IAHAIO International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations

Beyond Training: Building Mutual Trust and Respect with Dogs

20-21 November 2026

ABSTRACTS

FRIDAY 20th NOVEMBER

Session 1: Person-centred, dog-centred: Evolving our services at Dogs for Good

3pm-4pm GMT

How do we make sure people get the support that is right for them - while also prioritising dog wellbeing? This session explores how Dogs for Good is changing the way we deliver our services, which include assistance dogs, AAS and other forms of support. Using research and case studies, we'll look at what this means in practice, and why finding the right fit for both people and dogs is at the heart of what we do.

Selina Gibsone, UK

Selina has worked with dogs and people for over 25 years. She is Research & Development Manager at Dogs for Good, where she develops new initiatives and evaluates projects in assistance dogs and animal-assisted services (AAS). She chairs the board of Animal Assisted Services International (AASI) and has helped shape its standards of practice. She previously worked at Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and ran her own dog training and behaviour business. She holds a BSc (Hons) in Animal Biology, an MSc in Companion Animal Behaviour Counselling, and an MSc in Psychology, and has trained as a transformative coach. Her research has spanned wolf behaviour, stimulus control in dogs, and anxiety transfer between people and dogs.

Session 2: When training doesn't transfer: Rethinking impulse control training in dogs

4pm-5pm GMT

Improving canine welfare requires an empirical understanding of how dogs experience their interactions with us and how our practices affect them. As comparative psychologists, we believe our research should contribute directly to that goal, including by putting commonly accepted assumptions about dogs to the test. One such common assumption is that impulse control can be strengthened like a muscle: practicing behaviours such as “wait” or “leave it” should improve a dog’s ability to exercise impulse control in other contexts. Across a series of studies, we have tested this claim using interventions ranging from a novice training game (“It’s Yer Choice”) to an advanced training protocol (Karen Overall’s Relaxation Protocol) and even pharmacological intervention (dogs on versus off SSRIs). Despite these very different approaches, we consistently find no evidence that any of these interventions lead to widespread impulse control improvements. We consider what these findings reveal about canine impulse control and, more broadly, how testing assumptions about dogs can inform evidence-based approaches to their welfare.

Ellen Furlong, USA

Ellen Furlong is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Transylvania University and a specialist in canine cognition and behaviour. She earned her PhD at The Ohio State University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale, studying dogs and nonhuman primates. Ellen leads a research group exploring cognition in dogs, chimpanzees and orangutans, has published widely, and is the author of *Decoding Dogs: Inside the Canine Mind* and *Learning and Behavior*. Her work has been featured internationally, including in ABC Australia’s *A Dog’s World*. Ellen serves on the boards of IAHAIO and the Primate Rescue Center and is a science advisor for Pack Animals, a start-up focused on human–canine wellbeing.

Julia Whorton, USA

Julia is a neuroscience student at Transylvania University graduating in December. She works at the Lexington Humane Society in the behaviour department and aims to pursue a PhD studying dog cognition.

Katherine Judy, USA

Katherine is a pre-vet biology major graduating in May of 2027 at Transylvania. In the last year, Julia and Katherine have presented their research at the Comparative Cognition and Animal Behaviour Society annual meetings.

Session 3: An evolving relationship: Best practice application and practical considerations

5pm-6pm GMT

In this facilitated, unscripted conversation, a group of international professionals familiar with dogs, their behaviour and training will address contemporary questions around the human-dog relationship. Animal-assisted work with dogs is becoming increasingly popular – and comes with a high ethical and professional responsibility. How do we create encounters on equal footing and what does that mean? Can we ensure effective training outcomes that are only based on voluntary participation and trust? Are evaluation methods and expectations of working dogs changing? Can we guarantee that animal welfare isn't just a concept, but a practice lived every day? These core questions will be discussed by the panel that will base their input on current findings from behavioural biology, ethology, ethics, and most of all practice. This engaging hour offers space for exchange, for reflection and an open discussion that will include input from attendees via the chat function.

Michael Kaufmann (USA) with Sandra Foltin (Germany), Stephanie Grath (Germany), Jane Kopelman, (USA), Eddie Lee (Hong Kong) and Anice Nascimento (Brazil)

Michael Kaufmann is President of IAHAIO and Farm & Wildlife Director at Green Chimneys, where he leads nature-based therapeutic and educational programmes through the Sam and Myra Ross Institute. With a career spanning humane education, animal-assisted services and Green Care, he has held senior roles at the ASPCA, American Humane Association and PATH Intl., and has long contributed to IAHAIO's committees, conferences and white papers. Michael has served on multiple boards in the equine-assisted and human–animal interaction fields and advises international centres in anthrozoology and animal-assisted services.

Sandra Foltin, Germany

Sandra Foltin is an interdisciplinary scholar and practitioner specialising in Human–Animal Interaction, Animal-Assisted Services, veterinary behavioural science and ethics. With academic training in biology, psychology and law, she integrates scientific, ethical and legal perspectives into evidence-based practice. Her work spans university teaching, curriculum development, international lecturing and science communication, with a strong focus on trauma-informed approaches, welfare-centred canine behaviour, and ethical standards in AAS. She is an active contributor to research, professional training and international collaboration in the human–animal field.

Stephanie Grath, Germany

Stephanie Grath is a veterinarian, behaviour specialist and long-time dog-sport practitioner with decades of hands-on experience across multiple breeds and working disciplines. After studying veterinary medicine at LMU Munich, she built a career focused on behavioural therapy, running a mobile veterinary practice, dog school and boarding facility while teaching internationally as a speaker, seminar leader and trainer mentor. Stephanie is an expert assessor for dangerous dogs,

assistance dogs and guide-dog teams, and has volunteered for over 15 years with visiting-dog programmes. A certified ISAAT specialist in Animal-Assisted Intervention, she also serves as a senior staff veterinarian in the Bundeswehr reserve. Her training philosophy blends modern behavioural science, positive reinforcement and ethical, welfare-centred practice.

Jane Kopelman, USA

Jane Kopelman is a highly experienced dog trainer and behaviour specialist with more than 20 years' experience in dog training, behaviour counselling, shelter outreach, and animal-assisted interventions. She is the owner of *All About Dogs* in New York and has evaluated and trained hundreds of therapy dog teams. Jane serves as a therapy dog evaluator for Pet Partners and consultant to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center's therapy dog programme. Her career has included roles with the ASPCA, service on the boards of Animal Care Centers of New York City and Angel on a Leash, and leadership of national shelter outreach initiatives. She is also a respected national speaker on animal welfare, sheltering, and community outreach.

Eddie Lee, Hong Kong

Eddie Lee is member of the IAHAIO Board, a psychological counsellor, certified professional dog trainer and behaviour consultant. He was the first Pet Partners International Team Evaluator in Hong Kong. He founded the Hong Kong Institute of Animal-Assisted Interventions, delivering therapy-animal programmes across education, social services and special needs. A pioneer in developing academic AAS programs in Hong Kong, Eddie teaches at Hong Kong Metropolitan University, the University of Hong Kong and Lingnan University. His work focuses on advancing practitioner standards, animal welfare and public understanding of AAI.

Anice Nascimento, Brazil

Anice Nascimento, a IAHAIO Regional Representative, is a physiotherapist and AAI practitioner in Brazil who began her work in 2004 as a volunteer in a nursing-home programme. She has since completed extensive national and international training, becoming an AASI full member and serving on its Education Committee. Her work spans paediatric neurofunctional physiotherapy, assistance-dog training and research in AATx. Anice presented at the 2025 IAHAIO Conference and now leads a multidisciplinary group promoting high standards in AAS across Brazil, delivering webinars, workshops and developing a 50-hour handler training course to strengthen professional practice.

Session 4: Four questions that give social working dogs a voice

6pm-7pm GMT

Before a social working dog enters a classroom, meets a participant, or joins a therapy session, we usually have a plan. We know what we hope to achieve, which activities we have prepared, and how much time we have. But what does the dog want? This presentation explores how we can give social working dogs a meaningful say in their working lives through four simple questions: Are you ready? Do you want to? May I? Are you done? Through practical examples and relevant research on choice, control, and therapy dog welfare, we examine how these questions can guide preparation, participation, touch, and the opportunity to finish. We consider how handlers can recognise each dog's communication, respect their boundaries, and create opportunities for positive experiences in therapeutic, educational, and supportive settings. Participants will gain a practical framework for bringing the dog's preferences into everyday decisions while maintaining the handler's responsibility for welfare and safety. The central message is simple: giving dogs a voice means allowing their answers to influence what happens next.

Sara Karlberg

Sara Karlberg, a key figure in developing Sweden's standards for training dog teams in Animal Assisted Services will advocate for transitioning toward a more consent-based partnership with dogs. Following their presentations, they will field questions and engage in a dialogue with attendees.

Tess Erngren

Tess Erngren is an animal behaviourist, psychotherapy dog handler, founder of GoodDog and CEO of the Norwegian Therapy Dog School. She holds a bachelor's degree in Applied Psychology, is pursuing a master's in Environmental Psychology and is a Level 3 certified TAG teacher. She also created the training concept The Dog is The Boss, promoting dogs' choice and voice. Her work combines animal ethics, human psychology and animal-assisted interventions. An international speaker, Tess shares her expertise in communication, choice and control, and received the 2021 Change Makers Medal of Honor.

SATURDAY 21st NOVEMBER

Session 5: From agency to resilience: Supporting confidence, competence and coping

3pm-4pm GMT

Agency and enrichment aren't luxuries—they're biological necessities that shape resilience, emotional regulation, learning, and behaviour. In this talk, Dr. Spaulding digs into the science behind agency, choice, and enrichment. Attendees will learn how agency drives increased confidence and stress coping skills, ultimately leading to animals who are more resilient and

easier to live and work with. Walk away with a clearer, science-grounded framework that reshapes how you approach therapy and assistance dog training and interactions.

Kristina Spaulding, USA

Dr. Kristina Spaulding is a Certified Applied Animal Behaviourist with over 25 years of experience blending scientific insight with practical dog-training expertise. She holds a PhD in Biopsychology and now educates professionals through the Science Matters Academy of Animal Behaviour, bridging research and practice at conferences worldwide. A skilled teacher and award-winning educator, she co-leads the Carefree Companion Certification Program and teaches for the IAABC Foundation and Virginia Tech. Author of *The Stress Factor in Dogs*. Her work focuses on stress, neurobiology, cognition and canine well-being. Dr. Spaulding serves as Vice President of the IAABC Foundation Board.



Session 6: Whose Choice is it? Consent and cognitive freedom in everyday life with dogs

4pm-5pm GMT

This session brings the principles of consent and cognitive freedom into the home of every dog. We will be examining what consent means in practical terms across daily life, from handling and grooming to walks, visitors and vet visit, and how owners can learn to read and respond to a dog's yes, no and not sure. Drawing on current understanding of canine cognition and emotion, it makes the case that giving dogs more agency produces calmer, more resilient companions rather than the chaos many owners fear. Attendees will leave with a simple framework for recognising choice, offering it safely, and honouring it, along with real examples they can use with their dogs that evening.

Jo Middleton, UK

Jo Middleton is a UK-based canine behaviour specialist, educator and Principal of the International School for Canine Psychology & Behaviour, Director of Canine Principles and heading up the International Institute for Canine Eghics (IICE). With more years than she would care to share in ethical, science-led canine education, Jo is best known for her calm, cognitive-led approach, Jo focuses on the psychology behind behaviour, helping guardians and pet pros understand what their dog is feeling, not just what they’re doing. Her work centres on safety, neurobiology and ethical practice, empowering families to move from crisis management to genuine rehabilitation.

Jo has supported thousands of professionals and pet parents worldwide through her courses, consultations and public speaking, and is a passionate advocate for force-free, humane training methods grounded in behavioural science.

Session 7: Investigating two-way human-dog communication using soundboards

5pm-6pm GMT

In the late 20th century, Animal Language Studies attempted to teach non-human animals human-like communication. Early efforts with apes, dolphins, and parrots using sign language, or lexigrams had some success, but were criticized for small sample sizes, poor methodology, and lack of ecological validity. Recently, research in canine cognition has shown that dogs outperform non-human primates in understanding human cues such as pointing and facial expressions, and they live naturally with humans, making them ideal subjects for large-scale, long-term studies in more ecologically valid scenarios. Modern advances in citizen science and video technology have enabled distributed studies across many households, addressing the limitations of earlier single-subject experiments.

In this talk I report on the project we launched in 2021 that has become the world's largest citizen science project on interspecies communication, involving over 10,000 participants across 47 countries. Pets were trained by their owners through augmented interspecies communication (AIC) devices composed of buttons that when pressed reproduce prerecorded human words or phrases. Our project collects survey data about the dogs and households, automated logging of button use, video recordings from households, both in-person and remote experimental protocols that are preregistered and tests training protocols to investigate dog cognition at scale.

Federico Rossano

Federico Rossano is an Associate Professor of Cognitive Science at the University of California, San Diego, where he directs the Comparative Cognition Lab. He studies the evolution of social cognition, communication, and intelligence across humans and other animals, with a particular focus on primates and companion animals.

His research combines experiments, naturalistic observation, large-scale behavioural datasets, and machine-learning approaches to understand how animals communicate, interact, and solve problems. Current projects examine animal communication, social relationships, individual differences in intelligence, and the emergence of exceptional abilities. He leads a large-scale research program investigating companion animals trained to use soundboard buttons to communicate with their caregivers.



Session 8: Implementation: future trends and opportunities

7pm-8pm GMT

Clare Thomas-Pino, UK with Christine Olsen, Norway, and keynote speakers

Clare Thomas-Pino is a Senior Lecturer in Human–Animal Interaction at Hartpury University, where she leads the Master's programme in Animal-Assisted Counselling and Psychology. With academic training in psychology, animal behaviour and mental health counselling, she has over two decades of experience in nature-based and animal-assisted services, integrating animal behaviour, welfare and human wellbeing. Clare has taught and developed programmes across multiple US and UK universities, contributed extensively to research and professional standards in AAI and anthrozoology, and serves on several boards including HHRF and SCAS. Now based in Gloucestershire, she brings her long-standing commitment to ethical, evidence-informed human–animal interaction to her role on the IAHAIO Board.

Christine Olsen

Christine Olsen is an ethologist and public health scientist with more than two decades of experience in human–animal interaction, animal-assisted services and animal welfare. She is the founder and R&D Director of Dyrebar Omsorg and the International Community of Anthrozoology, where she develops education programmes, certification systems and research-informed practice standards. Her work spans randomized controlled trials on AAI, extensive teaching across universities and professional sectors, and international collaboration to strengthen quality, ethics and welfare in AAS. Christine is a frequent speaker at global conferences and a leading advocate for evidence-based, welfare-centred human–animal interaction.