect with you this way and reflect on some things as we embark on this new journey together.

I heard a great sermon from Pastor Dexter Harris and have been reading in the Gospel of Mark. I find several things that get my attention, as I think about joining New Leaf and serving the staff and clients that come to us. I am drawn to Mark 1:29-34. "29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon (Peter) and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and raised her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. 33 The whole town gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

It was the Sabbath, and Jesus had been busy teaching, healing, and casting out demons in Capernaum. When He and the disciples left, they headed back to Simon-Peter's house to have Sabbath dinner (like our Sunday family dinner). The problem is that Simon's mother-in-law, who would normally prepare and serve the meal, was in bed and ill with a fever. Jesus had compassion for her and touched her by the hand, raised her up, and she was healed. Jesus touched a lot of people that day and throughout his time on earth, literally and figuratively.

In verses 32-34, we see that a large amount of sick and demon possessed people came to the house. The bible says the whole town gathered at the door. Just think about that; can you imagine that scene?

Jesus touched all kinds of people, beggars, lepers, the paralyzed, people who were blind, possessed, and even dead and buried. He touched people who were on the margins of society; people who were stigmatized and going in the wrong direction. Some He touched were unexpected and unlikely. What's noticeable about Simon's mother-in-law is that he took her by the hand. It was very unusual, in fact unheard of, for a Rabbi (teacher) to touch a woman in the course of His work. So, it is not only that he touched people, it is who he touched that is also meaningful. Jesus touched all the "wrong" people, from society's view. The question is, why?

Jesus touched them not because they were good, but because He is good. They did not meet preconditions, earn, or "deserve," His touch. He touched them because they needed Him. We see that Jesus is willing to go outside the conventional to touch the people that need him; no one is too dirty, far gone, or injured. In Psalm 138, the Bible says, "For the Lord is exalted, yet He looks after the lowly." In fact, Jesus pays special attention to those on the outside and desires to bring them in.

How does this relate to me starting a position at New Leaf Resources? Maybe you already see the parallel. People in our communities are at our doors. They have needs, are hurting, searching for a resolution and answers to their problems. So many people need help, and I expect that need to continue to grow. Have you asked yourself, "If I had a hand like Jesus, who would I touch?" The good news is that God has given us power through the Holy Spirit to touch those He brings to us who need hope, help, and healing. We seek to extend the hand of Jesus to those at our doors every day. We take what we've learned about helping people and listen for God's guidance, depend on His power, and offer the mercy we have been given. Working for an organization that acknowledges God in the process of helping someone is a key factor in my reason for taking this leadership role at New Leaf Resources.

When Jesus touched people, he restored them to transform them. It's quite amazing that we have access to His transformative power and can reach into a person's life and touch them with the hope, help, and healing that God desires for them.

Continued next page

**Director's Note continued...**

Do you know what captured my attention the most in these verses in Mark 1? After Jesus touched Simon's mother-in-law, do you see what it says? It says she was not only healed of her fever, but she was raised up and she began to serve them. Wow!

At New Leaf Resources, not only do we strive to alleviate a person's pain, but we also want to see them restored and transformed, so they are able to fulfill their God given purpose, where they will find meaning and joy. All of us, members of the staff and board, donors, and supporters of this ministry working together to extend the hand of Jesus to those he has brought to us. We do our part, God does His part, and the clients do their part. In this way, we can make an impact that lasts beyond this life and into eternity.

I look forward to this journey with you and thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

God Bless You,

Steve Butera



**The New, Improving:  
newleafresources.org**

**Visitors to our website will notice a big update!**

**We're now able to provide a portal for clients seeking 'telehealth' appointments and the ability to better manage their care.**

**For supporters, we'll be posting volunteer opportunities, allowing for event RSVPs, posting organizational needs, and easily accepting donations!**

**If you want to get more involved, we're doing what we can to make it easy!**

**Upcoming Events**

**August  
Pet Photo Competition on  
GiveGrove.com**

**Sept 23  
Mental Health First Aid Training**

**October  
Seeking Volunteers & Opportunities  
for Trunk or Treat Events!**

**New Leaf at the 10th Annual  
Jasper County Back to School Fair**



Staff and Board Members of New Leaf gave out crayons at the fair, and got to spend some time in the shade with excited young learners! Guests to the New Leaf table also got to learn about the sort of mental health services we can offer to the community.

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**Sept 23rd**  
9-5pm at Bethel Church  
3500 Glenwood-Lansing Rd, Lansing

**WHO SHOULD TAKE IT**

- Employers
- Police officers
- Hospital staff
- First responders
- Faith leaders
- Community members
- Caring individuals

**WHAT IT COVERS**

- Common signs and symptoms of mental illness
- Common signs and symptoms of substance use
- How to interact with a person in crisis
- How to connect the person with help
- **NEW:** Expanded content on trauma, addiction and self-care

**The course will teach you how to apply the ALGEE action plan:**

- **A**ssess for risk of suicide or harm.
- **L**isten nonjudgmentally.
- **G**ive reassurance and information.
- **E**ncourage appropriate professional help.
- **E**ncourage self-help and other support strategies.

To register, contact us at: [marc@newleafresources.org](mailto:marc@newleafresources.org)  
or by calling (708) 895-7310 x1016

**WHY MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?**

Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. This training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care.