



Animal-Assisted Interventions in Mental Health and Socialisation.

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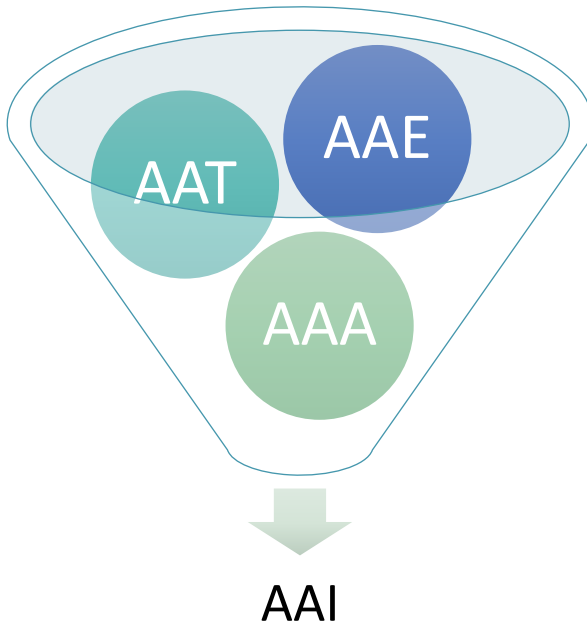


Established in 2003 in response to a growing interest in Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT).

Lead The Way Psychology Clinics - Provides AAT to individuals, families & groups incorporating therapy animals (dogs, cats, horses, rabbits).

- **Lead The Way Institute** – Provides training in Animal-Assisted Interventions, including;
 - Professional development, consultancy and clinical supervision to health and educational professionals wanting to work with Animals
 - Intensive training and certification programmes for Therapy-Dogs/Horses and their handlers.





Animal-Assisted Interventions - an umbrella term covering all of the different ways that animals are called upon to assist with the healing or helping of humans.

Animal-Assisted Activities - also known as Pet Therapy, Visiting Dogs etc. These activities are designed to facilitate emotional or physical well-being. They are not necessarily overseen by a professional, nor are treatment plans devised or outcomes recorded.

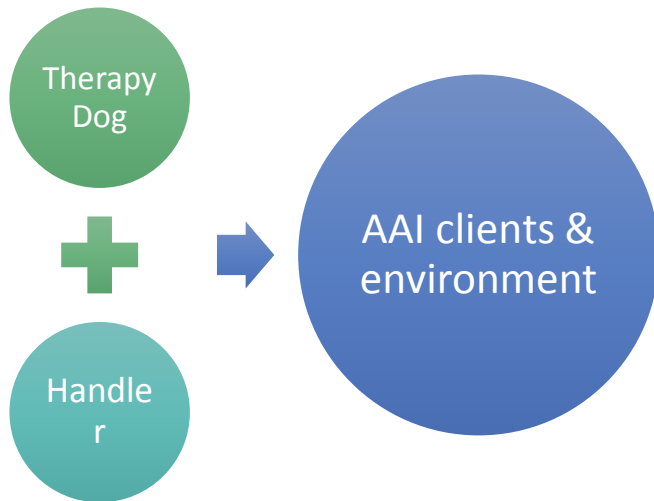
Animal-Assisted Therapy - a specialised, goal-directed intervention, where the use of the animal is integral to the treatment. The treatment is conducted or directed by a professional, within their scope of professional practice.

- **Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy** - a sub-set of AAT, where the therapy being conducted is psychotherapeutic and the relationship is the primary agent of change.

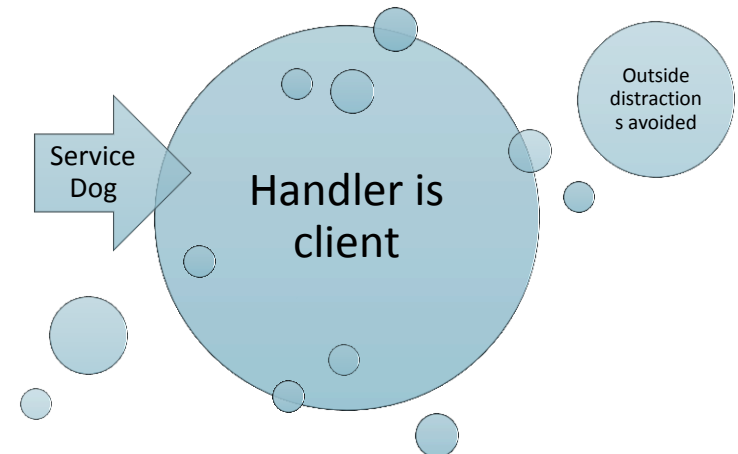
Animal-Assisted Education – A goal-directed educational intervention, provided or supervised by an educational professional, designed to improve learning outcomes.

Therapy animals are not service animals

- The role of the Therapy Dog is to react and respond to the environment and multiple clients, under the guidance and direction of the Handler. The most important person in this model is the AAI client



- This is in stark contrast to the Service Dog, whose job is to exclusively focus on the Handler, to the exclusion of all other situations, people and distractions. It may be life-threatening should the service dog's focus move away from the Handler. The most important person in this model is the handler with a disability

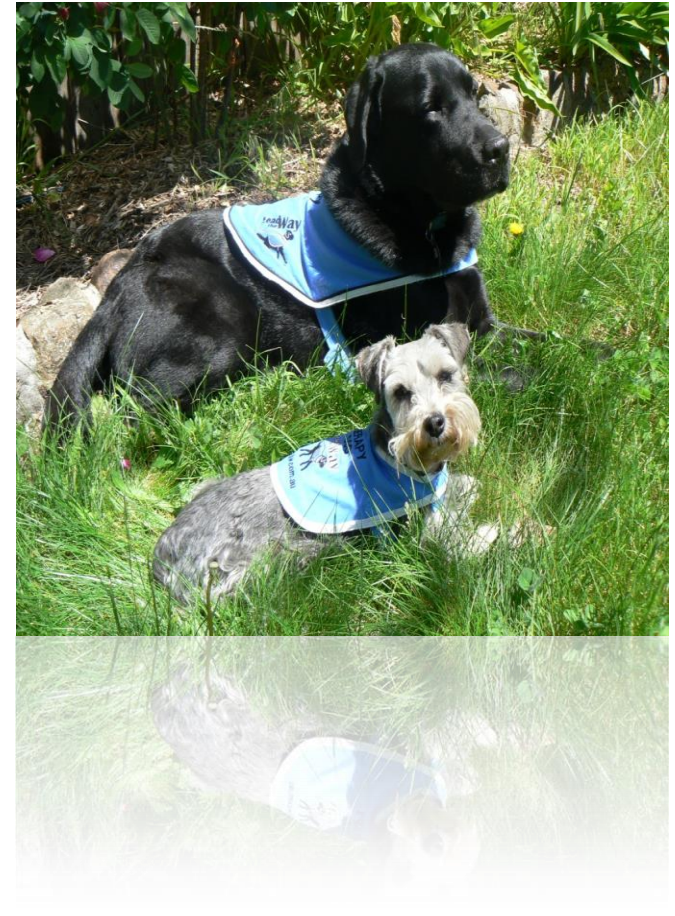


Activity One Tricks!



Why work with Animals?

- Pets have been shown to have a significant role in families (Boat 2010; Walsh 2009).
- They play a significant role in child and adolescent development, having an influence on the development of empathy, non-gendered care-giving skills, and attachment. Children bond quickly and closely to animals, and have a tendency to confide in them (CIAS 2004; Malon, 1992; Malon 1994; Melson & Fine, 2010; Menzies 2003).
- Biophilia and nature hypotheses – suggest a genetic pre-disposition to be drawn to animals and nature (for mutual benefit)



What is the Human-Animal Bond?



- Many of the qualities of the Human-Animal Bond are in line with the qualities of Human-Human attachment (Green, Mathews & Foster 2009; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011)
- There are many individual and cultural differences to the meaning of animals. Context is therefore vitally important and may include individual circumstance, family influence, cultural or religious influences
- Most of our research is based in Western Culture - Historically, western culture comes from an hierarchical perspective, where human's occupy the 'top' position, however there have been significant shifts in western cultures within the past few decades, and these coincide with a shift in the perceived importance of companion animals, and animal welfare (Wood, Shardlow & Willis, 2009)
- Despite many homeless persons not owning their own pets, there is evidence to suggest that animals still play an important part in the lives of homeless people, and may elicit the importance of welfare and safety. Pets can play an important role in managing loneliness (Rew, 2000; Slatter, Lloyd & King, 2012).



The Neurobiological Model of Animal-Assisted Interventions



Modes of Interaction – Degree of directivity

Spontaneous Interventions (Animal-led)

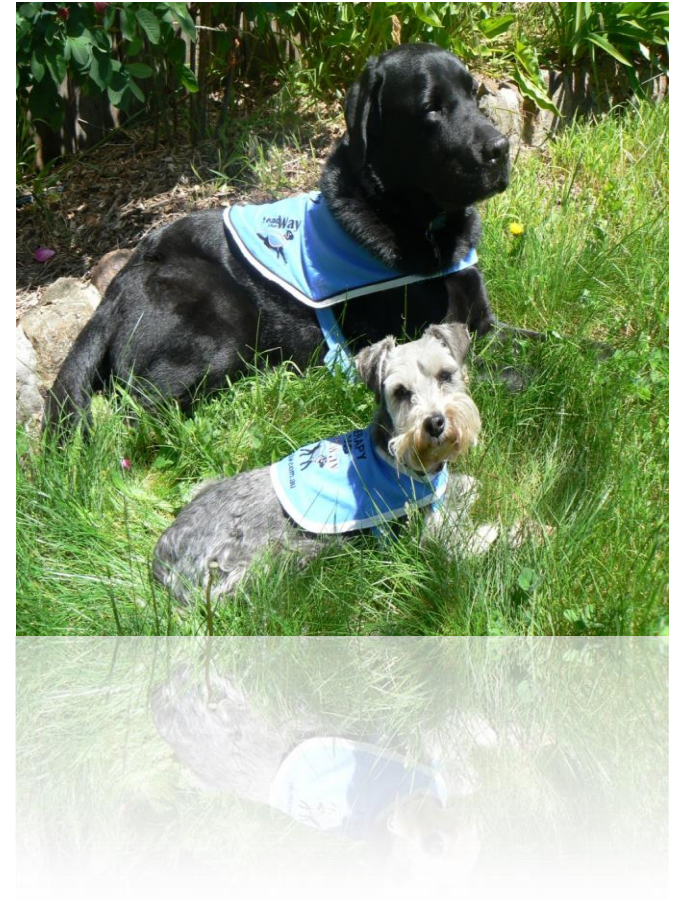
Unstructured, and occur spontaneously when the dog is provided with opportunities to respond naturally

Adjunctive Interventions (Facilitator-led)

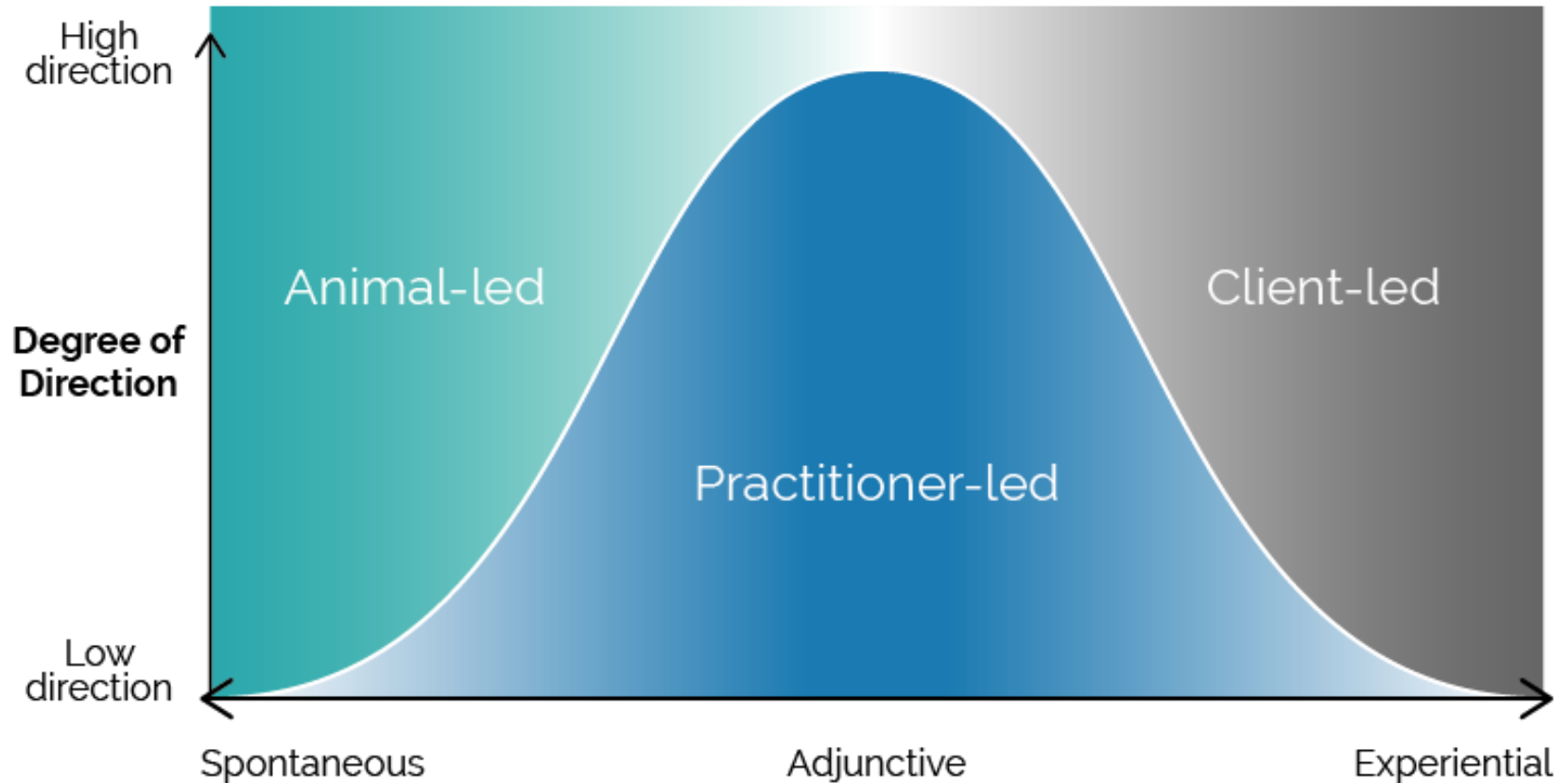
‘In addition to’ the therapy. Guided and managed by the interventionist

Experiential Interventions (Client-led)

Client directed activities, where clients learn by ‘doing’



Degree of 'direction' during NB-AAI





Why use Animal-Assisted Interventions?



- Even brief encounters with pets, such as participating in Animal-Assisted Interventions with Therapy Dogs can have profound impacts.
- Therapy Animals have been implicated in a myriad of health, social, behavioural and emotional benefits, and may have positive impacts on wellbeing and operate as psychological 'assets'.
- Key areas of efficacy are:
 - Engagement, rapport & social lubricant effect
 - Physiological and health outcomes
 - Behavioural disorders
 - Emotional wellbeing

(Bennett, 2012; Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, Uvnas-Moberg, 2013; Nimer & Lundahl, 2007; Schneider & Pilchak-Harley, 2006)

Impact on Humans

- Reduction in stress physiology – Cortisol, BP
- Reduction in feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increases in ‘bonding’ & ‘affiliative’ responses including Oxytocin, Dopamine, Prolactin
- Autonomic down-regulation & co-regulation
- Bonding and the oxytocin hypothesis – opens up the relational space

Impact on Animals

- Dogs may co-regulate with handler’s or owner’s cortisol
- Cortisol responses in dogs are mediated by a strong bond with their owner
- Dogs will produce oxytocin when bonding with their owner
- Dogs have been known to display negative or stress-related behaviours in interactions with humans (e.g. AAT), but this is not always correlated with BP or Cortisol
- Freedom (e.g. no lead) and breaks improve dog’s stress responses to AAT



Activity Two Co-regulation



An Animal Assisted Intervention with young people experiencing homelessness



Frontyard Youth Services

- Located in Melbourne's CBD
- Integrated co-located services for young people 12-25 yrs experiencing or at-risk of homelessness
- Assistance: case management, housing, finance, life skills, health, mental health legal, parenting, education and employment.

Animal Assisted Intervention (Program Development):

- potential to mitigate against the challenges faced by young people
 - Reducing stress, anxiety and aggression
 - Increasing social interactions, motivation, mood
 - Enhancing rapport and engagement with clients
 - Enhancing engagement across co-located services



Program Structure and Implementation



Key findings:

- *Consistency in program organisation and structure is critical to successful implementation*
- *Clear guidelines and regulations are required for program participation*
- Each session was facilitated by Melanie Jones (qualified Psychologist and Animal-Assisted Therapist)
- Support from Frontyard staff and managers.
- Communication of clear rules guiding each session (respect for others, the dogs, handling and sharing of dogs)
- Structured activities designed to teach young people to engage with the therapy dogs (e.g. tricks, going through tunnels, jumping, sitting, shaking hands).
- Unstructured activities (e.g. relax with the therapy dogs)
- Build relationships and trust not with the therapy dogs and other young people



Promoting program engagement



Key findings:

- *Communication with and support from internal stakeholders are integral to program feasibility*
- *Follow-up strategies are required to maintain client engagement*
- Poster distributed across key stakeholders/co-located services
- Facebook and Twitter
- Recording attendance cross-referenced with existing databases to contact young people
 - Reminder SMS's, messages
- Weekly emails to co-located services and other key stakeholders



Program Outcomes



Key findings:

- *April 2017 through January 2019*
- *Over 800 clients participated across all program phases*
- *At least 20% of clients accessed co-located services following program participation*

PRIOR to program participation: vulnerability, sadness, anxiety and stress

FOLLOWING program participation: Happy, calm, relaxed and alive

PERCEIVED BENEFITS: Increased emotion control and socialisation

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS: Increased variety of animals; time spent with animals; session length; and range of activities.



Program Outcomes



Program environment provided an opportunity to:

- Form friendships
- Develop social skills
- Learn to work collective with others
- Participants began to build trust between themselves and the therapy dogs and other young people
- Some young people took up the responsibility of introducing the dogs to the new members of the Program
- Took the lead to teach them how to engage with the dogs in an appropriate manner (e.g. tricks).

Young people's comments

"The dogs make me feel happy, alive.....
The dogs give me a break from my
problems.... I smile when I am around
them and my smile is genuine...I usually
put on a smile but it is a front.... I don't
have many friends left... my smile is
real when I am in the basement with
the dogs"

"It is really hard to get me to
smile given what I am going
through The dogs have
assisted me in feeling happy ...
because I don't think about
anything else but how I am
going to get another hug from
Opal"

"The dogs have made it
easier for me to talk to other
people at Frontyard.... to
control my anger.... I am
more fun to be around"

"I feel happy, relaxed and in
control when I am in the
Program.... When I have a bad
day the dogs have cheered me
up".

"The dogs make me
feel at home when I
haven't felt at home in
a long time."



Interactions





Thank you

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Young people
Poppy Fotiadis
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