

**WHO LET THE DOGS IN: A NARRATIVE EXAMINATION INTO THE NEED
FOR ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTION BASED PROGRAMMING FOR
YOUTH RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTERS**

PAULA A. WRIGHT

Diploma, Criminal Justice, University of the Fraser Valley, 1990
B.A., Canadian University College, 2001

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mother, who has always believed in me, taught me patience, and has always shared my passion for dogs and the comfort, security, and companionship they offer.

Abstract

Throughout my career working with youth, it has been my dream to use animals for therapy in residential treatment settings. This project is an effort to make that dream a reality. It is a journey through the events and experiences in my life that have shaped my views. What I have learned is the foundation for a proposed youth residential treatment program. A combination of personal experiences and opinions and current research frame the platform on which this project is based. The goal is to mesh the practical with the theoretical to propose an idea for a treatment center. This project includes descriptions and personal views of organizations that employed me. Alternate names have been used to identify these programs.

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Chapter 1. Residential Treatment Centers and Animal Assisted Interventions in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia

Residential programming for youth at risk and young offenders is a resource that is sporadically found throughout the province of British Columbia. Because of political changes, many programs have closed throughout the province over the last 10 years. Provincially run young offender camp programs such as Logan Lake, Center Creek, and Campbell River, as well as privately run programs, such as House of Concorde, and Maple Ridge Wilderness Program, have all been shut down for different reasons.

When determining the need for beds and services, factors to consider include the crime rate, the number of youth in custody, and the number of youth waiting for care. Informal reports have shown that many youth are waiting for treatment homes and placements; however, the commitment to invest in alternative residential treatments appears to be more important in some regions than in others.

Currently in British Columbia, there are only 27 residential settings for young offenders. Their level of treatment ranges from detoxification programs, to specialized sex offender programs, to group homes, to aboriginal healing centers. These programs all offer unique and specialized services to their clients.

A directory published by British Columbia's Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) (2009) lists 27 residential programs in all of British Columbia that supply contracted services. The Fraser Region of British Columbia covers an area of 13,361.74 km² (5,159 sq. mi.) between Hope and Greater Vancouver, with a combined population of approximately 820,000 (City Population, 2006). Out of the 27 residential

treatment programs listed in the MCFD directory, there are currently only four in the Fraser Region. These programs are:

1. AM'UT, located in Chilliwack, is a six-bed co-ed drug and alcohol residential program for self-identifying aboriginal youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years. This program embraces cultural teachings, and provides an in-house school, and a program of approximately 20 weeks in length.
2. Fraser Region Transition Beds provides a maximum of 11 family home placements in the Fraser Region for males and females as an alternative to custody. The families and support staff provide one-on-one support in compliance with the community court orders, participation in positive activities, and assistance in reintegration with family and community. The length of the program is between 30 to 60 days.
3. Waypoint is a male residential drug and alcohol program in Surrey that provides residential substance abuse treatment for male young offenders. There are seven beds in individual family based care homes, with an attached day treatment program at a staffed day center. Treatment programming includes peer and group support, education, life skills, and recreation.
4. Daughters and Sisters Program is a female residential program run by the company that runs Waypoint, and offers the same services.

There were no programs listed for the Fraser Valley region that uses animals as a treatment strategy. It is ironic that a memorable television show like *Neon Rider*, depicting a ranch based treatment program that inspired many people to dream about

opening a youth ranch, was filmed in this region, but no existing treatment programs use animals in therapy.

In a recent conversation (February, 2009), a probation officer, who wishes not to be named, recalls that a ranch program located in Logan Lake had sled dogs cared for and trained by youth, and that the youth could earn the right to drive the sled with the dogs. Unfortunately, this program has shut down and there is little literature about it. Adult facilities that utilize dog programs include the Burnaby women's prison and the Fraser Valley Institution, but there is definitely an absence in the youth system.

There are programs in Canada that use animals in treatment, but not in substantial numbers. In British Columbia, there are places where animals are used in an unofficial manner, (a staff member bringing his or her dog to work), but none have been officially reported. The use of animals in residential treatment is still in an early stage, and seems to be more prominent in the United States and other countries than in Canada.

Numerous ranches and programs in the United States use animals in youth treatment programs, and have experienced great success. These will be discussed later. The youth of the Fraser Region, as well as the rest of British Columbia, would greatly benefit from having a ranch-based residential treatment center that uses animal assisted interventions in addition to life, social, and job skills training, as well as other programming. In the end, it is more efficient to invest in effective interventions and build up our youth, than it is to pay for the long-term incarceration of adults.

Chapter 2. The Path to Here and Now

From an early age, animals, particularly dogs, have inspired me. I have many fond memories of the connections and the camaraderie that I shared with my canine friends. Throughout my childhood and youth, I faced many challenges that came with being raised in a young, single-parent home, and having Attention Deficit Disorder. As an adult, I have come to realize the impact that those around me, including my pets, had on me. They gave me the self- confidence and courage to overcome the challenges that I faced.

My interest in working with youth began right after high school. Shortly after starting university, my initial aspirations of becoming a paramedic, or a conservation officer, were soon replaced with those of becoming a high school gym teacher and counsellor. However, this goal was short lived as the reality of having to study the sciences and attend classes, combined with my newfound freedom, translated into failed classes and wasted student loans. I dropped out of college for a while because of the rocky transition between youth and adulthood.

After a short hiatus, I returned to school to explore my fascination with prisons, with the goal of becoming a correctional officer. As my education in criminal justice continued, and with more exposure to the system, I became less interested in becoming a prison guard. However, it was through this educational path that I discovered my calling to work with youth.

The field of working with youth has always seemed to be a series of stepping stones, working one's way up the ladder, trying to find the perfect job that one enjoys doing, and feeling that one is making a difference, and is happy with one's salary. Historically, working with youth was something an individual did because he or she

loved it, not because it paid well. A person could not get ahead financially by being a youth worker. Because of this, I worked at many different jobs, moving up the pay scale, and taking on different challenges. I took every opportunity to learn and add to my repertoire of skills.

Throughout my career working with youth, I have had the privilege to work at a variety of residential treatment programs, as well as within the school environment. From these experiences I acquired a sense of which settings, programming, and approaches work with youth, and which do not.

I first began working with troubled youth and young offenders as a youth worker for a bail hostel program in the Fraser Valley in the late 1980's. This program inspired me to work with youth at risk. I was not much older than most of the youth with whom I was working. I was 19 and the youth ranged in age from 14 to 16 years.

This program was for adolescents who were placed in a treatment home while they awaited their court date. Attached to this placement was a day work program where youth workers would take the youth to work projects, and accompany them to court. This work program consisted of transporting three to four youth to a job site, which, at the time, was an old homestead on the side of a mountain. As youth workers, we would supervise and work along with the youth. We utilized chainsaws to clear brush, and cut and hauled firewood, using an old Fargo to drive on an overgrown road to another home on the property. In addition to being supervisors, we were also mentors and sounding boards as needed. We served as role models, and helped with problem solving.

For the most part, the youth felt good about the physical work that they accomplished, and were able to build therapeutic relationships with those that worked

with them. It was, in essence, team building in a positive environment, encouraging and working together toward a common goal, regardless of any preconceived notions about each other. This was the first of many jobs that reinforced the importance of building a therapeutic alliance with troubled youth. It made me realize the need for physical work to be part of any programming with youth, and the need to incorporate teamwork, exercise, and provide a sense of accomplishment.

As I reached the end of my college program, I participated in a work practicum position at a facility for boys located in Langley, British Columbia. The House of Concorde (HOC) was an open custody youth attendance program that housed up to approximately 55 young offenders in three cottages and one dorm/remand wing. The program had its own school, gymnasium, indoor swimming pool and sports field. Each cottage had specialized programming. One cottage was for youth charged with sex offences, the second cottage was for substance abusers, and the third cottage was for youth whose offences were less serious. The dorm incorporated a two tiered program, accommodating the more aggressive youth who had behavioural problems as well as remanded youths awaiting trial.

The HOC provided schooling and recreation programs that were second to none. Group counselling, individual counselling, and conflict resolution were areas that were the strengths of the program. This program has since been closed.

Following completion of college, I chose to travel to New Zealand and Australia via the working holiday route. It was in a suburb of Sydney, Australia that I was able to gain experience in working with homeless street children. I had the privilege of being one of the first staff at this residence. The Lodge was an old brick house that was set up to

provide short-term accommodation for homeless or displaced youth who needed a place to stay. It was run by a Christian organization that was optimistic in their endeavour to provide refuge and support. The program provided necessities like shelter and food. Staff assisted the youth in connecting with job agencies, school, and health care workers. Organizations donated tickets to sporting events and other entertainment. I was fortunate enough to accompany the youth to rugby games, as well as the last concert the band, INXS, performed in Australia with their original cast.

Because the residence and program were new, they experienced growing pains. The basic boundaries were set out in the form of curfews, respect for the residence and staff, and a no substance abuse policy. Each youth was assigned a worker. The youth were not required to do any chores, and had little to no responsibilities, other than to be in on time. When they did break the curfew, it was usually forgiven and there were no consistent consequences. It was through working here that I learned that youth need consistency and accountability.

These youth were homeless for many reasons. Some abused drugs and no longer wanted to follow the rules set up at home, while others had a horrendous home life and turned to the streets. Sydney had, at the time, a variety of refuges set up for street children. Some of the youth that arrived at our program had already been through some of these other programs. Some had difficulty following the rules at these residences, and seemed to float between programs, almost as if they were doing the circuit.

I found that some of the youth that had been travelling between places the longest, displayed a sense of entitlement, and came into the lodge with expectations. Although this was not a treatment center, it could be seen that, when working with youth, there

needs to be strong boundaries, personal responsibility, and accountability components in a program. Australia had provided valuable new experiences, and opened my eyes to a different youth population and culture. I spent another six months in Australia before returning home to Alberta.

Arriving back in Canada, I still had the travel bug. Within two weeks of returning, I took a road trip to the Kootenays. On this trip, I secured a job at a youth attendance program that would prove to be the most influential residential program at which I would work. This particular program had a strong impact on my view of residential treatment, and what it should entail. In my opinion, it addressed very well the needs of the youth that it treated, and is one of the few programs at which I worked that is still running today.

The Woods was an open custody youth attendance center for young offenders. At the time, it was a co-ed six-bed program that the youth attended as part of their probation order. This program only accepted individuals convicted of minor crimes, who were on the path to closed custody. They did not admit anyone convicted of sex offences, violent crimes, or arson. This allowed them to fully access community resources, and successfully reintegrate the youth back into community living. Addictions counselling and mental health therapists were also employed in the community.

At the time that I worked for this organization, it was a privilege for the youth to attend the local public school. Not attending school meant doing menial physical labour, and not acquiring any privileges. The program, in its current state, has in-house schooling as part of the programming. The program was based on a token economy system, through which participants could earn different levels of rewards. To graduate from the program,

the youth had to complete a certain number of shifts per week, follow program rules, and attend and participate in programming. This included life skills components, anger management, and conflict resolution, and drug and alcohol awareness, as well as household duties.

The Woods also had a physical fitness and wilderness component to the programming. The youth were required to run a few kilometres every morning before school. Along with running with the youth, the staff also taught camping skills, both winter and summer. Once the youth learned the skills required, they were brought into the mountains and given the opportunity to use the skills they had learned. It was a positive experience for both the staff and the youth, regardless of the weather. Youth who attended this program became more physically fit and learned new life skills that would enable them to pursue a healthier lifestyle once they returned to the community.

One youth that really stood out in my mind was an overweight, aboriginal girl, who came into the program very defiant, threatening to leave, and vowing to fight anyone who stood in her way. She came from a remote reserve, and lived with her mother, who gave in to every demand, and who appeared to be mentally and emotionally younger than she was. Over the next four and a half months, this girl adapted to the program, and accepted the help and support that was offered, which allowed her to experience many successes. She improved in school and was able to gain valuable self-confidence. She worked hard, and lost almost 40 pounds courtesy of the healthy eating regiment, and the emphasis on physical activity. This improved her self-esteem. She surprised everyone when, after reaching the level required to graduate, she decided to stay the full term of six months and continue in the supportive environment, working with her mother to change

the environment at home. She exemplified what the whole program was seeking to achieve.

Another very valuable aspect to this program was that it provided a positive community experience for the youth. Some community projects included cleaning litter from the highways, chopping wood for local campgrounds, and snow removal. The youth, along with the staff, were given the chance to participate in community events such as winter festivals, and received positive recognition through this interaction. No one was aware that this was a group of young offenders; they were just youth helping and having fun.

One winter, they were allowed to volunteer as gate keepers at the downhill races at a local ski hill, and as a sign of appreciation, were given a free day of skiing, including rentals. It was a positive and rewarding experience on many levels. They learned the value of helping others without expecting anything in return; gained a sense of accomplishment in a job well-done; and, in the end, were appreciative of the rewards that resulted. In all my work experiences, I found the most effective treatment was at the Woods center.

Working in a school environment had always intrigued me, and I took a position that lasted almost seven years in a neighbouring East Kootenay town. Becoming a liaison between home and school opened my eyes to the family system, and the impact it had on children and youth. In residential treatment, I was only able to see the end product. I did not witness the environment from which the youth in treatment came, and the path that led them there.

This new position allowed me to do just that. Over the years, the job brought me to both elementary and high schools. Behaviour management in special education programs, counselling youth one-on-one, teaching parenting classes, and community outreach were all duties that I performed. From this viewpoint, I was also able to see deficits in community resources and the lack of services for certain populations.

It was during this time that I was introduced to coaching, and found a new tool in working with youth. Coaching allowed me to find the way to get the best out of a player, change attitudes, and address negativity and turn it into something more positive. It allowed me to learn teamwork, how to promote working together to achieve a goal, and how to be supportive and think about more than oneself. This would transfer over to other aspects of my career. I continued to coach both boys' and girls' volleyball for the next 12 years.

The more that I worked with youth, the stronger my passion grew to develop and start my own treatment ranch. I started to dream about having my own Neon Rider ranch, where troubled youth could learn responsibility, accountability, work ethics, responsibility, and develop self-esteem through the process of working with animals.

The next 10 years of my life would see me going back to school and finishing my degree, and then entering a graduate program. During this time, I would also work at residential treatment centers, both behavioural and addiction based, as well as in school based positions including high school counsellor and family school liaison with a government agency. It was during these years, that I had the opportunity to involve my own dogs in treatment, and use them as tools in working with youth, both in group and individual settings.

While attending university, I worked for a family services agency in central Alberta that owned and operated several youth treatment and assessment centers, including aboriginal specific programming. Most of the programs were six to eight bed co-ed programs offering a variety of different treatments, depending on the setting. The programming mostly consisted of recreation activities, following household rules, and receiving individual and group support from the therapist.

Most of the treatment facilities had in-school programming, with district teachers and assistants coming and teaching on site. For the most part, all the centers had their own in-house therapist who directed part of the program, with a program manager who oversaw all the staff. No time limit was set for how long a youth attended the program.

One particular work site followed a house parent model, and had aboriginal clients ranging from 2 to 17 years. The treatment models in this program changed throughout the years with no apparent fluidity. One year it was a treatment center for aboriginal teens, and the next it included foster beds for children as young as 2 years old.

It was at this agency that I first introduced my dogs into a treatment setting. I had the opportunity to bring my dogs into the residence, and it seemed to change the immediate environment. The mood in the room lightened, with all the youth wanting to pet and walk the dog. One resident, who was a bit withdrawn, came out and interacted with the animals. The dogs appeared to have a positive impact on the therapeutic environment.

From this work experience, I identified what was hindering successful and effective treatment. I felt that the deficiency of structure, and the lack of youth responsibility, accountability, and consistency, had a negative impact. The lack of staff

support in some programs was also a problem. I found that the placement of youth in certain programs was counter-productive, because it sometimes seemed that youth who were not compatible with the program actually had a negative impact on the other children and staff. It appeared that they were placed in the programs to fill beds and generate dollars. This is solely a personal view and opinion, but it is one that really encouraged me to look at the fit of clients into programming, and how that can affect the success of treatment.

Both the residential settings and the school environment had provided for great learning experiences, and helped me gain valuable knowledge. With each job, I would learn new intervention strategies, and be exposed to different behaviours and scenarios. The next path of my journey would take me to northern Alberta to work as a family-school liaison for a government children's services agency.

Working in a northern community in itself brought unique challenges. It was a very busy city with much cultural and social diversity. It was a transitional city as well, with the majority of people coming from somewhere else, and not wanting to stay long. Housing was expensive, and there was lots of money to be made, however, there was a lot of poverty as well. Nevertheless this city did have an abundance of resources for everyone, and part of my job was not only counselling, but also linking families to these resources.

Working for the government had its benefits. They had an impressive professional development program, and I was able to attend seminars and take training. I attended two training seminars that would prove to be valuable in improving my intervention skills.

Both the Why Try facilitator training and the Roots of Empathy program provided skills that I would utilize in the school environment.

I decided to return to central Alberta when I grew tired of the high cost of housing and the isolation of being in the North. Until then, I had mostly worked with youth during my career in the human services field. I decided to take a different type of position, and became a correctional officer at a remand center. This allowed me to witness what can happen to youth if they are not appropriately treated at an earlier age. Of course, people do end up in jail for a variety of reasons, but after talking to some of the inmates; it became evident that for many of them, problems started at an early age.

Armed with my experience and knowledge, I sought to pursue a graduate degree that would help me reach my goal of providing services of my own design. I was accepted to the University of Lethbridge M.Ed. program, and continued to work as a correctional officer while I attended school. I also took on a full-time position as a family-school liaison counsellor for the school district, and worked alternate weekends at a youth residential drug and alcohol treatment program.

While attending university, the direction of my studies was focused on the area of animal-assisted therapy, and how it can be applied to working with youth. It is my goal to take the knowledge gained through academics, and combine it with the practical experience and wisdom gained from years of working with youth in a variety of settings, and develop a youth treatment model.

This endeavour combines my passion for working with youth with my love of animals. A program where youth learn responsibility, and experience unconditional acceptance from an animal is, to me, a valuable catalyst for change. In caring for animals,

empathy and responsibility is required, and in learning this, it is possible for youth to improve their chances for positive change.

Chapter 3. Animal Assisted Interventions as a Therapeutic Connection: A Literature Review

A pet is an island of sanity in what appears to be an insane world. Friendship retains its traditional values and securities in one's relationship with one's pet. Whether a dog, cat, bird, fish, turtle or what have you, one can rely on the fact that one's pet will always remain a faithful, intimate, non-competitive friend — regardless of the good or the ill fortune life brings us (Levinson, quoted in Arkow, n.d.).

Hollywood has attempted to provide us with some insight into the emotional bonds that people have in relation to pets and animals in general. These bonds have been the basis for many movies, depicting just how much animals can work their way into our hearts, and affect our lives. The classic film *Old Yeller*, and the more recent films *My Dog Skip*, or *Milo and Me*, have left viewers teary eyed as a life changing connection ended. Other movies have shown relationships between people and their horses, and even between other animals that one would not expect, such as whales, elephants, wolves, cows, and pigs. Although these are Hollywood creations, they do recognize the emotional bond that can develop between people and animals.

During my youth, I had always had a passion for animals, whether it was caring for a cat, taking care of an injured bird, or working as a stall hand on a horse ranch. However, it was a dog that would have the biggest impact on me. Dogs provided companionship and comfort. A dog was a friend one could bring along to keep one company, and who would be one's protector during one's many adventures. There is a magical connection with a dog that is supportive, and that can sense how one is feeling. It

is this connection, combined with the right therapeutic tools and setting, that can be the nucleus to develop a youth treatment center. Although my experience has been with dogs, there are a variety of animals that are valuable supports for children and youth of all ages.

The idea of creating these therapeutic alliances with animals is not a new one, and over time has been proven quite effective in many different environments and settings.

The connection between treating youth and the healing nature of animals is relevant. This section will provide literature support for the healing nature of animals on different populations and within various settings.

What Are Animal Assisted Interventions?

Many different agencies throughout the world are dedicated to the promotion of animal-assisted therapies and interventions. One of the better established organizations is The Delta Society. The Delta Society was founded as a non-profit organization in 1977, with a mission to promote mutually beneficial relationships between animals and people, in order to help people improve their health, independence, and quality of life (Delta Society, 2008).

According to the Delta Society, Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) has been defined as a goal directed intervention in which an animal that meets specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process (Kruger, Trachtenberg, & Serpell, 2004; Menzies, Ltd., 2003; Ryan, 2000). AAT is directed and delivered by a health, or human-service professional with specialized expertise, and within the scope of practice of his or her profession. Key features include specified goals and objectives for each individual, and measured progress.

Similar to AAT, Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) provides opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and therapeutic benefits to enhance quality of life. Specially trained professionals, paraprofessionals or volunteers, in association with animals that meet specific criteria, deliver these activities in a variety of environments. With AAA, there is an absence of required specific treatment goals. Visits and content can be spontaneous and volunteer and treatment providers are not required to take detailed notes (Kruger et al., 2004).

There is a difference between Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal Assisted Activity (AAA). Although both methods seek to bring about improvement in physical, social, or emotional function, AAT is always administered by a trained health professional, and is goal-directed, with measurable objectives. In contrast, Animal Assisted Activities (AAAs) are less formal opportunities for interaction with animals (Anderson, 2003).

A variety of programs actively integrate animals into the therapeutic process. The range of different techniques include story telling and true-life tales about animals or pets, or asking clients to tell stories about their own experiences with animals (Kruger et al., 2004). AAT applications in the counselling environment are growing in popularity because increasing numbers of therapists have observed the therapeutic benefits of animal assisted interventions (Chandler, 2006).

For the purpose of this project, animal assisted therapy, animals assisted activities, pet facilitated therapy, equine therapy, and canine therapy, will be grouped under the combined term of Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI). AAI is defined as any therapeutic

intervention that includes or incorporates animals as part of the therapeutic process or milieu (Kruger et al., 2004).

The manner in which AAIs are applied varies. It can be largely undirected with the animals simply present and available to provide reassurance. It can be a useful tool for rapport building between the patient and the counsellor. It can serve as a motivator for the client to come to a session. It can also be a directive, in which case the animal is integrated into the foundation on which the therapeutic intervention is based.

The therapeutic impact animals have had on humans has been well-documented. Pets can often be natural “therapists” in an unofficial capacity just by their very presence. Studies show that people with pets experience a better quality of life physically, as well as mentally and emotionally (Arkow, n.d; Furst, 2006; Jalongo, Astorino, & Bomboy, 2004; Velde, Cipriani, & Fisher, 2005). Animals are able to reduce levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and instill a sense of calm for many people, such as the elderly, emotionally and behaviorally challenged children and adolescents; as well as persons with other physical, mental, and psychological illnesses. Walking and exercising with a pet can reduce anxiety and stress. In many circumstances, having a pet can encourage an overall healthier lifestyle.

For professionals, pets may assist with the treatment of individuals, as well as groups. They help with the treatment of people suffering from many conditions, including depression, anger issues, anxiety, and may aid in the treatment of mentally challenged individuals of all ages.

The animals that are used in AAI come in all shapes and sizes. Birds, cats, dogs, dolphins, fish, goats, llamas, horses, rabbits, turtles, and even elephants have all taken

part in therapy in one way or another. (Examples of how different animals can be involved in interventions will be covered later in this section). Having a nonjudgmental ear to listen, or just a supportive companion present to put one at ease when one is talking with other people, can be therapeutic.

Animals have improved the quality of life, or performed safety or life-saving duties in many settings. Dogs especially deserve a lot of recognition for making the world a safer and better place to live. They have served as rescue animals sniffing out avalanche victims, bombs, and mines in minefields; they have served as police dogs; and they have provided support to people with various forms of physical and mental disabilities. This has included working as Seeing Eye guide dogs, as hearing dogs, as assistants to autistic children, and as detectors of seizures.

History of Animal Assisted Interventions

The health and well-being of humans and animals have historically been intertwined, but it is only just recently that this has become the subject of empirical studies. Fortunately, knowledge of, and interest in, this relationship are growing. As a result, more evidence attests to the powerful connections that exist between people and their animals, both positive and negative (Faver & Strand, 2003; Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987).

This special bond between humans and animals has been documented since the dawn of time. Stories associated with this connection can be traced as far back as the prehistoric era of cave dwellers:

Cave paintings indicate that the earliest human-animal relationships may have occurred between wolves and cave dwellers. Archaeologists suggest that, over

10,000 years ago, the wolf/dog was the first animal to be domesticated. The dog played a large role in hunting and carrying loads, but there is little doubt that real human-dog relationships began the first time a dog responded to a pat on the head with a wagging tail. (Urichuk & Anderson, 2003, p. 14)

Many stories depict the bonds between animals and their owners around the world and throughout time. Though not confirmed, they give us an example of the impact pets can have on human existence, and the effects on human nature and health. It has only been in modern times that psychological and physiological effects of the bond between humans and animals have been examined.

It has been reported that the York Retreat in England, established in 1792 by a Quaker group, was the first documented use of animal assisted therapy. Farm animals were used to teach the psychiatric patients self-control through positive interaction with the more weak and needy animals (Anderson, 2003; Furst, 2006; Velde et al., 2005).

Two of the most significant events in the history of modern pet therapy were the publication in 1969 of *Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy* and the publication in 1972 of *Pets and Human Development* by Dr. Boris Levinson. His study of the therapeutic use of animals in treatment began quite by accident in 1953, upon a young patient's first visit to see him (Anderson, 2003; Gonski, 1985; Kruger et al., 2004; Menzies, Ltd., 2003; Ryan, 2000). The boy arrived early for his appointment, met, and embraced Levinson's dog, Jingles, who was in the office that day. The dog helped Levinson develop rapport with the boy and facilitated a bond between them. Levinson recognized the powerful impact that the dog had, and thus began his future specialization in the human-animal bond. He wrote

extensively on the topic of therapeutic uses for animals with adults and children in a variety of treatment settings, including residential treatment possibilities.

Dr. Samuel Corson, from Ohio State University, was the first to coin the term pet facilitated psychotherapy (Anderson, 2003; Gonski, 1985; Netting et al., 1987). Dr. Corson and his wife conducted an experiment during the 1970's on the use of dogs with 50 hospitalized psychiatric patients who did not respond to more conventional treatment models, such as psychotherapy, medication, or shock therapy. After interacting with the dogs, petting, walking, and playing with them, the typically withdrawn, uncommunicative patients began to respond to hospital personnel and other patients.

This early recognition of the power of animals on human nature and health has provided a foundation on which modern agencies, such as The Delta Society and The Chimo project, have been built.

Animals and Youth

Animals serve a very positive and useful role in the lives of all people, but when the person happens to be a child, particularly a child who lives in a residential treatment center apart from his or her family, contact with an animal is almost universally beneficial. (Mallon, 1994, p. 456)

Numerous public and private residential programs across Canada and the United States have been established to treat at risk youth and young offenders, whose situations, behaviors, or criminal involvement have warranted out of home placements. These programs range from therapeutic interventions, such as group homes and ranch programs, to punitive correctional systems, such as closed custody young offender centers (Abrams, 2006).

However, because many hardened and dangerous youth criminals have not responded well to the standard approach to treatment, there is a need for more innovative treatment centered approaches for them. James (2007), a former resident of Stoke Heath, an institution for young offenders, shares his insight and reinforces the need for alternative approaches:

Our criminal identity had long been established and, if anything, was reinforced by the way we lived: in cells with barred windows, on landings and on wings where the rattle of keys was the most prevalent sound. We were criminals, that is what the system told us, but it offered little to help us to change our way of thinking. We were tough, hardened by our life experiences. We needed softening. Cells, bars, wings and landings did exactly the opposite. (¶ 6)

One approach to soften and change the ways of thinking, of which James speaks, can be brought about by using animal assisted therapy. Animal assisted intervention is becoming recognized as a catalyst for change in at risk youth and young offenders. The reasons youth are sentenced to residential, or in custody programming, vary with the crimes and circumstances. The offenses range from minor nonphysical crimes to violent murders. With that said, a large percentage of this population is suffering from some form of mental illness.

While conduct disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and attachment disorders are the most common diagnoses, other forms of mental and psychiatric illnesses may be present. It has been estimated that 70% of girls, and 60% of boys, meet the criteria for conduct disorder (Otto et al., 2002, as cited in Odgers, Burnette, Chauhan, Moretti, & Reppucci, 2005).

However, growing evidence suggests that aggression and violence are not the only problems, and perhaps not the most serious, in this population. "A convincing body of research shows that the majority of children and youth within correctional settings suffer from one or more mental disorders" (Odgers et al., 2005, p. 26).

Research shows that individuals suffering from these mental illnesses have responded well to the presence of animals as part of the therapeutic process. Animal assisted interventions have also been shown to reinforce certain areas of ego functioning, such as object relations, reality testing and adaptation, regulation, and control of the drives necessary for the development of impulse control and frustration tolerance, and the development of empathy (Gonski, 1985). The research that has been done in the field of animal assisted interventions not only identifies the positive benefits gained from including animals in residential treatment programs, it also encourages programs to incorporate more animal assisted interventions into their treatment designs, and into the development of new treatment facilities.

Animal Assisted Interventions in Youth Treatment Programs

Youth treatment occurs in many different settings. Interventions and treatment programs are set up for issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, behavioral problems, and sexual or physical abuse. Treatment settings can include, but are not limited to, group homes, youth ranches, shelters, and secured youth correctional facilities.

Animals in a residential center can be useful in different ways. They can help break a boring routine, and in the process can act as therapeutic aides in assisting troubled children to move more quickly to health (Menziez, Ltd., 2003). Animal assisted therapeutic intervention in a ranch setting, for example, provides a supportive context for

interaction with animals and allows opportunities for children and adolescents to experience the unique healing qualities linked with the interactions. It also provides opportunities to learn from the documented potential of animals to provide a calming, nonjudgmental acceptance, and unconditional love.

Some of the more challenging cases can be found in correctional facilities.

Although these facilities house some of the more hardened and harder to reach youth, there is still a place for the healing nature of animals. Young people are jailed for the same reasons, and convicted of the same crimes as their adult counterparts. These range from violent crimes, such as murder and sexual assault, to gang violence and assaults, to property crimes, drugs, and prostitution. Some youth have a history of child abuse, physical and sexual abuse, negative tendencies, as well as violence including dog fighting (Abrams, 2005; Conniff, Scarlett, Goodman, & Appel, 2005; Harbolt & Ward, 2001).

In many young offender programs, the youth have been in contact with animals, and have had the chance to interact with, care for, and train these animals. In these interactions, the youth have been put in positions of power and control over these animals. They have learned from these relationships that being in a position of power can be positive, non-abusive and non-coercive. This has taught them the importance of respect, empathy, patience, and understanding; things that they possibly have not had modeled for them. For many of them, the idea of power has been something that was used to do harm, or manipulate, or gain advantage (Abrams, 2005; Decosta, 2007; Hanselman, 2001; Harbolt & Ward, 2001; Kruger et al., 2004; Menzies, Ltd., 2003; Schwartz, 2003).

Through this interaction and experience, youth have been encouraged to look at things from a different perspective, and to take risks and try new things. This leads to an increase in self-esteem and the feeling of contributing positively to something, such as training a dog for the benefit of someone else, and being proud of their accomplishments. They have learned responsibility, and seen a purpose in their work, and the benefits it can bring. AAI has helped shift the egocentric attitude of “I” to the concept of others (Harbolt & Ward, 2001; Menzies, Ltd., 2003; Schwartz, 2003).

Other Populations Served by Animal Assisted Interventions

Although this project concentrates on the importance of animals in a youth based setting, the effect of animals on other populations cannot be ignored. As a dog lover, I have introduced my dogs to many different people; including handicapped children, immigrants, young offenders, youth, and adults with mental health issues; as well as taken them to many different settings, including schools, and geriatric facilities. Through these interactions, I have witnessed firsthand, the positive effect animals can have on people. AAI has been proven effective with many different populations, and lends value and reinforcement to the overall healing capacity of the connection between humans and animals.

Adult Offenders

Adult offenders have usually experienced some events or problems in childhood or adolescence. This raises the question of where these adult inmates would be if they had some animal intervention at an earlier age. We cannot look back in the past and have our questions hypothetically answered, but the benefits AAI has on these adult offenders can be explored.

The AAT program at Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, (now Oakwood Forensic Center), in Ohio, which was established in 1975, remains one of the most oft-cited animal assisted programs, and was the first formal program to use a maximum-security population (Graham, 2000; Lai, 1998; Lee, 1987; Moneymaker & Strimple, 1991, all as cited in Furst, 2006). Pets were introduced to certain wards of the institution. Those patients with pets required half as much medication, and had drastically reduced incidents of violence, with no suicide attempts during the year-long comparison. The ward without pets had eight documented suicide attempts during the same year (Lee, 1987, as cited in Furst, 2006).

Another example is a study done by Fournier, Geller, and Fortney (2007) to test the psychological effects of AAI on incarcerated adult offenders. Inmates cared for, and trained shelter dogs, to get them ready for adoption. The results of this study supported the prediction that participation in an AAI program would result in positive psychosocial changes in inmates. This interaction with the dogs was associated with increased treatment progress in the therapeutic programming, decreased institutional infractions, and improvement of social sensitivity as reported by institutional staff.

Persons with Disabilities

Animals are used in different capacities with people with disabilities. Interventions can range from riding a horse in an equine therapy program to taking care of a bunny. Equine therapy has started to become a popular and valuable resource for people with disabilities. Studies have shown that programs for people with physical disabilities that use horses help them with their coordination, confidence, and self-esteem (Menzies, Ltd., 2003).

Service dogs are not only therapeutic companions, but also serve as vehicles for self-reliance and independence. They serve as guide dogs for the blind, and as assistance dogs to people who are hard of hearing, autistic, wheelchair bound, or suffering from seizures (Delta Society, 2008). Hearing dogs are trained to alert their owners to basic sounds like smoke alarms, intruders, alarm clocks, doorbells, knocks at the door, and telephones or telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDD). Service dogs perform such varied tasks as pulling wheelchairs, opening doors, retrieving dropped objects as small as a dime, turning light switches off and on, and, even helping people regain their position when they fall.

Seizure alert dogs provide calming and reassuring support for people who suffer from seizures. It has been reported that these dogs have a natural instinct, and intrinsically know when a seizure is about to occur in order to alert their owners (Delta Society, 2008; Horowitz, 2008). Trainers of alert dogs have indicated that true alerting behavior is the result of the dog and human developing a very close bond. That bond evolves as time passes and mutual trust develops.

The Elderly

Growing old can be a difficult time for some people. Losing family members and friends as aging progresses, loneliness, and the loss of independence, are just some of the challenges that the elderly face. It has been shown that pets and visiting animals can assist with the process of aging, by providing emotional comfort, physical assistance, or an increase in a person's motivation to live life fully.

Studies have indicated that residents in geriatric facilities benefit physically from intervention with animals (Velde et al., 2005). The therapists recorded increased range of

motion, better sensory modulation and sensory interpretation, and higher tolerance for physical activity with pain present. It was also shown that animals can promote reminiscence and alertness. Therapists described occupational therapy participants actively recalling memories related to personal pets. These memories contained both real and symbolic meanings. Therapists working with clients who had chronic and persistent mental illness noted increased alertness and cognitive ability. An additional cognitive benefit was the ability of the animal to help the client focus and to remain attentive for longer periods of time.

Animal assisted interventions have also been shown to reduce the loneliness of residents in long-term care facilities (LTCFs). Banks and Banks (2005) conducted a study to determine the relative contribution of socialization (human–human bonding) and human–animal bonding as mechanisms by which animals can assist in reducing loneliness. Results showed that AAI was more effective in decreasing loneliness in residents of LTCFs, though it was more evident when used on an individual basis rather than in a group setting. Perhaps these were due to the improved opportunity to bond, and make a personal connection to the animal.

On a personal note, I was able to witness a delightful experience of AAI in a more unusual manner. While visiting my grandmother in a LTCF, a guest brought in a miniature pony to visit the residents. This unique experience made the residents curious and brought smiles to their faces. Some residents, who usually sat by themselves and appeared melancholy, searched out the animal to either observe it or interact with it. Through this experience, there was a marked change in their demeanor, and, if only for a short time, it did appear to have a positive effect.

The Sick and Hospitalized

Dogs have been making rounds in hospitals for years. Evidence has shown that animals have a calming and comforting effect on humans (Antonioli & Reveley, 2005; Baun, Bergstrom, Langston, & Thoma, 1984; Fournier et al., 2007; Prothman, Bienert, & Ettrich, 2006). When humans develop a sickness, animals seem to have an intrinsic desire to calm and comfort. This has been observed in hospital settings (Kaminski, Pellino, & Wish, 2002).

Studies have shown that the presence and calming effect of these visiting animals can result in lowering the heart rate, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety among those patients being visited. A recent study on AAT shows a 12-minute dog visit lowered the blood pressure, and reduced the production of damaging hormones in cardiac patients and those with hypertension (Horowitz, 2008).

Reports on the use of pet visitation in a critical-care medical setting suggest that AAI had a calming influence on patients, and advocate the use of animals to increase patient cognition, range of motion, strength, and balance (Moody, King, & O'Rourke, 2002; Velde et al., 2005). Nurses have used AAI in the form of visiting pets in the perioperative setting to decrease preoperative anxiety, improve patients' positive outlook, and reduce the need for preoperative medication. Animal assisted therapy may also be helpful in reducing fear and anxiety in patients with a psychiatric condition prior to receiving electroconvulsive therapy (Barker, Pandurangi, & Best, 2003, as cited in Velde et al., 2005; Horowitz, 2008). Reports show that the reduction of stress and improvement in emotional well-being associated with AAI has helped individuals suffering from spinal

cord injuries by enhancing the mental, physical, and spiritual functions required to deal with these challenges. (Counsell, Abran, & Gilbert, 1997, as cited in Velde et al., 2005).

Persons With ADHD

As a person who faces the challenges that having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) brings, I can provide a firsthand account of the positive impact a pet can have on the quality of what can sometimes feel like a scattered life. A pet provided me with consistency in what seemed like an ever-changing world, was a source of comfort when I was confused, and provided me with a companion when I was just not comfortable being around people.

The presence of an animal is considered potentially useful for children and youth with ADHD. These individuals often have relationship difficulties and issues surrounding trust. Animals may be useful in helping these clients to engage and reinforce certain behaviors. While children and adolescents have difficulties in situations with no immediate and frequent feedback, or reinforcement for their behavior, they are able to stay on task and maintain attention when the feedback is provided (Gonski, 1985).

Evidence has shown that animals are well-suited to provide this level and intensity of feedback, where humans often have difficulty maintaining the necessary frequency and patience (Kruger et al., 2004). This suggests that animals could be used to promote engagement, learning, and skill building for persons with ADHD. AAI can also serve to reinforce certain areas of ego functioning, such as object relations; reality testing and adaptation; regulation and control of the drives necessary for the development of impulse control and frustration tolerance; and the development of empathy; all of which are common elements of ADHD (Gonski, 1985). Statistically significant positive results were

demonstrated in AAI programs that were related to behavior and affect, social skills, self-esteem, locus of control, and decreases in aggression and hostility (Kruger et al.).

Programs Implementing Animal Assisted Interventions

As previously discussed, many programs incorporate animals into treatment and therapy in a variety of different ways. AAI occurs in a variety of settings such as prisons, schools, hospitals, youth residential programs, community programs, and geriatric facilities, just to name a few. Within the realm of programming, a vast number of approaches are found, from caring for the animals, using animals as a catalyst in a private practice session, using animals to assist with stability and motor skills, to using animals to give comfort to children removed from their homes.

Velde et al. (2005) report that the therapeutic use of animals can occur in three basic ways:

1. Pets are used as companions for individuals who are either living independently in their own home or in assisted living facilities.
2. Pets are used in institutions where they help to stimulate and/or be companions to the residents.
3. Animals visit institutions to help stimulate the residents' interest and provide a topic of conversation.

Many programs throughout the world use animals in some sort of therapeutic settings. A review of the literature reinforces and substantiates the possible benefits that animals can lend to any program or clientele. The following section includes a small sample of such programs.

Youth Residential Programs

Numerous government and private youth residential programs operate across the nation and include animals in their therapeutic milieu. Although a higher number of these programs are utilized in the United States, it is hopeful that more opportunities will arise in Canada to provide such services.

These programs have been set up to provide treatments and interventions for emotionally troubled youth, and convicted young offenders. These programs range from therapeutic interventions to punitive correctional systems, including group homes, youth ranches, and correctional facilities. They often use a blend of behavior change strategies that include behavior modification, psychological counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy, reality therapy, and specialized programs for the correction of problematic behaviors (Abrams, 2006; Furst, 2006; Velde et al., 2005).

Looking first at the correctional end of the spectrum, behavior modification programs are a core part of most juvenile prisons, secure residential treatment facilities, and “boot camps” (Abrams, 2006). These programs have incorporated the caring and sheltering of dogs into their rehabilitation strategies. The following programs have experienced success with the introduction of animal assisted interventions.

Project Second Chance is a training program that pairs older teenagers with shelter dogs to foster empathy, community responsibility, kindness, and awareness of healthy social interactions. Although it is not quantified with substantial research, the program reports improvement in these areas through staff observed behavior changes in the youth, as well as self-reports in the journals written by the youth (Furst, 2006; Harbolt & Ward, 2001).

Project Pooch is synonymous with The MacLaren youth project. POOCH is an acronym for Positive Opportunities Obvious Change with Hounds, an internationally known youth correctional program that matches offenders with hard to adopt dogs. Much has been written about it, and it has received international attention (Decosta, 2007; Hill, 2007; Furst, 2006; Menzies, Ltd., 2003). A Japanese author wrote a book about the program, and it is reported to be required reading in some middle schools in Japan (Hill, 2007).

The goal of the program is to rescue dogs that are considered unadoptable. The dogs used in the program are termed “eleventh hour” shelter dogs that would otherwise be euthanized if not in the program. The offenders groom the dogs, train them, nurture them, and help them overcome the behaviors that have kept them from being adopted, and then find loving homes for them (Decosta, 2007; Furst, 2006; Hill, 2007). A study was done on the youth that attended Project Pooch. Hill (2007) reported that over 100 youth had been through this program, and at the time of publication, the recidivism rate was at 0 percent.

A similar program based in Canada is the Toronto Young Offender Program: Youth and Animal Pilot Project. This is a collaborative program that is similar to the previously mentioned programs. It also matches young offenders with hard to adopt dogs (Menzies, Ltd., 2003).

Evidence show that graduates from these correctional programs have reduced levels of violence and antisocial behavior, and a reduction in recidivism. They also exhibit improvement in anger management, coping skills, cognitive functioning, social

skills, relationships, and the development of empathy (Decosta, 2007; Furst, 2006; Hill, 2007; Menzies, Ltd., 2003).

Looking next at the treatment end of the spectrum, residential placements typically provide various forms of psychological counseling, such as individual, group, family therapy, and/or cognitive-behavioral therapy (Abrams, 2005). The Green Chimneys Children's Services have residential treatment programs that have been cited as successfully using animals in their therapeutic approaches (Mallon, 1994; Menzies, 2003). The headquarters is situated on a 150-acre farm complete with farm animals. As part of the program, the children ride horses and participate in 4H activities, caring for and feeding the animals. Access to the animals is on a 24-hour basis, and treatment consists of formal and informal therapeutic interactions.

Children that attend the residential programs have typically experienced significant behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties to the extent that they were unable to function adequately in their former environments (Abrams, 2005; Furst, 2006; Gonski, 1985; Harbolt & Ward, 2001; Menzies, Ltd., 2003). Mallon (1994) reports evidence supporting the positive connection between interaction with animals and children's behavior. Qualitative data of the benefits of the program provide interesting results. The horses were the favorites of the older children because they demanded respect, required more communication, and provided more of a give and take relationship. The younger children preferred the bunnies because of their softness, and the fact that they did not expect or demand much. This met the need of the children for touch and contact comfort. Reports from the children indicated that they felt happier

when they fed and petted the animals. They reported a sense of responsibility in caring for the animals when they got sick.

Prisons

At first glance, the harsh and presumably volatile environment of a prison does not appear to welcome friendly, loveable animals. However, animals have been recorded as being a presence in inmate populations from early on. One well-known example of this was the “birdman of Alcatraz.” He cared for, and learned about, the birds that would fly and land on the prison grounds (Furst, 2006). This was not a case of a therapeutic program, but it is an example of how animals can change the environment and the behavior of those who encounter them.

In modern day correctional facilities across the country, both in Canada and the United States, there are an increasing number of strategies incorporating animals in different capacities (Strimple, 2003). The prison programs differ in several aspects from other programs. Research has shown that in some prisons, the animal is not present primarily for the therapeutic benefit of the inmate. There is no pairing with clinical methods such as psychoanalysis to communicate more effectively with inmates (Furst, 2006). The inmates interact with the animals, but they often work with, or train the animals, as well. Usually, a clinician maintains regular contact with the inmates.

A variety of prison programs use different animals in different capacities (see Table 1). Some programs train and work with dogs, others are found in more of an agricultural setting, whereas others are responsible for saving wild mustangs. These variations are evident in both male and female inmate programs (Furst, 2006).

Table 1. Prison Programs

Program Type	Description
Visitation programs	Companion animals brought to facility by humane society or nonprofit organization at specified times.
Wildlife rehabilitation programs	Participants care for injured wildlife, which are then released.
Livestock care programs	Farm animal care including milking and calf raising; fish breeding.
Pet adoption programs	Animals are adopted and cared for by individual inmates.
Service animal socialization	Assistance/work puppies or dogs are raised and taught basic commands; dog goes on to specialized training.
Vocational programs	Participants are trained/certified in animal grooming/handling/care.
Community service programs	Participants train and care for animals (including dogs and wild horses), which are then adopted out to the community.
Multimodal community service program component	Usually vocational based program component.

Note. The data are drawn from "Prison based animal programs: A national survey," by G. Furst, 2006, *The Prison Journal*, 86, pp. 407-430, and from "Pet facilitated therapy in correctional institutions," by Correctional Services Canada, 1998.

The literature's most rigorous research has been conducted on the Wild Mustang Program (WMP), which operated from 1988 to 1992 at a New Mexico prison, in partnership with the state Bureau of Land Management. This program not only sought to save and tame wild mustangs, but it also served as a vocational program in the prison,

and generated a profit for the facility when the horses were sold to members of the community (Correctional Services Canada, 1998). At Lorton Prison, shelter animals were paired with inmates who were allowed to keep the animal if transferred or released, in what would be considered a pet adoption program. According to the program's director, through sharing, the inmates learn to trust one another (Furst, 2006).

Women's correctional facilities have incorporated dogs into their programming. Pawsitive Directions is a canine-handler training program to introduce women inmates to the basics of dog care and training. Upon successful completion of the initial phase of the program, the inmates are qualified to train homeless animals, obtained from the SPCA and other sources, for eventual placement in family homes. In the second year of operation, Pawsitive Directions planned to initiate a program to train assistance-dogs for use by physically disabled and hearing disabled residents in Nova Scotia (Logan, 1996, as cited in Correctional Services Canada, 1998).

Two other programs that pair up dogs and female inmates are The Purdy Washington State Correctional Center for Women and the Fraser Valley Correctional Institution for Women. Both utilize a prison pet partnership program. The inmates care for and train shelter dogs to assist different disabled populations (Correctional Services Canada, 1998; Furst, 2006).

Hospitals

Animals can be seen in hospitals in different capacities. People bring their pets in while visiting their relatives, and certified therapy animals come in for certain patients. Therapeutic canines have been employed in hospitals for years (Kaminski et al., 2002).

Research was conducted on the extent to which animals were used as therapeutic aides in a hospital setting. Velde et al. (2005) provide evidence that positive interaction with animals can lower a person's blood pressure and heart rate. Following a doctor's orders, volunteers with specially trained dogs came in and visited inpatients. Petting the animals allowed the patients time away from their sickness, as their attention was on the animal.

A study of an animal therapy program, A Magical Dream, developed for children hospitalized in paediatric oncology, was undertaken in 2004. The therapy program was implemented in an effort to promote their well-being during hospitalization, and facilitate their adaptation to the therapeutic process (Gagnon et al., 2004). The main goal of the study was to describe the implementation of the program. It focussed on documenting the observed connection between participating in the program, the quality of care, and satisfaction of the participating parents and nurses. The sample was comprised of 16 parents and 12 nurses. Data were collected through two self-administered questionnaires intended for parents and one questionnaire for nurses. Evaluating the quality of the animal therapy program included issues related to user profiles, the animal therapy intervention process, and the organizational structure and client outcomes. From the results of the study, it appears that AAI may contribute to calming the anxieties and distress of the children and their parents, as well as assisting in the transition to a more therapeutic approach, thus promoting their well-being while hospitalized.

Geriatric Facilities

It is well-documented that the presence of animals, especially dogs, is both physically and psychologically beneficial to individuals of all ages. Pets are particularly

therapeutic for the elderly or infirm who have become socially isolated. Studies have indicated that residents in geriatric facilities benefit physically from intervention with animals (Arkow, n.d.). Some nursing homes have resident dogs, while others have volunteers visiting with shelter dogs, and still others have visitors who bring their personal pets. This has a positive impact on the residents and they look forward to the visits each week (Jennings, 1999).

Therapists have recorded an increased range of motion, better sensory modulation and sensory interpretation, and a higher tolerance for physical activity when pets are present. A recent occupational therapy study found that senior citizens in a walking program at an assisted living facility walked farther when with a dog than when they walked alone, indicating the potential value of pets in physical conditioning (Arkow, n.d.; Velde et al., 2005). Banks and Banks (2005) conducted a study in which they had a therapy dog come to visit a nursing home one day a week for 30 minutes. The results showed that the animal's interactions decreased loneliness in the study participants.

Private Practices

It has been reported that the presence of dogs lends focus and purpose to a session, and maintains the child's interest (Gonski, 1985). It has been suggested that animals make the therapeutic environment seem more friendly, and the therapy itself less threatening. Animals serve as a rapport builder between the client and counsellor, and act as an emotional catalyst. Clients report that the animals make them feel more relaxed and more comfortable in general.

It has been found that dogs in a therapeutic process are perceived as nonthreatening, gentle suppliers of unconditional love and acceptance (Gonski, 1985;

Kruger et al., 2004). It should be clarified that the dogs are not solely used for structured or formal therapeutic interventions. Almost every child, regardless of his or her makeup and background, enjoys playing with dogs, and this recreation is the most therapeutic (Gonski, 1985).

The therapeutic use of animals is not intended to function as a catalyst for any and every population, nor is the animal alone sufficient in producing a desired effect in behavior or thinking patterns. The counselor requires the tools and knowledge to take advantage fully of the environment that the presence of a dog provides. They must work as a team and complement each other.

Schools

The school system encompasses many different programs and populations. There are residential schools, special education programs, and alternative programs for behaviourally challenged students. They incorporate the use of different animals ranging from dogs, rabbits, and gerbils, to horses and cows (Chandler, 2006; Kogan, Granger, Fitchett, Helmer, & Young, 1999).

Jalongo et al. (2004) reported that trained therapy dogs are becoming an increasingly common sight in many educational and health care settings. One school program that has had notable results in using dogs to help children learn to read is the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R. E. A. D.) program. Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA) started this program in Salt Lake City in 1999. It paired students with a therapy dog and handler who worked together for 20 minutes once a week. All of the students who participated in the R.E.A.D program for 13 months improved by two grade levels in their reading. Some students even went up four levels. Jalongo et al. found that a

similar program, Carolina Canines for Service Project obtained similar results with the presence of therapy dogs. They found that the grade two children involved improved at least two grade levels while going through the program.

The Human Animal Bond in Colorado (HABIC) is a program at an alternative high school for expelled youth that centers on having students train dogs to be more dependable and well-disciplined companion animals. The focus for these students is on learning specific dog handling techniques, social skills related to caring and nurturing, and development of self-control. This program found its most significant changes in improvement in the social skills of the students, according to the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) teacher rating scales (Kruger et al., 2004).

Having worked in the school setting in different capacities, I have witnessed the effects of having a dog in the programming in an informal way. I have utilized my dogs in the therapeutic setting just by having them present in a session. The dogs served as an icebreaker, a distraction, a calmer, and a motivator.

Benefits of Animal Assisted Interventions

The wide applicability of AAI is its strength, as it has been suggested that it can be beneficial to a broad range of populations (Chandler, 2006). It cannot be expected that AAI will be equally appropriate for all parties participating, or that it will be a solution to all problems or a cure to all ills. However, research suggests that the human-animal bond has qualities that make it a potentially strong and effective resource in working with children and adolescents who have grown up in an environment where they are neglected, abused, or rejected by adults who have the responsibility to care for them (Menzies, Ltd., 2003). While the number of empirical studies on the efficacy of animal assisted

interventions has risen greatly over the past few years, the field of child and adolescent psychotherapy lacks well-designed and controlled studies (Prothman et al., 2006).

Self Esteem

The use of AAI is successful in improving self-esteem, socialization, and problem-solving skills with emotionally disturbed children, as well as with children who have been abused or neglected (Kogan, Granger, Fitchett, Helmer, & Young, 1999). Reports have shown that pets may help teach children the responsibilities of daily living, compassion for other creatures, and the cycles of life and death. This in turn has been related to building self-confidence and self-esteem (Arkow, n.d.). Kruger et al. (2004) note the value of the animal as living instruments that can be used to effect positive changes in a person's self-concept and behavior through the acquisition of various skills, and the acceptance of personal responsibility. The overall love and acceptance an animal shows for a person is enough to lead to an improvement in self-esteem.

Anger Management

Cruelty to animals is one of several signs of aggression in childhood. Many factors are involved in anger management difficulties. Stress, anxiety, attachment, and transference all contribute to a lack of control over emotions (Hanselman, 2001).

Animals give unconditional love and acceptance regardless of color, appearance, or socioeconomic status. It has been suggested that attention to animals alone is sufficient to explain some of the benefits of AAI, since things that tend to focus and absorb people's attention in nonthreatening ways are also known to exert a calming or de-arousing influence (Chandler, 2006; Kruger et al., 2004).

Loneliness

When children are taken away from their homes and put into foster care, or group homes, or treatment centers, they feel rejection and separation and loneliness. Evidence has shown that animals in these situations have been used as a catalyst to work with children on these issues. They become a safe third party and lend comfort to the children (Gonski, 1985).

Isolation

Isolation comes in many forms. Living by oneself in a remote area can be considered isolation. Another form of isolation is being in prison and separated from family and friends. Research has shown that the unconditional positive regard received from an animal can be of particular significance to prison inmates who have been identified as a population vulnerable to “social isolation that leaves people without the social or family support they need during a ... crisis” (Hart, 2000 as cited in Furst, 2006, p. 411). The company of a pet provides companionship and security in these circumstances.

Stress

Nearly half of the psychiatrists, psychologists, and family physicians responding to a survey conducted by an American pet food company, reported that they have prescribed pets for their patients to combat loneliness, depression, inactivity, and stress. In a random sampling, 57% of psychiatrists, 48% of psychologists, and 40% of family physicians reported recommending animals for companionship, to provide unconditional warmth and affection, and to provide a purpose, amusement, and a feeling of being needed (Arkow, n.d.).

Anxiety

Hanselman (2001) cites a study by Beck and Katcher (1983), in which children were brought into a room with an interviewer alone, or with an interviewer and a dog. Results showed that the children were more relaxed, as measured by their blood pressure, when in the presence of the animal. A review of literature by Menzies, Ltd. (2003) found that practitioners who used animals in their practices reported that animals eased the stress of the initial stages of therapy, gave a sense of comfort, and had a calming effect on some clients, and led children and young people to see the therapist and the environment as less threatening.

Empathy

Hanselman (2001) studied the effects of using animals in interventions with adolescents with anger management issues. He noted that the presence of the pets increased feelings of happiness, security, and self-worth, and reduced feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stress. Pets were a vehicle to facilitate awareness of clients' intimate attachments and attachment behavior. They also provided an opportunity to nurture others. Freud (1953, as quoted in Hanselman, 2001) stated:

Children show no trace of arrogance that urges adult civilized men to draw a hard- and fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples allowing animals to rank as their bodily needs; they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them. (p. 177).

Pets clearly play an important role in the lives of children. The relationship is characterized by deep feelings of love and care. It is enhanced by children's empathy

toward the feelings of animals and their intuitive sense of having a common status with animals (Hanselman, 2001).

Education

A pet can make education interesting and reality oriented, thus supplying a powerful tool in teaching by naturally motivating the child to learn (Kruger et al., 2004). Animals can motivate children to learn, and teach them valuable life skills. Animals teach children about life cycles, birth, and death. Studies have shown that academically, having a dog in the classroom has helped children improve their levels of reading (Jalongo et al., 2004). Research has also shown that AAI is a promising resource that could meet some of the needs of emotionally disturbed children, and place a valuable new tool in the hands of therapists and Special Education teachers (Kogan et al., 1999).

Health

An abundance of research shows the physiological benefits of the presence of animals. They not only improve the quality of life, but also improve human health. Research has demonstrated that caring for animals, including grooming and petting them, can reduce blood pressure and heart rate, and improve the survival rates for those suffering from heart disease (Antonioli & Reveley, 2005; Arkow, n.d.; Correctional Services Canada, 1998; Fournier et al., 2007).

Baun et al. (1984) recorded the blood pressure, heart rate, and respiratory rate of 24 subjects during 3 to 9 minute measurement sessions in which they petted an unknown dog, petted a dog where a bond had been established, or read quietly. They found a significant decrease in systolic and diastolic blood pressure when interacting with the familiar dog. Other research (Odendaal, 2000, as cited in Parshall, 2003; Prothman et al.,

2006) has indicated that when people interacted with their dogs, their systolic blood pressure and chemical plasma levels related to stress were affected positively.

Employment

Working and interacting with animals not only provides a therapeutic element, it also requires the acquisition of certain skills. These skills can be utilized in the field of animal care and husbandry. The Washington State Correctional Center for Women has a program that helps women learn how to train, groom, and board dogs within the prison walls. The training they receive has allowed some inmates to pursue employment working with animals once released (Schwartz, 2003; Walsh & Mertin, 1994).

Other Benefits

Evidence supports the belief that animals have a unique way of teaching appropriate forms of communication and affection. It has been observed that when in a prison setting intermingling with an animal, inmates are given the opportunity to interact with a living being that has no interest in their past actions or mistakes. Especially for males, who, it has been noted, “have few socially-acceptable outlets for touching and caressing,” the mutual affection that a relationship with an animal provides can be therapeutic (Arkow, 1998, p. 2, quoted in Furst, 2006). For inmates who live lives absent of touch and acceptance, animals are able to “stimulate a kind of love and caring that is not poisoned or inhibited by the prisoners’ experiences with people” (Beck & Katcher, 1983, as quoted in Furst, 2006).

Disadvantages and Limitations of Animal Assisted Interventions

Allergies

There is always a fear of allergies when it comes to animals. Some breeds are hypoallergenic, but not all therapy dogs share this trait. To battle this challenge, therapy dogs are bathed and well-groomed before visiting an institution, so that the allergen dander will be significantly reduced. Depending on the allergy to the dogs, visits and demonstrations can be held outside, or in an airy classroom or gymnasium (Jalongo et al., 2004). Dogs are not the only animal that produces allergenic results. Farm animals, cats, and any other fur-bearing or hair-shedding animal can be a danger to anyone with allergies. This would limit their participation in any therapy that includes such creatures.

Fears and Phobias

Media attention has focused on specific breeds of dogs associated with unpredictable behavior and unprovoked attacks on children and adults alike. A child, youth, or adult who might have been previously bitten by a dog, or witnessed a dog attacking another person or animal, may develop a deeply instilled fear of these animals. This will have an impact on one's first meeting with, or observation of, a therapy dog. It is recommended that the exposure to the therapy dog be a gradual and gentle one, showing the client that, like people, not all dogs behave in the same way. It should not be expected that this would eliminate all fear or dislike of dogs (Jalongo et al., 2004). People may also be fearful of farm animals such as cows and horses as they are large and powerful. This fear can be used as a catalyst for therapy and confronting fears, or it can be a barrier to a treatment program utilizing those specific animals.

Safety Considerations

There is sometimes a fear that therapy animals will bite, or claw, or jump on a patient or client. Therapy animals, dogs in particular, are put through specialized training and suitability tests, and any aggressive animals are weeded out. Registered therapy dogs are capable of coping with situations that would otherwise be dangerous with untrained dogs or household pets (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Sanitation Concerns

There are concerns about diseases a dog might have, for example, that the animal may be carrying a host of “zoonoses” (diseases and infections transferred to humans) (Brodie et al., 2002; Horowitz, 2008). This is definitely a concern in a hospital setting. Recent research, however, has shown that even though dogs have the potential to pass on the greatest number of these diseases, the danger is minimal if responsibility and safety measures are observed (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Cultural Considerations

Just as a wide variation in belief systems exists among different countries and cultures of the world, variation exists in the attitudes towards animals among different populations of the world. In some cultures, not only are animals not accepted as household pets, they are even considered unclean and a nuisance. In other cultures, animals are highly sought after to fill the role of loving pet and companion.

In some cultures, canines are highly valued for their role as security and guard dogs. The downside is that this leads to many dogs being bred to be vicious and aggressive. As often happens, many of these breeds can instill a deep fear and distrust of all dogs among many adults. Those fears are often passed down to children. It is

important for adults to keep an open mind, and observe how their child responds in the presence of a dog or other animal. They cannot assume that their child will react or feel the same way that they do (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Suitability

Determining a child's candidacy for a canine intervention is based on several factors such as the child's age, past or present experience with animals, personal likes or dislikes toward animals, and the nature of the child's circumstances in placement.

Introducing the dog to a prospective candidate for the canine counselling technique requires discretion and an accurate sense or perception on the part of the worker.

Research has shown that this type of intervention works best with children who are at least four years of age and older because of their maturing verbal ability and cognitive operations (Gonski, 1985).

Chapter 4. Putting It All Together

This project has shown the value of having an animal assisted intervention component included in the treatment plan for youth residential programs in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. The research has provided a very compelling argument for using animals in therapeutic environments, especially in youth residential programs. Many programs in the United States have shown positive results, and have helped youth grow and become healthy using this approach.

The youth service communities in British Columbia would benefit from incorporating similar programs. With that said, and reinforced by the research, the animals alone cannot produce the desired change in behavior or thinking patterns. The counselor requires the tools and knowledge to take advantage fully of the environment that the presence of an animal provides. They work as a team and complement each other.

I have shared my journey as a youth counselor, and the tools that I have collected along the way, with the goal of helping youth construct their own roads. The Wrightway Youth Project is a dream that has been in the making since I first began my journey. The Wrightway Youth Project is a proposed youth treatment ranch that will be developed to treat youth at risk and young offenders. It will incorporate many strategies and interventions learned from many different sources, along with the proven and wonderful involvement of animals, more specifically, dogs. The first step has been taken. A description of the Wrightway Youth Project proposal follows.

The Wrightway Youth Project

The Wrightway Youth Project (WYP) will be a working ranch for troubled youth aged 12 to 18 years. The programming will incorporate education, work ethics, life skills,

health and fitness, and community service and involvement. Therapeutic models will include Animal Assisted Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Rationale Emotive Therapy (REBT), Reality Therapy, and music therapy. The goals of this program will be to work on individual strengths, and build self-esteem and self-confidence in the youth; to provide them with positive experiences in the community; and to develop self-respect, respect for others, and for society as a whole.

The concept of respect will be emphasized. The youth will be encouraged to scrape away their negative past, tear down their walls, and rebuild themselves as more positive people they like and respect. The youth will be held accountable for their actions, and be required to take responsibility for the consequences.

Each youth will live and interact with nine other youth in the program. Through this interaction, they will learn coping skills, cooperation, communication skills, patience, acceptance, and respect. The staffing model will include a full time clinical counsellor, a family transition counsellor, and youth care workers at a 3:1 youth to staff ratio. The ranch will also contract trained dog handler instructors and a food and nutritionist instructor.

Animal Assisted Interventions

The Wrightway Project will center on incorporating animals into therapeutic programming. AAI will be utilized in the form of training and caring for animals, which requires building relationships and rapport with the animals and instructors. A dog shelter will be incorporated into the program. The SPCA will supply the center with dogs that are difficult to adopt, or that require extra attention, grooming, and training to become more adoptable. The youth will work alongside a trainer, and be taught to groom and train the

dogs. The dogs, after completing the training, will be returned to the SPCA to be adopted out. For each dog they train, the youth will provide an introduction and information about the dog to the new owners.

This program is designed to teach youth who are challenged behaviourally and emotionally, the virtues of patience, empathy, and responsibility. Some youth may relate to the feeling of being unwanted or abandoned, empathizing with the animals, building self esteem through facilitating change in the animals' circumstances. The animals they will work with need to learn new behaviours, and receive help and care from someone else in order to have a new life. This entails a process of breaking old habits and learning new strategies, which in turn, builds empathy and understanding. This process will give the youth a sense of responsibility and accomplishment, and a sense of caring and pride. This will prove a valuable tool in helping youth diagnosed with emotional and behavioural problems such as ADHD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, (ODD), and Conduct Disorder.

There will be horses on the property as well, for those who decide to assist in the care and maintenance of them. This will reaffirm the importance of responsibility and the idea of control. The horse is a large animal that requires respect to harness its power. The youth will learn the concepts of respect and control, by controlling a much larger and more powerful creature. It will also give the youth the skill of being able to ride a horse (Rothe, Vega, Torres, Soler, & Pazos, 2005).

Individual and Group Therapy

It is recognized that youth have issues that have many deep and underlying origins. A therapist will be on staff to help the youth explore issues that, over time, have

resulted in their present behaviours, and will help them to attempt to move forward in a positive and productive manner.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Rational Emotive Therapy will be used in individual and group sessions. Because behaviours have developed through time, the thought processes and behaviours that result require revisiting and restructuring. Problem solving, taking responsibility, impulse control, reasoning, and communication are some of the common behaviours that require improvement for many youth.

Reality Therapy will be used to make youth realize that they are responsible for their own actions and the consequences that accompany those actions. It is based on the belief that we all choose what we do with our lives, and that we are responsible for our choices. Responsibility is defined as learning to choose behaviours that satisfy our needs and, at the same time, do not deprive others of a chance to do the same. Reality Therapy is a method of counselling based on Choice Theory, and can be aimed at helping troubled youth gain more control over their lives (Wubbolding et al., 2004). The therapist becomes involved with the youth, and helps them examine their current behaviors with a goal of improvement in the future. Using the principles of Reality Therapy, the program counsellors can assist at-risk youth to face reality, and to meet their needs in the world.

During both group therapy and individual therapy, a choice to have the resident therapy dog present may be made. Research has shown that animals help ease tension in group settings, and provide a nonjudgmental catalyst for building trust and working relationships within individual therapy (Velde et al., 2005).

Daily goals and token economy systems will be used to measure success and improvement, and reinforce behaviour goals. The youth will start on level one and will be

able to gather more privileges as they move up the levels. The criteria for each level are the same for everyone, but personal goals and achievements are added in a personal programming section. This allows staff to monitor the youths' progress, and assist them through any challenges.

Roots of Empathy

The Roots of Empathy (ROE) program has been very successful (Gordon, 2001). It was originally designed as an elementary school program. The core beliefs are that empathy can be built through knowledge and exposure. Learning empathy has no age limit, and this program emphasizes the basic skills that will be taught at Wrightway.

The program involves a mother and infant visiting the program, using the baby as a teacher to help children learn about being different, their own feelings, and those of others, social inclusion, and health and safety. Research results from national and international evaluations of ROE indicate significant reduction in aggression, and an increase in pro-social behaviour. It is hoped that the youth will develop some empathy through their engagement in this process. Because of the nature of this program, participation will depend on the availability of a volunteer parent and child.

Informal Music Therapy

The Wrightway Project will provide instruments and a music room for its clients. A drum set, guitars, bass guitar, and keyboard will be available for those youth who would like to explore their hidden musical talents. Music is also a way for youth to cope with their stress and frustration. They can communicate their thoughts and feelings through music and song. It also allows the youth to learn a new hobby, and permits them to work along with other youth towards a common goal.

Family and Home Transition

The Wrightway Youth Project believes in positive family systems and encourages family involvement in treatment. A family transition counsellor will be available during treatment as well as to aid in the transition back home. Assistance with issues such as boundaries, positive reflection, effective discipline strategies, and routines will be offered to reinforce the growth and change that the child has experienced, and to assist in maintaining a positive family environment.

Program Summary

The Wrightway Youth Project is driven by the belief that there are reasons behind all behaviors and all youth have strengths that can be built upon. WYP will strive to encourage the youth to find that strength, by providing them with a safe environment in which they can lay the foundation to start rebuilding their lives.

The idea of having youth full time at a residential program leaves the door open for numerous amounts of teachable moments through many different avenues. It is these teachable moments that allow us the opportunity to encourage and instill a deeper sense of self. The use of animals at WYP can enhance these teachable moments through care, responsibility and empathy. Youth are given the support through the challenge of making changes and dealing with past issues. It is the goal of WYP to help troubled youth help themselves build self esteem and confidence in the youth and for them to find a new found freedom with these tools.

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