

## Acceptance type: Oral - 20 minutes

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### **Paws and Progress: Exploring the Transformative Impact of Animal-Assisted Intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorders**

AJ Cullen Langell

Autism Barks, Boston, MA, USA. Carroll University, Waukesha, WI, USA

#### **Abstract**

This presentation delves into the captivating realm of Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) and its profound influence on individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). As we navigate the complexities of autism, this session explores the unique and therapeutic connection between humans and animals, particularly the positive outcomes observed when integrating animals into therapeutic settings.

We will delve into current research findings, case studies, and real-life experiences that shed light on the therapeutic benefits of AAI for individuals on the autism spectrum. From enhanced social interactions and communication skills to reduced anxiety and stress, the presentation will showcase the multifaceted ways in which animals contribute to the overall well-being of those with ASD.

Through a combination of theoretical insights and practical examples, participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying AAI in autism intervention. The session aims to inspire professionals, caregivers, and educators to consider and incorporate animal-assisted approaches into their therapeutic practices, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with ASD.

#### **Presentation**

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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### **There is no care without self-care**

Graeme Green, Jennifer Geach

Athena Herd Foundation, Paddock Wood, United Kingdom

#### **Abstract**

Self-care is not just about ourselves; it is also essential if practitioners are to effectively care for others. The words of the French-born essayist Anaïs Nin provide an insightful foundation: *“we do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.”*

If we are to provide appropriate and effective care for others, including the animals that we are working with, we need to be able to take the best version of ourselves into that interaction. Meaningful self-care is founded upon an objective self-awareness that not just recognises personal needs but can take appropriate action to provide the necessary care and attention required.

We will look at the important dimensions of self-care, addressing both personal and the professional practices; and explore the wider benefits of these practices, including:

- personal health and wellbeing
- professional practice and performance
- professional development
- the ability to approach others objectively with care and compassion
- ensure a client's sense of being attended to, and
- maintain a sensitive and empathetic approach to our animal companions

Finally, we will explore the importance of self-care from a regulatory perspective. As holders of a practitioner register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (an independent statutory body, accountable to the UK Parliament) we will also argue the importance of self-care in ensuring the delivery of services that protect and keep safe service users and clients.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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### **Animal Assisted Activities and the Moral Status of the Other Animals**

Irina Frasin

Gheorghe Zane Institute for Social and Economic Research, Romanian Academy, Iasi Branch, Iasi, Romania

#### Abstract

Human – animal relationships are very significant when we think of resilience, psychological well-being and coping strategies in a stressful environment. This is why today we recognize the significance and importance of animal assisted activities in all their diverse forms. The focus of my presentation will be on how we frame these benefits of AAA.

We have rules, regulations and recommendations to ensure that animals involved in such activities are treated with empathy and respect and that they are not used or made to work beyond their comfort level. Because today we recognize that animals have moral standing we pay attention to their needs and emotions and treat them as individuals with their particular wishes and goals.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse these human – animal relationships within a larger framework and show that treating animals with equal respect truly means re-organizing our perspective. We need to acknowledge the importance of the presence of other animals and multi-species relationships for joint resilience. Instead of considering the benefits of these relationships for humans we should think of mutual thriving in cooperation, in interrelation, in togetherness. Only exploring the mutual benefits of this connectivity we can truly learn to respect our non-human partners.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## 7

### **Promoting mental health of military veterans through Equine-Assisted Intervention: an Italian pilot study**

Chiara Ciacchella<sup>1</sup>, Barbara Collacchi<sup>1</sup>, Marta Borgi<sup>1</sup>, Alessandra D'Onofrio<sup>2</sup>, Nadia Francia<sup>1</sup>, Stefania Cerino<sup>3</sup>, Francesca Cirulli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy. <sup>2</sup>Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy. <sup>3</sup>Equestrian Rehabilitation Centre "Girolamo de Marco" onlus (CRE), Rome, Italy

#### Abstract

Military veterans who are exposed to stressful or traumatic events may experience adjustment difficulties in the post-deployment period, with a high risk of mental health-related problems. The use of promising complementary interventions such as equine-assisted therapy (EAT) is increasing, although standardised protocols are missing. The present study

qualitative evaluations (observations and discussions guided by a psychotherapist) were carried out. Standardized scales did not show significant results, however, the qualitative evaluation revealed improvements in participants' attitudes and behaviours, coping strategies, levels of anxiety and the gradual overcoming of interpersonal difficulties. The EAT intervention was particularly appreciated, with high adherence, and the empathetic relationship with the horse allowed veterans to establish positive relationships within the intervention group. A process of self-awareness emerged during the guided discussions, and the EAT intervention enabled the veterans to rediscover a new group identity. The intervention methodology proved to be feasible and sustainable, albeit with major limitations due to the low number of participants, the lack of female veterans, and the distance between the equestrian centre and the participants' residence. This pilot study highlights the potential of the human-horse relationship in managing adjustment difficulties, developing interpersonal skills and fostering a process of self-awareness among veterans.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## Complementary interventions for the management of anorexia nervosa: a pilot study employing equestrian vaulting

Barbara Collacchi<sup>1</sup>, Nadia Francia<sup>1</sup>, Chiara Ciacchella<sup>1</sup>, Antonella Piccotti<sup>2</sup>, Stefania Cerino<sup>3</sup>, Francesca Cirulli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy. <sup>2</sup>University of Perugia, Department of Medicine, Perugia, Italy. <sup>3</sup>Ecos-EU, Rome, Italy

## Abstract

Anorexia nervosa is a serious eating disorder characterized by a distorted perception of one's weight and profound dissatisfaction with body image. Multidimensional integrative therapeutic approaches are needed to intervene on both symptomatic mechanisms and interpersonal processes. This pilot study aimed to develop a 3-month horse-assisted intervention based on equestrian vaulting (EV) and to test its suitability and acceptability in patients with anorexia. Seven female participants in outpatient treatment for anorexia were enrolled in the study (EV group = 3 and control group = 4). Longitudinal evaluations (baseline T0 and final T1) were conducted to assess the effectiveness of EV intervention on body mass index scores (BMI), eating disorder-related symptoms (EDI-3), anxiety management (STAI), and psychopathological symptoms (SCL-90-R). Observations were conducted to monitor participants' attitudes during the session and their relationship with horses and team members. The EV intervention appears to be feasible and well accepted by the participants, and preliminary results have shown an increase in BMI, improvements in disease-related symptoms (drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, affective problems composite, perfectionism), anxiety and interpersonal skills. This pilot study suggests the potential of EV to support patients with anorexia in regaining body awareness and increasing sociability, which are fundamental elements for their reintegration into everyday life contexts. The developed protocol represents a first step to promoting EV interventions for eating disorders, informing the design of larger controlled studies and suggesting critical variables to focus on.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

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## “Quacking for Noggin:” Farm Animal Assisted Therapy for The Traumatic Brain Injury Survivors

Alex Sargsyan<sup>1</sup>, Lora Beebe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, USA. <sup>2</sup>University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of Animal Assisted Therapies with Farm Animals (AATF) with domesticated ducks on depression, anxiety, and self-efficacy in patients with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Furthermore, the following hypothesis was tested:

The study examined the effects of AATF on anxiety, depression and self-efficacy among nine patients with TBI. Time series quasi-experimental design was utilized. Participants completed Hospital Anxiety and Depression Survey (HADS) and General Self Efficacy (GSE) questionnaires at baseline, followed by the AATF intervention. AATF intervention consisted of two one-hour sessions interacting with ducks, every week for 12 weeks. Participants repeated baseline measures immediately following the intervention, and again four weeks post intervention to evaluate the residual effects of the intervention.

General Linear Model was employed to examine changes in anxiety, depression, and self-efficacy. Participants' anxiety scores decreased significantly from baseline to post intervention measure ( $p = .009$ ), however, there were no statistically significant differences between anxiety levels immediately post intervention and four weeks later. There were no statistically significant differences in depression or self-efficacy levels pre, post, and retest.

Our study hypothesis was partially supported in that statistically significant decreases in anxiety were observed from baseline to immediate posttest. Mastery of skills, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion may be the factors that contributed to the beneficial outcomes of the interactions between persons with TBI and domesticated ducks.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

# 11

## Empowerment for families in times of crisis Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) in pediatric palliative care in Austria

Monika Watzak-Helmer, Roswitha Zink  
Lichtblickhof, Vienna, Austria

### Abstract

Pediatric hospice and palliative care facilities offer seriously ill children and their families a variety of therapeutic options. Working with animal support is one of them. One best praxis example is ray of hope farm (Lichtblickhof). This farm provides outpatient therapy with animals (mainly horses, cats, rabbits, dogs and sheep) as well as inpatient living in specially equipped hospice support apartments on the farm area in a city. Especially for the training and animal welfare and animal consent to therapy lichtblickhof is very special. Other Research projects at the moment are about supported communication for therapy animals, heartbeat, breathing, stress and body language in connection with AAI.

In this study we asked "To what extent are animal-assisted interventions used in specialized pediatric hospice and palliative care facilities in Austria, and how do the team members assess the impact factors, risks and obstacles?" To answer the question, an online survey was conducted in 37 facilities in this area. Team members from the facilities were interviewed in the form of an open survey.

With a response rate of 37.8%, it was shown that 43% of the facilities regularly work with animal assistance. Horses and dogs are most commonly used, and all animals are experienced in therapy. The team members judge AAI to be very useful for patients. The impact factors are seen primarily in the psychological-emotional and social areas. The most common reason given for obstacles is a lack of financing.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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# **Whiskers, wagging tails, and emotional bonds: investigating the relationship between children's socio-emotional health and their attachment to dogs and cats.**

Daniëlle Groenewoud<sup>1</sup>, Annemiek van Dijke<sup>2,3</sup>, Roeslan Leontjevas<sup>1,4</sup>, Marie-Jose Enders-Slegers<sup>1</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>5,1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Open Universiteit, Heerlen, Netherlands. <sup>2</sup>Brijder the Hague, Parnassia Group, Amsterdam, Netherlands. <sup>3</sup>NeLL/Leiden University Medical Centre, Leiden, Netherlands. <sup>4</sup>Department of Primary and Community Care, Radboud University Medical Centre, Radboud Institute for Health Sciences, Radboudumc Alzheimer Center, Nijmegen, Netherlands. <sup>5</sup>Faculty of Psychology, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## **Abstract**

Understanding the complex interplay between children, dogs, cats and attachment is crucial for fostering healthy socio-emotional development in childhood.

The bond between children and companion animals has long been recognized for its potential impact on socio-emotional development as evidenced by enhanced competencies such as empathy, communication, social support, and quality of life (Groenewoud et al., 2023). Dogs and cats in particular offer comfort, companionship, unconditional love, and a sense of security and belonging to children. Moreover, the reciprocal nature of these relationships provides valuable opportunities for children to develop interpersonal skills and enhance emotional development.

However, it is essential to distinguish between a strong bond and a secure attachment. A secure attachment is pivotal for lifelong socio-emotional well-being. While research on attachment theory has primarily focused on child-parent relationships, the significance of children's attachment style to companion animals remains unclear. Furthermore, it's uncertain whether children's attachment to companion animals aligns with, compensates for, or differs from attachment to humans.

Our survey study aims to explore the association between children's attachment to humans, dogs, and cats, and investigate how their attachment style to dogs and cats is associated with their socio-emotional well-being. We utilize the Relationship Questionnaire for Adolescents, a shortened Pet Attachment Questionnaire, and the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire in our research.

In this presentation, we will delve into the preliminary results of our study, illuminating aspects of child-companion animal attachment dynamics through the use of a clinical vignette.

## **Presentation**

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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# **Investigating the Neuromechanisms of Human-Dog Interaction: Objective and Subjective Insights**

Fabio Carbone, Eve Gerber, Camille Rerat, Karin Hediger  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## **Abstract**

This study delves into the cerebral mechanisms underlying the benefits of human-animal interaction, focusing on emotional and motivational biomarkers in brain electrical activity. Specifically, we investigated frontal alpha asymmetry (FAA), a key indicator of hemispheric asymmetry of alpha power in the frontal cortex, associated with approach motivation and positive affect.

Twenty-nine healthy adults participated in this innovative investigation, where their electrical brain activity was measured using electroencephalography (EEG). The session unfolded in five distinct blocks, encompassing baseline measures, interactions with a real dog, interactions with a replica dog, interactions with a plant, and a neutral phase. The interactions

"Multidimensional Well-being" (MDWB) and the "Intrinsic Motivation Index (IMI)" questionnaires, assessing mental state and motivation, respectively.

The results revealed fascinating insights. Although objective measures of motivation using FAA showed no significant difference between interactions with a real dog and control conditions, subjective assessments presented a contrasting view. Participants reported significantly greater subjective motivation and a more positive emotional state after interacting with a real dog compared to the control conditions.

In conclusion, our study highlights the intricate interplay between objective neural markers and subjective experiences in human-animal interaction. These findings emphasize the need to consider both measures in understanding the complex neuromechanisms involved in these meaningful connections with our four-legged companions.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## Long-term effects on socioemotional skills of animal-assisted therapy in patients with acquired brain injury

Elena Pauli<sup>1,2</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>1,3,4,2,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Division of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup>REHAB Basel, Clinic for Neurorehabilitation and Paraplegiology, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>3</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands. <sup>4</sup>Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Human and Animal Health Unit, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>5</sup>Faculty of Behavioural Sciences and Psychology, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychology, University of Lucerne, Luzern, Switzerland

## Abstract

**Background:** Patients with acquired brain injury (ABI) benefit from short-term animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in terms of socioemotional skills and therapy motivation. This study aims to investigate the long-term effects of AAT on socioemotional skills, therapy motivation, and quality of life in patients with ABI.

**Methods:** Seventy patients with ABI were randomly allocated to two groups: an intervention group receiving 6 weeks of animal-assisted speech, occupational, or physiotherapy, and a control group receiving equivalent treatment as usual (TAU) without animal assistance. The main outcome was the amount of expressed emotion and interaction in a standardized social situation measured via behavioural video coding. Secondary outcomes included changes in social cognition, therapy motivation, quality of life, depression, and treatment adherence. Outcomes were assessed at baseline, post-intervention, and at 6 and 12 weeks follow-up. Data will be analysed via general linear models with repeated measurements. The effect size will be calculated as the estimated difference of means.

**Results:** Data collection is still ongoing and will conclude at the last patient's treatment end, with results to be first revealed at the conference. We hypothesize that patients undergoing AAT will demonstrate improved socioemotional skills compared to the TAU group.

**Conclusion:** The study addresses the potential of AAT in enhancing long-term neurorehabilitation outcomes for patients suffering from ABI, discussing practical implications for therapy protocols and patient care.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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# Impacts of an Animal-Assisted Trauma-Focused Therapy Group Program for Children and Adolescents: A Practical Approach

Karin Hediger, Wanda Arnskötter  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the therapeutic value of animal-assisted interventions in addressing post-traumatic stress. However, it is still not fully explored how to practically include animals in these therapies and how to integrate them effectively to enhance the therapeutic benefits during sessions.

This presentation explores the practical implementation of an innovative 10-week Animal-Assisted Trauma-Focused Therapy Group program designed specifically for children and adolescents aged 9 to 17 years who have experienced trauma. The presentation provides a detailed overview of the therapy procedure, highlighting the active involvement of different animals in each of the 10 sessions. Based on case studies some first observations made during the interactions between the children/adolescents and the animals will be presented. In doing so, it will help address the need for practical guidance in implementing animal-assisted trauma interventions for practitioners in the field.

Based on trauma-focused principles and enhanced by the incorporation of trained therapy animals, this program provides a distinct avenue for healing and recovery for children and adolescents affected by post-traumatic stress.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## Effects of dogs on perceived trustworthiness of people

Karin Hediger<sup>1,2</sup>, Elizabeth Grinspoon<sup>3</sup>, Lisa Kluehn<sup>4,3</sup>, Janine Illgen<sup>1</sup>, Sophia Engelter<sup>1</sup>, Laura Germine<sup>4,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>2</sup>Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands. <sup>3</sup>McLean Hospital, Belmont, USA.

<sup>4</sup>Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA

## Abstract

**Background:** Previous research shows that the presence of animals influences the perception of people. For example, people pictured with a dog are perceived as friendlier, happier, bolder and more relaxed (Lockwood, 1983; Rossbach & Wilson, 1992), and the presence of a dog makes therapists in a video appear more trustworthy (Schneider & Harley, 2006). However, the studies are not recent and methodologically limited. Our study aims to investigate whether people sitting next to a dog are perceived as more trustworthy compared to sitting alone or next to a plant or lamp.

**Methods:** The study was conducted online using a between-subjects design. 5284 participants rated the trustworthiness, friendliness and likeability of 10 different people, who were presented alone or with a dog, a plant or a lamp. The pictures were exactly comparable except for the item presented next to the person. The data were analysed with one-way ANOVAs.

**Results:** A person sitting next to a dog is perceived as significantly more trustworthy, friendly and sympathetic compared to all other conditions (all  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, a person next to a plant is perceived as more sympathetic compared to the person alone ( $p = 0.046$ ).

**Discussion:** People are perceived as more trustworthy, friendly and sympathetic when presented with a dog. The presentation will include whether demographic variables influence this effect and discuss how these findings may provide a mechanism for why animal-assisted therapy works.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## Docs & dogs - animal assisted intervention in the Ukraine

Sandra Foltin<sup>1</sup>, Anna Verena Mederer<sup>2</sup>, Anne Sophie Albertowski<sup>3</sup>, Franz Lutz<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>animal advocate e.V., Oberhausen, Germany. <sup>2</sup>animal advocate e.V., Kassel, Germany. <sup>3</sup>animal advocate e.V., Berlin, Germany. <sup>4</sup>animal advocate e.V., Rotenburg, Germany

### Abstract

#### Abstract

Docs& dogs – we are a group of German “doctors” either medical, psychiatric or ethologist (and their dogs) - certified and experienced teams -trying to implement an animal assisted program through the German nonprofit organization animal-advocate e.V., an IAHAIO member, in a military hospital in the city of Vinnitsa in the Ukraine. We travel to the Ukraine every few month, supplying very much needed medical materials, but our main focus lies on offering workshops and providing educational materials aimed at practitioners in Vinnitsa who are interested in delivering AAI, across different settings and client populations according to IAHAIO standards. Primary receivers/clients will be soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder while at the Military hospital in Vinnitsa and children in the neighboring children's hospital. However, the civilian population should also be part of the program as studies show the most negative impact on their mental health. In addition, we plan to study the impact of animal-assisted services on the Ukrainian people in crisis including how the human-dog teams support children, soldiers and civilians in times of physical, emotional and/or psychological need.

We hope to include cortisol measurements on the clients and the animals involved and through our professional background provide mechanisms, including self-care, for people supporting others. Our goal is to ensure, through the implementation of international guidelines for best practice - including education and training of people working with animals as well as animal selection and animal welfare issues - long-term care through animal assisted intervention provided by Ukrainian teams for Ukrainians!

### Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## A Journey From Trauma to Resilience - Together

Nancy Parish-Plass

IAAAP - - Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy, Kibbutz Usha, Israel. Tel Hai Academic College, Kiryat Shmona, Israel

### Abstract

Mia Leimberg, a teenager captive in a tunnel in Gaza, had hidden her tiny dog in her pajamas as she was kidnapped by terrorists. Sapir Cohen, a hostage held captive by three Hamasniks in an apartment in Gaza, created a connection with one captor through a shared love for cats in order to receive better treatment. Numerous soldiers, traumatized by the effects of the war, are seen in videos saving trapped dogs, feeding stray dogs, putting puppies into their backpacks and bringing dogs to Israel to save them. A bond between human and animal, or interactions between them, or even their sharing a presence in the same space, influence both humans and animals, both psychologically and neurobiologically. These mechanisms influence our everyday life, and even more so in times of trauma. This presentation focuses on how the presence of animals may actually minimize the effects of trauma, leading to lessened degree in which trauma will develop into post-trauma stress disorder (PTSD), and to resilience. Psychologically-based mechanisms that might lead to improved emotional state include social facilitation, sense of social support, lessened sense of helplessness, a sense of being needed by others. Neurobiologically-based mechanisms might include a lowering of the hormone cortisol (associated with lower state-anxiety), rising levels of oxytocin (leading to higher levels of trust), activation of the right amygdala leading to more social regulation, safe touch with the dog resulting in increased blood flow to the brain and therefore preventing dissociation, increasing regulation and neural connectivity.

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## **Power of Animal Assisted Activities to change attitudes towards stray dogs in Romania**

Clayton Davis<sup>1,2</sup>, [Julia Miu](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Animal Society, Bucharest, Romania. <sup>2</sup>Four Paws International, Vienna, Austria

### **Abstract**

In 2004, Four Paws International pioneered Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) with former stray dogs in Romania. Since 2018, this work has continued with Animal Society, Four Paws International's partner in Romania, and expanded to include Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) to change attitudes towards stray dogs. This began in the city of Galati as part of a pilot project using community engagement to develop a humane and sustainable stray dog population management system. The success and lessons learned from this pilot program led to its introduction in Constanta in 2022.

The activity was developed for small groups of 15 to 25 people to be implemented in workplaces for adults and in schools for children (with some modifications) and has three parts that are interactive:

1. Introduction to the activity and the story of dog (from stray to therapy dog)
2. Showing a video of the dog doing AAT to demonstrate the value of a former stray
3. Conducting a spectrum exercise to challenge attitudes towards strays

The activity closes by asking the group what they can do to improve the life of stray dogs and provides some calls to action that interested group members can do.

In Galati 50 of these activities were done for over 1,000 people. Using the lessons learned, upgrades were made to the activity for Constanta. The power of small groups is the interaction with the dog and within the group itself. Animal Society plans to develop a scientific protocol to test this starting in 2025.

### **Presentation**

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## ***"Time flies with the birds": Involving species other than dogs in Animal Assisted Services in prisons to help mitigate the stressors of prison and address the mental health crisis.***

[Elizabeth Ormerod](#)

Society for Companion Animal Studies, Castle Douglas, United Kingdom

### **Abstract**

The World Health Organisation 2023 Report

*"Status Report on Prison Health in the WHO European Region"* states that the most prevalent condition amongst incarcerated people is mental health disorder, identified as affecting 32.8% of inmates. It also cites suicide as the commonest cause of death in prisons.

Animal Assisted Services (AAS) can help to mitigate the stressors of prisons in many ways. Their presence brings some normalisation to the regime, they enhance mood, bring spontaneity and laughter, provide companionship, improve communication and promote better relationships with other prisoners and staff. Their presence reduces violence and aggression and makes prisons more manageable.

Much current AAS focus is on dog training programmes with prisoners training unwanted rescue dogs, or by helping assistance dog programmes. Inmates learn teamwork, develop greater patience, problem solving and vocational skills that can lead to employment on release. Reduced recidivism is another key finding.

smaller animal companions can more easily be introduced and could allow the majority of prisoners to benefit from human-animal interaction.

### Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## Of Dogs and Narratives in Time of Crisis

Marco Adda

AEDC Anthrozoology Education Dogs Canines, Napoli, Italy. USAMV, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

### Abstract

In the face of crisis, dogs serve as remarkable catalysts. They play multifaceted roles amidst turmoils, such as guides, companions, antagonists, and martyrs, among others. In this presentation, we explore a few cases of dogs — and people — in times of crisis and challenges. We explore some tendencies to depict events through recurring narratives and acknowledge that dogs offer alternative perspectives that challenge conventional interpretations. By revisiting the roles dogs acquire in our perception of events, we can better understand the interconnectedness between our emotional states and societal dynamics.

### Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## Can dog-assisted therapy (DAT) improve social skills among youths with long-term physical disease? A systematic review

Anita Røysum

Oslo Metropolitan University (Oslomet), Oslo, Norway

### Abstract

Research shows that participation in dog-assisted therapy (DAT) can improve social skills, empathy, and self-confidence for youths with attention deficit, mental health, and hyperactivity disorders as well as autism and intellectual disability. We find similar results within schools, child welfare organizations, and prisons. What experiences do we find among youths with long-term physical disease? Due to long hospital stays, homeschooling, and few leisure activities, these individuals often lack age-appropriate social competence and skills.

This scoping review aims to provide an overview of published research on DAT implemented among youths with long-term physical disease and the potential impact of their social skill development in this context. We searched for studies on experiences training youths in social communication and interaction with therapy dogs.

Systematic searches were performed in the Academic Search Ultimate, PubMed, Web of Science, Swemed+1, Google Scholar (in English), Google Scholar (in Norwegian), and Oria (in Norwegian) databases and in the journals *Anthrozoös*, *Human Animal Interaction*, and *People and Animals*. The reference lists of the included studies were also manually searched for relevant studies.

Of the 259 studies screened thus far, 9 were eligible for inclusion. Analyses are ongoing. The results and discussion will be presented at the conference.

### Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## **Children Love Animals - An animal assisted educational program for kindergartens and schools in Cluj country**

George Mosoia

Dog Assist Association, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Pet Partners, Bellavue, USA

### **Abstract**

For the last 7 years, Dog Assist Association has been delivering Children Love Animals (Copiii iubesc animalele), an animal assisted educational program, rooted in humane education pedagogy principles. We believe that true changes come through education, and changing a community's mindframe needs a shift in the young ones mentality.

Designed as an inovative program consisting of visits at educational institutions or at our location, its aim is to offer children from kindergartens and schools in Cluj country the opportunity to interact with our therapy dogs and learn valuable information about safe interaction with dogs, their needs and emotions, communication and then draw a paralel to humans. We tackle subjects such as friendships, personal space and hygiene, nutrition, social and emotional skills, group dynamics, bullying and many more. We discuss how to take care of animals, how to take care of those around us and how to take care of the environment.

Through discussions, games and hands on activities with children we foster curiosity, empathy, respect and tolerance towards all living being, including themselves.

From the start of the program, Children Love Animals program has lead to visiting more than 16.000 children from Cluj-Napoca and from Cluj County (urban and rural areas), approximately 5700 alone in 2023. We are confident that the reach of the program is much larger because of the indirect impact, making it a successful and rewarding program in the field of animal assisted interventions.

### **Presentation**

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## **Animal Assisted Therapy for neurodivergent beneficiaries**

Alexandra Gecea<sup>1</sup>, George Mosoia<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dog Assist Association, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. <sup>2</sup>Pet Partners, Bellevue, USA

### **Abstract**

Studies have shown that compared to standard therapy animal assisted therapy can bring significant improvements in working with neurodivergent beneficiaries.

Based on the diamond model of animal assisted therapy, including a therapy team (dog handler and therapy dog) in the session alongside the psychologist and the beneficiary can help the latter by offering unique learning experiences, creating a more natural, authentic therapeutical setting and, nonetheless, offer support and connection.

Setting up therapeutical objectives, selecting the suitable therapy animal, designing tasks and involving the therapy animal and many other practical aspects in working with neurodivergent clients will be addressed during the presentation, from the perspective of two specialists, each with their own responsibilities - the psychologist and the dog handler.

### **Presentation**

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

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## **Protecting the Human Animal Bond and its Social Value during times of personal crisis in Australian Society**

Alicia Kennedy

Cherished Pets, Ocean Grove, Australia

In this presentation, we will demonstrate the vital role of the human-animal bond during times of personal crisis for individuals and families in contemporary Australian society.

These crises include:

- Mental health crisis
- Family and Domestic Violence
- Homelessness
- Financial Crisis
- Unexpected hospitalisation

We will explore how the human-animal bond is a key driver of human decision that impacts health and wellbeing. We will outline the Cherished Pets Model of Care which prioritises keeping companion animals healthy and together with their humans fostering the flourishing of this bond and its associated benefits. This model, intentionally community-centric and multi-disciplinary by design, includes key roles such as the veterinary social worker and community vet nurse.

We'll present insights from the Cherished Pets Social Impact Report, highlighting the significant social value generated by our veterinary and social services, and discuss the importance of measuring Social Return on Investment (SROI) for services operating within the HAI space.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## Acceptance type: Panel;

14

## Animal-Assisted Services in Transition: Creating the Future Together

michael kaufmann  
green chimneys/IAHAIO board, brewster, USA

### Abstract

*I propose a one hour facilitated panel discussion.*

**Facilitator: Michael Kaufmann**

**Panelists: To be selected - 5 individuals who represent different perspectives in our field- veterinarian, IAHAIO board, practitioner, student, human health care**

Each panelists will introduce themselves- and then we will discuss key questions that I as facilitator develop together with the panelists ahead of time, that are relevant to the topic and field.

**Example: We are seeking greater acceptance for animal-assisted services from the medical field such as hospitals, long term care facilities and medical insurers - what progress has been made and what obstacles do we face? What steps would advance our effort in this area?**

**Example: The gap between researchers and practitioners continues to challenge us- what are concrete steps we can take to generate greater cooperation?**



**We will open it to the room and invite questions and comments from audience members - a microphone will be made available so that audience members can be heard.**

## Presentation

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.

## Acceptance type: Poster

6

### Outcomes of the PET@home Toolkit Process-Evaluation Study

Peter Reniers<sup>1</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>1,2</sup>, Ine Declercq<sup>1,3,4</sup>, Marie-José Enders-Slegers<sup>1</sup>, Debby Gerritsen<sup>5</sup>, Roeslan Leontjevas<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Open Universiteit, Heerlen, Netherlands. <sup>2</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>3</sup>Radboudumc, Nijmegen, Netherlands. <sup>4</sup>Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium. <sup>5</sup>Radboudumc, Nijmegen, Netherlands

## Abstract

**Objective:** Clients receiving home care derive emotional, physical, and social support from interactions with pets. However, clients receiving home care may face additional challenges related to pets compared to healthy individuals. Examples include the client's declining health, reliance on family carers to care for pets, and professional carers who are afraid of pets. To help mitigate these challenges we have developed the PET@home Toolkit. The aim of this study was to gather the experiences of stakeholders who used the toolkit in practice to refine its materials.

**Methods:** Stakeholders consisting of professional carers, clients, and family carers who had used Toolkit materials participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews focused on satisfaction, relevance, feasibility, and implementation characteristics of the materials. Interviews were analysed in ATLAS.ti using an inductive-iterative approach. Discussions were held to reach consensus on themes.

**Results:** Professional carers (N=6), clients (N=2), and family carers (N=2) participated in the interviews. The following themes were identified within the interview topics: Satisfaction (general impression, suggestions for improvement), Relevance (awareness, clarity, pets in practice, healthcare quality), Feasibility (healthcare practice, competence, quantity), and Implementation (digitisation/care plan, responsibility within organisations, pilot testing, timing).

**Conclusion:** Participants identified several ways in which the PET@home materials could be better adapted to the daily practice of home care, such as providing clearer instructions. Nonetheless, participants acknowledged that using the toolkit could lead to better planning around pets in home care and improved healthcare quality, thereby mitigating challenges and leading to more responsible and lasting relationships between clients and their pets.

## Presentation

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## Poster

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### The accessibility of migrants to use equine-assisted therapy for trauma treatment associated with PTSD.

Caroline Erviksæter  
HVL, KJØLSDALEN, Norway

## Abstract

The advantage of using horses for this patient group is that language, religion, and culture are put aside, the horse is open and not judgmental. It is also important for PTSD patients as there may be a barrier to putting words to what they have experienced. The horse can then be a good conversationalist, providing security and warmth. Nor does the horse exude any threat or malice.

Before being able to explore this, we want to use a qualitative design and semi-structured interviews with an interview guide. Here we want to look at the part that is equine-assisted therapy regardless of whether the patient is treated with other forms of therapy such as cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, and other forms used for PTSD disorders.

The interview group consists of employees at institutions, treatment homes, private actors, and patients undergoing treatment. The patient doesn't need to be treated with equine-assisted therapy as it is initially important to find out its availability.

The interview guide must be designed so that language does not hurt the examination, it should be designed so that you can get good answers and not make the interviewee feel confused and not have the opportunity to express themselves correctly.

By using the term migrants, it is shielded to those persons who have fled from war.

Trauma is also described as PTSD's experience of war and flight.

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15

## Effects of animal-assisted therapy on therapists' motivation

[Hanzhang Xie](#), Karin Hediger  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## Abstract

Initially, research on Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) primarily focused on assessing the effects of interventions on patients or clients. Despite notable progress, research gaps persist, particularly concerning therapists' intrinsic work motivation. Intrinsic motivation may mitigate burnout and enhance mental well-being. Thus, we designed a study using the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS) to explore the impact of dog presence on therapist motivation. We aim to recruit 35 therapists in Switzerland who work with their own dog and assess motivation, stress, mood, and therapeutic alliance through questionnaires and saliva cortisol tests. Qualitative interviews will also evaluate individual experiences. Over 10 days, each therapist will alternate between working with and without their dog. Our primary hypothesis is that therapists will be more motivated on days when they bring their dog to work. Additionally, we hypothesize that they will perceive sessions with patients as less demanding, more satisfying, and with a higher therapeutic alliance when their dog is present compared to sessions without their dog. This study addresses a literature gap by investigating how integrating animals into therapy affects therapist motivation compared to traditional practices. Furthermore, it refines therapeutic triad relationships, providing insights into AAT feasibility and optimal conditions. Ultimately, this research promotes therapist well-being and advances AAT's multifaceted benefits within the "One Health" framework, contributing to the well-being of both humans and animals in therapy.

## Presentation

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# Effects of Animal-Assisted Resilience Training on Emotion Regulation of Children with Adverse Childhood Experiences

Jay Mazumdar, Karin Hediger, Helen Koechlin  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## Abstract

Every third adult reports an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Since most of them remain untreated, many children end up developing psychopathological symptoms or disorders due to ACEs. This could be prevented by strengthening the children's resilience and Emotion Regulation, which helps processing the experience, coping with future stressors and regulating emotional reactions in a healthy manner. As research on Animal-Assisted Interventions is rapidly expanding, a combination of these two fields was molded into a pioneering intervention and study examining the effects of an Animal-Assisted Resilience Training (AART) for children with an ACE.

A total of 45 participants aged 8-12 attended 12 group sessions of the program at a therapy farm facility in Basel (Switzerland), which was conducted by therapists and consisted of resilience strengthening exercises assisted by horses, dogs, rabbits and chicken. Of those participants, 25 children completed a Pre-Intervention, Post-Intervention and 3-Month-Follow-Up assessment with questionnaires and interviews regarding ER, resilience and further variables. This study analyzed the Pre-to-Post-Intervention results of the AART's effect on participants' subjective and their parents' objective evaluation of the children's ER.

Results show participants' use of maladaptive ER strategies to be significantly reduced, while the use of most adaptive ER strategies mostly remained steady. The parents' external evaluation showed a significant decrease in problematic ER, along with an improvement in anger management. These promising findings warrant further investigation into the novel approach to fostering resilience and ER skills in burdened children, with the Animal-Assisted approach playing a fundamental role in the observed improvements and participation.

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## Animal Assisted Interventions in Italy: practices and practitioners

Morgana Galardi, Alberto Mair, Enrica Ceola, Franco Mutinelli, Laura Contalbrigo  
National Reference Centre for Animal Assisted Interventions, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Legnaro (PD), Italy

## Abstract

In Italy, Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) have been regulated since 2015 by an agreement between Government and Regions: the National Guidelines for AAI. Therefore, only professionals can provide the different categories of AAI (Activity, Education and Therapy) according to their academic background and participation in specific training courses. A web-based platform has been created to ensure that only trained people provide Interventions in the country: *Digital Pet*.

In *Digital Pet*, all people trained as AAI professionals are registered and their names and qualifications are visible to the public. At the end of 2023, we had 11,243 people from all over Italy registered on the platform. In particular, we have reached 6,827 qualifications for animal handlers (800 for donkeys, 3,634 for dogs, 1,311 for horses, 1,082 for cats and rabbits); 514 for veterinarians expert in AAI; 2,627 professionals for Education and 1,375 for Therapy.

involved in AAI is the dog with 49% of the registered projects, followed by the horse with 32%; the other species are less represented with 8% rabbits, 6% cats and 5% donkeys.

At the end of 2023, 495 projects were registered on *Digital Pet*: 29% are therapeutic and the remaining 71% are educational. The people involved are 26% aged 0-9, 34% aged 10-19, 13% young adults aged 20-29, 15% aged 30-49, 6% aged 50-69 and 6% aged over 70.

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## The Effects of Animal Assisted Trauma-Focused Group Therapy on Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms of Children and Adolescents

Emre Can Özgü, Wanda Arnskötter, Karin Hediger  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

### Abstract

**Background:** One of the core elements of animal assisted trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (AA TF-CBT) is the reduction of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS). This study aimed to assess the effects of AA TF-CBT on the posttraumatic stress symptoms of children and adolescents.

**Methods:** Eleven participants were recruited for an AA TF-CBT consisting of 10 sessions for the participants and three sessions for the caregivers. Participants and caregivers were asked about traumas and posttraumatic stress levels with the Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen 2 (CATS-2). Data was collected across three measurement points (t1, t2, t3) and analyzed with the Friedman test.

**Results:** The statistical analysis showed no significant effect between treatment and posttraumatic stress symptoms,  $X^2(2, n = 10) = 4, p = .140$ . Both hypotheses were falsified, although the data showed a slight reduction in PTSS across the three measurement points. The same, after the Dunn-Bonferroni correction, non-significant reduction in PTSS was measured through the caregiver reports (CATS-2),  $X^2(2, n = 8) = 11.81, p = .003$ .

**Conclusion:** Integrating animals in TF-CBT does not seem to significantly reduce PTSS, yet it does lessen posttraumatic stress symptoms slightly. Further research is necessary, especially with a larger sample size and with a control group, to properly assess the effectiveness of AA TF-CBT in reducing PTSS in children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** animal-assisted trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, posttraumatic stress symptoms, children and adolescents, animal-assisted intervention, animal-assisted therapy

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## Diabetes Alert Dog training methodology

Emma Bassan<sup>1</sup>, Matteo Rino Pittavino<sup>2</sup>, Paola Costantino<sup>2</sup>, Alessandro Vestri<sup>3</sup>, Massimo Bugianelli<sup>3</sup>, Laura Contalbrigo<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>National Reference Centre for Animal Assisted Interventions, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Viale dell'Università 10, 35020, Legnaro (PD), Italy. <sup>2</sup>Scuola Nazionale Formazione Cinofila, Milano, Italy. <sup>3</sup>National School of guide dogs for the blind, Regione Toscana, Scandicci (FI), Italy

### Abstract

A medical alert dog is a type of assistance dog trained to identify odour variations associated with abnormal blood glucose concentrations in diabetic individuals. Once they detect the volatile molecules linked to hypo- or hyperglycaemia risk, they are instructed to alert their diabetic handler or whoever is assisting the person with diabetes and to provide assistance during the crisis.

Currently, there are no standardised education and training protocols for assistance dogs, however, there is a widespread consensus in adopting methods that exclude the use of coercive actions, focusing instead on positive reinforcement training principles.

The scientific research being conducted at the Scandicci Guide Dog School in Italy aims to validate a training program based on positive reinforcement that avoids excessive frustration in the dog by allowing the "scent search" to occur spontaneously rather than on command.

The training methodology involves four main steps:

- Classical conditioning: The dog associates the smell of the patient's saliva in hypoglycaemic conditions with the smell of food.
- Operant conditioning: In parallel with the first step, as the dog locates the scent, it spontaneously expresses a behaviour, which varies from dog to dog, that is reinforced and enhanced over time.
- Generalisation: The dog learns to locate the smell on any person, body part, and in different environments.
- Owner matching: Transition from signalling samples, to signalling an actual patient's glycaemic variation.

This methodology aims to develop a positive relationship between the dog and the assisted diabetic person while enhancing the dog's natural aptitudes.

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## Italian d/Deaf community's perception of hearing dogs: a survey-based study

Emma Bassan<sup>1</sup>, Elena Russo<sup>2</sup>, Alberto Mair<sup>1</sup>, Laura Contalbrigo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Reference Centre for Animal Assisted Interventions, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Viale dell'Università 10, 35020, Legnaro (PD), Italy. <sup>2</sup>Master's degree course in translation and interpreting, University Ca' Foscari of Venice, Venice, Italy

### Abstract

A hearing dog is a type of assistance dog, a general term referring to dogs specifically trained to assist individuals with disabilities. Hearing dogs are trained to alert their deaf caretakers to various specific sounds by performing different behaviours that can alert the deaf person.

The research project aims to investigate, through an online survey, the reality of hearing dogs in Italy. Specifically, the study aims to collect data about: a) the level of awareness and presence of these animals within the Italian d/Deaf community; b) whether owned dogs, even if not specifically trained, provide support to disabled people; c) to identify the assistive technologies currently utilised and assess the potential advantages of dogs over machines in assisting individuals with hearing impairments.

questions were formulated in an easy-to-read format, employing a stylistic tone, font, and colours conducive to comprehension.

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data was performed using Excel and R programs, while qualitative data were analysed using the MAXQDA platform.

The findings obtained from this research provide a comprehensive understanding of the Italian d/Deaf community's perception of hearing dogs. Moreover, they serve as valuable insights for proposing future projects and research initiatives on this topic.

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# 23

## Assessing Welfare of Dogs by Observing their Behaviors

[Tynke De Winkel](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Steffie Van der Steen](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Marie-Jose Enders-Slegers](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Richard Griffioen](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Karin Hediger](#)<sup>1,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands. <sup>2</sup>University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands. <sup>3</sup>Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronten, Dronten, Netherlands. <sup>4</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## Abstract

In times of crisis, not only the well-being of humans, but also that of dogs is often under pressure. The ability to comprehensively measure the welfare of dogs using physiological parameters is often lacking. Therefore, it is important to determine the welfare of dogs by observing their behavior.

Yet, no field-wide consensus or complete overview of observable behaviors to assess dogs' welfare seems to exist. We conducted a systematic review, closely analyzing and categorizing observational measures of a) dog welfare and b) their emotional state as described in the literature. Adhering to the PRISMA guidelines, we searched two major electronic databases (PubMed, Science Direct) and included peer-reviewed articles—published in the last ten years—about observable indicators of the welfare and/or emotional state of dogs. We included 39 studies in total. Based on these studies, nine overarching themes of behavioral indicators could be formulated, of which vocalizations, stress-related behaviors, and interaction with the non-social environment were mostly mentioned in the literature. Most articles described observable indicators that were both positively and negatively framed. Only five articles mentioned some form of validity assessment, while 23 studies mentioned inter-rater reliability measures. We conclude that having more validated observation instruments would be valuable for both research and practice. Although a clear and simple way of observing dog welfare without complicated tools is of great importance, the field would also benefit from instruments using combinations of physiological parameters and observable behaviors to assess dogs' welfare.

## Presentation

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## **LET'S READ TOGETHER: ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AT RACETRACK OF LA PLATA CITY , ARGENTINA**

Mariana Eva Kienast<sup>1,2</sup>, [Daniela Balduzzi](#)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of La Plata, La Plata, Argentina. <sup>2</sup>IAC La Plata. Servicios Asistidos con Animales, La Plata, Argentina. <sup>3</sup>Tierra de Encuentro, Pilar, Argentina

### **Abstract**

**Background:** Animal Assisted Education (AAE) have a great developed used to support in reading and writing difficulties. Upon detecting the difficulties observed in the basic literacy of the population of children in vulnerable situations (mainly due to socio-economic status), a university extension project of the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences of the UNLP proposes a comprehensive work program, which, based on a multidisciplinary team, begins to develop educational strategies with innovative techniques. This is how the program Let's read together was created, based at the La Plata Racecourse, that provides facilities and horses for our project.

**Method:** We use in our program of AAE based on EAGALA /HorsePowered Reading , that is a model of equine assisted education that integrates social-emotional learning with academics. Students see and experience reading with their entire mind, body, and emotions by creating metaphors for the skills involved in reading.

**Results:** The application of this experiential methodology has successfully achieved the inclusion of children with various difficulties, such as intellectual development, domestic violence, abandonment, among others, by working from equity with each of them, considering their individualities. Participating students successfully reintegrated with formal education, becoming literate and maintaining their attendance to date.

**Contributions:** This programme give the opportunity to achieve initial literacy in children from vulnerable populations. Helping to avoid illiteracy and the path to criminality in adulthood.

### **Presentation**

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### **Poster**

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## **An Italian survey on therapy dog personality and dog-handler relationship**

Alberto Mair<sup>1</sup>, Luca Martelli<sup>2</sup>, [Marta De Santis](#)<sup>1</sup>, Diletta Fornasiero<sup>2</sup>, Lorena Filugelli<sup>1</sup>, Simona Normando<sup>3</sup>, Franco Mutinelli<sup>1</sup>, Laura Contalbrigo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Reference Centre for Animal Assisted Interventions, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Legnaro (PD), Italy. <sup>2</sup>Epidemiology and Risk Analysis in Public Health, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Legnaro (PD), Italy. <sup>3</sup>Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science, Università degli Studi di Padova, Legnaro (PD), Italy

## Abstract

Therapy dogs involved in animal assisted interventions (AAIs) can be a valuable support for individuals with physical or psychological difficulties. The effectiveness of the intervention is influenced by the functioning of the dog-handler dyad. In Italy, handlers who have completed the requisite training are registered on the 'Digital Pet' platform. This study aimed to construct a general profile of the Italian population of therapy dogs and handlers, to investigate the mechanisms underlying the dog-handler relationship, and to help elucidate the factors that contribute to the efficacy of AAI teams.

We administered a survey to 809 handlers registered on Digital Pet. The survey included information on the dyad, an Italian translation of the C/DORS to assess the relationship between the dog and the owner (in this case, the handler), and of the C-BARQ to assess the dog's personality. The 240 respondents were 84.3% female and 15.7% male, while the dogs were 66.28% female (57.7% spayed) and 33.72% male (18.66% neutered). The factor analysis extracted six factors from the C/DORS questionnaire and 14 factors from the C-BARQ. Some of the factors of the two questionnaires were correlated, while some were influenced by certain individual characteristics of the dyad. A more comprehensive understanding of these elements may prove beneficial in anticipating the dynamics of the dyad during DAIs.

These preliminary results are part of a multimodal analysis of the dog personality and dog-handler relationship, that will be deepened further with behavioural and hormonal observations.

**Funding:** Italian Ministry of Health (RC IZSVe 08/22).

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## Dogs in child and adolescent psychotherapy: Effects on therapy motivation and compliance, treatment satisfaction and therapeutic relationship

Suzanne Martin<sup>1,2</sup>, Wanda Arnskötter<sup>1</sup>, Susanne Walitza<sup>2</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>2</sup>Psychiatric University Hospital, Zürich, Switzerland

## Abstract

Background:

Psychotherapy research has shown therapy motivation and therapeutic alliance as important predictors of treatment success. Animals are known to be both, highly motivating and alliance building in context of animal-assisted therapy (AAT). However, still little is known about underlying mechanisms.

Aim of this study is to investigate the effects of the presence of a dog on therapy motivation, treatment satisfaction and the therapeutic relationship. We want to investigate how the dog should be integrated and if it makes a difference if the dog is simply present or has an active part within the therapy.

Methods:

150 participants aged 9 to 17 years are randomly assigned to one of three conditions "no dog", "dog present without active role", "dog actively included in therapeutic context" in a therapeutic individual setting.

Results:

Initial results of a qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews with three participants have shown that the presence of the dog accelerates relationship building and promotes openness towards therapy, but also depends on type of involvement of the dog. Quantitative data analysis of three therapists and seven participants to investigate the influence of the presence of a dog on therapy motivation has shown no direct influence on the motivation of therapists and participants, but a positive preference for the presence of a dog in therapy is recognizable.

Discussion:



## Presentation

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## The Effects of Ear Shape in Dogs on the Trustworthiness of People: A Survey-Based Explorative Study

[Sophia Engelter](#)<sup>1</sup>, Liz Grinspoon<sup>2</sup>, Janine Illgen<sup>1</sup>, Lisa Klueen<sup>3,2</sup>, Roger Strong<sup>4</sup>, Laura Germino<sup>3,2</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>2</sup>McLean Hospital, Belmont, USA. <sup>3</sup>Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA. <sup>4</sup>The Many Brains Project, Belmont, USA

### Abstract

**Background:** This study explores whether the ear shape of dogs accompanying a person affects the perceived trustworthiness of that individual.

**Methods:** Participants completed an online survey and rated pre-specified traits of a person accompanied by one of 10 dogs with either pointy ( $n=5$ ) or floppy ears ( $n=5$ ). Ratings used a 4-point Likert scale. The person's trustworthiness was the primary outcome. Further outcomes included sympathy, friendliness, and readiness to contact. The effect of participants' age and gender was also asserted. A *Cumulative Link Mixed Model* was used to investigate the association between the type of dog ears (floppy vs. pointy) and the perceived ratings for the person next to the dog.

**Results:** A total of 733 participants (median age 33 years [range 18-89 years], 57% female, 40% male, 3% nonbinary) completed the online survey. The mean trustworthiness was 2.71 ( $SD = 0.81$ ) when accompanied by floppy-eared dogs, which was significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than when accompanied by pointy-eared dogs ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ). This effect was consistent across younger and older age groups and for female and with a statistical trend also for male raters. When with a floppy-eared dog, the individual also received significantly higher ratings in friendliness, sympathy, and readiness to contact than the person accompanied by a pointy-eared dog.

**Conclusion:** Results suggest that a person is perceived as more trustworthy when presented next to a floppy-eared dog. These results may increase the understanding of dogs as potential bridge builders in a therapeutic setting.

## Presentation

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## Impact of Dog-Assisted Physiotherapy on Gross Motor Skills and Motivation in Pediatric Patients with Down Syndrome

[Ivonne Daniela Montañez Rojas](#)<sup>1</sup>, Abdiel Guadalupe Rubio Bautista<sup>1</sup>, Rubí Idalia Guillén Vázquez<sup>2</sup>, Alejandra Abigail Vera Sánchez<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ApapáChame Centro de Rehabiliación Infantil, Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo, Mexico. <sup>2</sup>CENTRO DE REHABILITACIÓN E INCLUSIÓN INFANTIL TELETÓN HIDALGO, Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo, Mexico

### Abstract

in motivation between the experimental and control groups, with an F-value of 26.15 and a p-value of  $5.39 \times 10^{-13}$ , suggesting that the intervention has a positive impact on motivation. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this increased motivation will contribute to improvements in gross motor skills, supported by preliminary observations, existing literature, and feedback from physiotherapists. Although the final quantitative results are not yet available, qualitative evidence suggests a positive impact on motor skills due to the increased motivation and active participation of the children.

**Keywords:** Down syndrome, dog-assisted physiotherapy, motivation, gross motor skills, group intervention, CRIT Hidalgo.

## Presentation

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# The Impact of Animal-Assisted Trauma-Focused Group Therapy on the Motivation of Children and Adolescents Suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress

[Junia Colruyt](#), Wanda Arnskötter, Karin Hediger  
University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

## Abstract

**Background:** Empirical literature on animal-assisted therapy (AAT) predominantly shows subjective benefits in reducing PTSD symptoms, depression, and anxiety in children and adolescents. Yet its integration into trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) is debated due to concerns about weakening intervention effectiveness. The motivation of children and adolescents for trauma therapy is often low, but animals can increase this motivation to undergo therapy.

**Methods:** Using a quasi-randomized design, we are conducting a 10-week group program comparing the effects of animal-assisted trauma-focused therapy with a standard therapy manual without animals for children and adolescents aged 9 to 17. Motivation is assessed using the SMS-15 questionnaire at baseline, post-program, and at a 4-week follow-up, as well as through visual analogue scales administered before each treatment session.

**Results:** Preliminary findings indicate consistently high motivation levels among participants in the animal-assisted therapy group throughout the program. However, direct comparison with the control group is pending. Nonetheless, observations suggest that the presence of animals enhances motivation for trauma therapy among children and adolescents.

**Discussion:** These initial findings suggest that animal-assisted therapy may provide valuable support for children and adolescents undergoing trauma-focused therapy, potentially increasing their motivation for treatment. Further analysis will elucidate the specific benefits of incorporating animals into therapy settings for future interventions for individuals with PTSD.

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## **Potential impact of the Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) upon behavioural traits and molecular profiling, in both trained dogs and patients.**

Viviana Orsola Giuliano<sup>1</sup>, Luigi Sacchettino<sup>1</sup>, Claudia Gatta<sup>1</sup>, Luigi Avallone<sup>1</sup>, Francesco Napolitano<sup>1,2</sup>, Danila d'Angelo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Production, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy. <sup>2</sup>CEINGE-Biotecnologie Avanzate Franco Salvatore, Naples, Italy

### **Abstract**

Here we evaluated the potential benefits of both children suffering, from autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and dogs involved in AAI program. The activities were scheduled on a weekly base, over a three-month time, and the child-canine interaction was videorecorded. Salivary samples were collected at the established time, at the beginning and three months after. Video material was analysed using "Observer XT" (Noldus) software, specifically developed for behavioral research. Our results documented a cortisol level increase in dogs at the last meeting, compared with the baseline measurement carried out during the first meeting, while oxytocin was found increased in 50% of them. Similarly, higher cortisol levels were also detected in the children at the same time point, whereas oxytocin levels displayed a marked increase in 40% of them, and a slight decrease in the remaining. Overall, our neurochemical data allow us to better understand if dogs might benefit or not from the interaction with patients, and vice-versa (1,2). In addition, proteomic, metabolomic and microbiome profiling, that are under investigation, will allow us to identify molecular markers, potentially modulated by the AAI programs, in both ASD children and the enrolled dogs.

### **References**

1. *Glenk LM and Sandra Foltin S, 2021. doi.org/10.3390/vetsci8100226;*
2. *Foss CHE., doi:10.1079/abwcases.2023.0028.*

### **Presentation**

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

### **Poster**

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42

## **Empowerment Through Connection: A Dog Training Program for At-Risk Youth in the COVID Era**

Jai Oni Dane

Pepperdine University, Malibu, USA. K9 Youth Alliance, Pasadena, USA

### **Abstract**

This abstract focuses on a shift of harnessing the therapeutic potential of human-animal interaction, specifically through a dog training program tailored for at-risk youth. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated

existing challenges for vulnerable populations, K9 Youth Alliance program pivoted from its traditional model in helping at-risk youth and continues to serve as a beacon of resilience and hope.

The program's foundation lies in the profound bond between humans and dogs, leveraging this connection to foster personal growth and skill development among youth participants. Through structured training sessions, participants not only acquire valuable dog training skills but also cultivate essential life skills such as responsibility, empathy, and effective communication.

In the traditional setting, key components of the program include hands-on training sessions led by experienced instructors, opportunities for participants to build relationships with shelter dogs, and tailored humane education curriculum. Importantly, the program operated within the context of COVID-19 safety protocols, ensuring the well-being of both participants and animals.

Preliminary findings suggest significant positive outcomes, including improved self-esteem, enhanced social skills, and a greater sense of purpose among participants. Moreover, the program's impact extends beyond individual participants, fostering a sense of community and belonging among at-risk youth.

This abstract highlights the transformative potential of human-animal interaction programs, particularly in times of crisis. While the program continues to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 era, programs must continue to empower at-risk youth to thrive despite adversity and forge meaningful connections with the world around them.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

## Poster

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**43**

# Unleashing Transformation: The Impact of Dog Training Programs on Formerly Incarcerated Individuals who have Experienced Crisis and Trauma

Jai Oni Dane

Pepperdine University, Malibu, USA

## Abstract

This abstract investigates the transforming potential of dog training programs for those who have gone from incarceration to reintegration into society. This research digs into the varied benefits of such programs, with a focus on the unique setting of formerly incarcerated individuals and, specifically, dog training programs. It draws on a blend of empirical research and qualitative insights to demonstrate the substantial influence of these endeavors on emotional regulation, social reintegration, and personal growth. Participants in these programs learn valuable skills like patience, empathy, and responsibility through controlled interactions with therapy dogs, all of which are required for successful reintegration into society. Furthermore, the link developed between participants and their canine develops a sense of purpose, companionship, and unconditional acceptance, which helps to alleviate the stigma and loneliness individuals with criminal history frequently face. This abstract promotes the widespread use of canine-assisted interventions as integral components of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for formerly incarcerated individuals by examining the intersection of dog training programs and trauma-informed care within the context of reentry programs. Finally, this study emphasizes the ability of dog training programs to catalyze substantial transformations and empower individuals to embark on a road toward a positive, rewarding future after incarceration. This study aims to utilize a quantitative ethnographic approach once the data collection process has been approved and completed.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

## **Animal assisted interventions: designing programs for the general public and for neurodivergent groups**

George Mosoia<sup>1,2</sup>, Alexandra Gecea<sup>1</sup>, Amalia Cosmina Iancu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dog Assist Association, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. <sup>2</sup>Pet Partners, Bellevue, USA

### **Abstract**

Animal assisted interventions programs have a wide range of beneficiaries and purposes, from recreational and educational, to helping those in need: physical, emotional, psychological.

With more than 10 years of experience of designing and delivering programs in the community, Dog Assist Association's team consisting of a canine and alpaca assisted interventions specialist, a psychologist and a physiotherapist will guide the participants to understand how to design a program, how to set up objectives and sessions and how to engage a therapy animals in specific tasks in order to reach the set goals, all these while having in mind the well-being and welfare of the therapy animal.

Consisting of presentations, case studies and practical exercises including interacting with therapy animals, the workshop will help participants get a deeper understanding of how animal assisted interventions work and can be designed for the general public but also for specific disabilities, deficiencies and difficulties, having a multidisciplinary approach.

### **Presentation**

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.

### **Poster**

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## **Prevent negative impact of equine-assisted interventions on equine welfare: an innovative pilot experience of combined cyclic use of equines in a social farming setting.**

Francesca Raisi, Clemente Maria Forni, Serena Adamelli

ASD APS I'M Possible accredited Center for Animal-Assisted Interventions (Digital Pet National Registry), Modena, Italy

### **Abstract**

Mental health problems especially among children and teenagers arose in the post-pandemic era. In our specialized center we witnessed a progressive increase in the complexity of AAI (user's level of psychological distress and psychomotor impairment) with risk of negative consequences on the animal's workload and welfare, especially referred to horses. Research already suggests potential imbalances in the cost-benefit relationship, with human client benefits at the possible expense of equids.

In our experience we witnessed physical damage, in particular a reduction in the muscle mass of the involved horses. To maintain our AAI's quality and ensure animal welfare, we documented a bi-weekly cycles rotation for each horse, based on 5 areas (similar to the concept of "crop rotation") in social farming:

1. Agricultural work: supporting specific crop operations, horses perform a functional muscle training and maintain an optimal psycho-physical condition.
2. Carriage attacks: through this sport discipline, horses work with higher rhythms and improves physical and motor ability.

5. Psychophysical recovery: each horse is guaranteed a cyclical recovery period to rest and ensure the best psychophysical condition.

The model links both multifunctionality in agriculture to social innovation and relieves equids psychophysical stress. Anyway behavioral and physiological parameters need further to be assessed to determine the effects of our rotation model/this model.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

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## The ANÍMATE Foundation: therapies and education assisted with a wide range of animals in South Chile

[Heinrich von Baer](#), Krisly Vásquez

Fundación ANÍMATE de Terapias y Educación asistidas con Animales, Temuco, Chile

## Abstract

Excepting some important experiences with dogs and horses, human-animal interventions are still little known in Chile.

Between 18% - 20% of Chile's population has some kind of disability. In our region La Araucanía there are about 160,000 disable people, mostly socially vulnerable and on waiting lists, without access to continuous support services.

This motivated us in 2020 to create our Foundation, based on the Educational Farm "Llamas del Sur", located 30 minutes from the regional capital Temuco, where we have almost all species of domestic animals: chicken, rabbits, pigs, sheep, goats, llamas, alpacas, cattle, horses and donkeys.

Our team of eight therapists is formed by part-time Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists, Psychologists and Equine Coach, most of them with postgraduate degrees in animal-assisted therapy.

Since 2021 we are an IAHAIO associate member.

In addition to the farm's natural environment, we have large indoor therapy rooms, allowing us to run continuous sessions during bad weather.

Our intervention model is aimed at children, adolescents, adults, elderly, their families and caregivers, from municipalities, schools and businesses (children of their workers).

Our main financial sources are public and private competitive funds, supporting socially vulnerable beneficiaries (mainly children), and rarely the transportation and the Foundation's fixed costs.

We have collaboration agreements with three universities, with one of which we will offer an elective introductory course in animal-assisted therapies and education, within the framework of the One Health-One Welfare approach.

## Presentation

Oral presentation - 20 minutes (15-minute oral presentation, followed by 5 minutes for questions)

## Poster

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# The accessibility of migrants to use equine-assisted therapy for trauma treatment associated with PTSD.

Caroline Erviksæter  
HVL, KJØLSDALEN, Norway

## Abstract

The advantage of using horses for this patient group is that language, religion, and culture are put aside, the horse is open and not judgmental. It is also important for PTSD patients as there may be a barrier to putting words to what they have experienced. The horse can then be a good conversationalist, providing security and warmth. Nor does the horse exude any threat or malice.

Before being able to explore this, we want to use a qualitative design and semi-structured interviews with an interview guide. Here we want to look at the part that is equine-assisted therapy regardless of whether the patient is treated with other forms of therapy such as cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, and other forms used for PTSD disorders.

The interview group consists of employees at institutions, treatment homes, private actors, and patients undergoing treatment. The patient doesn't need to be treated with equine-assisted therapy as it is initially important to find out its availability.

The interview guide must be designed so that language does not hurt the examination, it should be designed so that you can get good answers and not make the interviewee feel confused and not have the opportunity to express themselves correctly.

By using the term migrants, it is shielded to those persons who have fled from war.

Trauma is also described as PTSD's experience of war and flight.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

## Poster

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## Motivation in Youth Trauma Therapy: Animal Assisted vs. Control Group

Junia Colruyt<sup>1</sup>, Lelia Blattner<sup>1</sup>, Wanda Arnskötter<sup>1</sup>, Karin Hediger<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>2</sup>University of Lucern, Lucern, Switzerland

## Abstract

**Background:** Empirical literature on animal-assisted therapy (AAT) predominantly shows subjective benefits in reducing PTSD symptoms, depression, and anxiety in children and adolescents. Yet its integration into trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) is debated due to concerns about weakening intervention effectiveness. The motivation of children and adolescents for trauma therapy is often low, but animals can increase this motivation to undergo therapy.

**Methods:** Using a quasi-randomized design, we are conducting a 10-week group program comparing the effects of animal-assisted trauma-focused therapy with a standard therapy manual without animals for children and adolescents aged 9 to 17. Motivation is assessed using the SMS-15 questionnaire at baseline, post-program, and at a 4-week follow-up, as well as through visual analogue scales administered before each treatment session.

**Results:** Preliminary findings indicate consistently high motivation levels among participants in the animal-assisted therapy group throughout the program. However, direct comparison with the control group is pending. Nonetheless, observations

Discussion: These initial findings suggest that animal-assisted therapy may provide valuable support for children and adolescents undergoing trauma-focused therapy, potentially increasing their motivation for treatment. Further analysis will elucidate the specific benefits of incorporating animals into therapy settings for future interventions for individuals with PTSD.

## Presentation

Poster presentation (Will be physically displayed during the conference and also available electronically on the conference website. Short presentation during a dedicated poster session)

## Poster

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## Acceptance type: Workshop

2

### **How Humane Are We Really? Bridging the Gap between Beliefs and Behaviors with Skills for Understanding and Responding to Animals' Communication Signals**

[Rise VanFleet, PhD](#)

International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy®, Boiling Springs PA, USA

## Abstract

Even a quick look at websites and social media posts about human-animal interactions and animal assisted services shows that humans frequently misunderstand and mishandle animals. Even experienced HAI professionals sometimes seem to interact in ways that are not very animal-friendly. Most people involved in HAI would say with complete sincerity that they wish to treat animals humanely. But what does this really mean in terms of our actual behavior? We need to increase awareness of the disconnect between our sincere intentions and our actual behaviors, as well as our impact on the animals we care about. Certain skills help us listen and understand better and become more behaviorally responsive with animals.

This workshop (2 to 3 hours) first looks at the inconsistencies between our intentions and behaviors when it comes to the humane treatment of animals. No one is perfect, and this segment simply raises awareness without criticism or shame. The gap between thinking in generalities and considering details is explored with everyday examples of human-animal interactions. Most of the workshop focuses on domesticated species (dogs, horses, cats) and briefly on two wild species (bears, moose). The importance of ethology and observation for understanding is presented through videos. The workshop then concentrates on human-dog interactions to demonstrate and practice specific skills that are useful in strengthening the link between good intentions and animal-responsive behaviors. The workshop includes brief lectures, video, demonstrations, and small group skills practice. (If non-assistance dogs are present, I can do some live demonstrations, too).

## Presentation

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.

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### **Recommendations for and Implementation of Uniform Terminology in Animal-Assisted Services (AAS)**



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## Abstract

The range of services involving animals benefiting people, often described as “animal-assisted interventions” (AAIs), has been plagued with confusing and inconsistent terminology compromising the development of the field in terms of establishing agreed standards of practice, qualifications, and competencies, and adopting good animal welfare practices. The lack of uniform terminology prevents meaningful and clear bodies of research. Establishing internationally agreed upon uniform terminology is crucial to more accurately reflect the key features of different approaches, to define the scope and competencies for different service providers and their animals, to provide transparency about services for recipients, to ensure the appropriate preparation, training, and support of the animals that work with them, and to encourage research that will contribute to the development of ways in which the inclusion of animals will benefit humans, while ensuring ethical practices towards both animal and human. The recommendations that we present are the result of an international work group that convened over the course of two years. The aim of these proposals is to set clear expectations and boundaries for each specialty of practice, without compromising the richness and diversity of each approach. The adoption of a new umbrella term and its categories is intended to improve clarity for all involved in the receipt and delivery of services, as well as for those who study their effects. A discussion will be held among participants to discover ways to disseminate the new terminology, aid its implementation, and understand how to circumvent hurdles to implementation that might exist.

## Presentation

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.

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## Minimum standards for research in the field of Animal Assisted Services (AAS), Human Animal Interaction (HAI) and/or the Human Animal Bond (HAB)

Karin Hediger<sup>1,2</sup>, Joni Delanoëij<sup>3,4,5</sup>, Anne Barnfield<sup>6</sup>, Marta De Santis<sup>7</sup>, Anne McBride<sup>8</sup>, Alina Rusu<sup>9</sup>, Machteld van Dierendonck<sup>10,11,12</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. <sup>2</sup>Open University, Haarlem, Netherlands. <sup>3</sup>Work and Organisation Studies, Faculty of Economics and Business, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium. <sup>4</sup>Research Foundation Flanders (FWO Vlaanderen), Brussels, Belgium. <sup>5</sup>International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO), global, United Kingdom. <sup>6</sup>Department of Psychology, Brescia University College, the University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada. <sup>7</sup>National Reference Centre for Animal Assisted Interventions, Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie, Legnaro (PD), Italy. <sup>8</sup>University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom. <sup>9</sup>Faculty of Animal Science and Biotechnologies, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. <sup>10</sup>Ethology and Animal Welfare Research Group, Department of Veterinary and Biosciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium. <sup>11</sup>Department of Equine Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands. <sup>12</sup>Faculty of Pharmaceutical, Biomedical and Veterinary Sciences, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

## Abstract

The working group has worked toward a draft that aims to facilitate best practices regarding research on AAS/HAI/HAB and has the scope of human and animal stakeholders. In doing so, it aims to ensure three main aspects: (1) well-being and welfare, safety and comfort of all of the involved humans and animals, (2) quality of fundamental and applied research, and (3) facilitate knowledge and good practice in practitioner's and educator's work. As the standards can be applied to various stages in the research design, they provide an overarching framework referring to various points related to (1) research methodology, (2) human recipients and (3) involved animals.

Applications are the encouragement of: fundamental and applied research to promote evidence-based practice; consistent use of terminology; transparency of treatment procedures and protocols; research that can be readily incorporated into educational curricula and/or practices; dissemination toward those involved in the field; collaboration between researchers, educators and practitioners. Until expected project completion in July 2025, the working group encourages any feedback, allowing for co-creating the research standards. The presentation will focus on the main elements in the framework, highlighting potential issues that may deserve further consideration.

## Presentation

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.

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## The power of human-pet interactions in online video-conferencing psychotherapy with logging app-support for complex trauma-related disorders

Annemiek van Dijke

PARNASSIA GROUP, THE HAGUE, Netherlands. LEIDEN UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTRE, LEIDEN, Netherlands

### Abstract

This workshop focuses on psychotherapy for (complex) PTSD/ DESNOS/ dissociation. By presenting clinical vignettes, theory and research will be combined with clinical practice. Themes are do's and don'ts in an online therapeutic alliance, content of a toolbox for online trauma-treatment, differentiating attachment styles to animals/ people, observing interaction with the pet in daily life, the beneficial influence of nature, and patients' self-regulation styles.

Interestingly, pets have a natural tendency to see and 'nose around' when the owner experiences negative emotions, such as fear or sadness. Studies into the effectiveness of therapists who work 'live' with animals show positive results. We also know from research that pets provide social support and that their presence has a relaxing effect. The patient's pet can be supportive during online trauma treatment. Interaction with the animal can help the patient to continue with the therapy in difficult moments (together we can do this). The pet may help to verbalize difficult stories (the animal keeps me calm, keeps me from dropping out). And cuddling, playing, or walking with the pet after an intensive session can be planned as a reward or comfort. Naturally, the well-being of both patient and pet is always central.

Trauma therapists tend to be hesitant towards treating complex trauma patients fully online. However, research has shown that remote PTSD treatment can be successfully delivered and that a secure alliance can be build. Pets can function as co-therapists in this process. However, some adaption is needed, the how and when will be discussed.

## Presentation

Workshop (2-3-hour workshop on a special interest topic. May include several speakers, interactive discussions and/or practical demonstrations. The submitter is responsible for organising the workshop and all invited speakers need to register for the conference.