


CARING COMPASSION

APPLICATIONS OF THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

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Introduction

In recent years, Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) have become particularly popular. Accordingly, more and more people wish to become actively involved in AAT and AAA. Despite their popularity, understanding of AAT and AAA varies significantly from one individual to the next. Sometimes it seems that there are as many definitions of AAT/AAA as there are people involved in the field! Definitions differ according to each person's educational background, work experience, and relationship with animals. In addition, an individual's goals may influence his or her notion of what AAT/AAA really is.

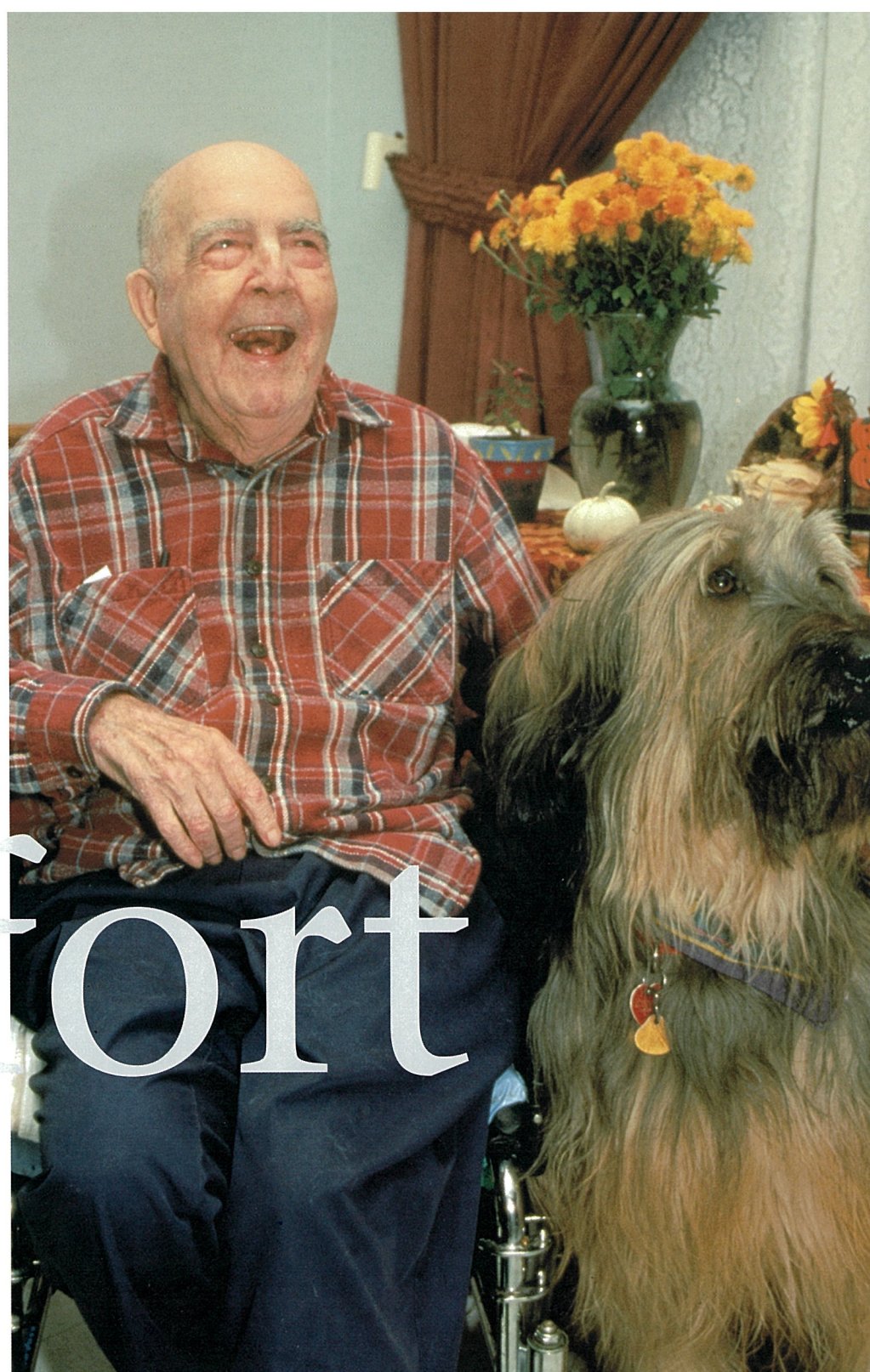
All definitions of AAT and AAA share one common theme: animals fascinate us. Animals are known for their ability to stimulate interest as well as to calm, comfort, and bring joy into our lives. The goal of this booklet is to give the reader a better understanding of the amazing contributions animals can make in people's lives.

When using an animal for AAT/AAA basic guidelines must be followed. Thoughtfulness, safety, and proper animal and handler behavior must be the basis of any pet visitation activity, be it a one-time visit from a volunteer with a dog or the implementation of an institution-based AAT program. In order to be successful while doing AAT/AAA, those in charge must have sufficient knowledge about both animal behavior and the condition of the person receiving care or attention.

People-Pet Partnership (PPP) and Zoothérapie Québec are two organizations involved in AAT/AAA. They both command a vast knowledge of the human-animal bond and their expertise is recognized worldwide.

People-Pet Partnership is a nonprofit, public service organization within the Center for the Study of Animal Well-Being at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University. PPP exists to research and educate the public about the human-animal bond and its applications. Just as importantly, PPP works to promote the humane treatment of companion animals.

Zoothérapie Québec (zoothérapie means animal-assisted therapy in French) is a private, nonprofit organization based in Montréal, Canada. Composed of psychologists, social workers, nurses, and occupational therapists, the team offers professional animal-assisted therapy services to hospitals, care facilities, schools, and rehabilitation centers.



A dog named Jingles

The current interest in AAT/AAA originates largely from the work of Boris Levinson. In the late 1950's, this psychologist became one of the first people to use animals as alternative therapeutic aides. According to Levinson, animals are especially useful to people who are experiencing heightened vulnerability. Examples of such people include those suffering through illness or divorce, or those coping with dramatic life changes (death of family members and friends, loss of economical responsibilities, changes in social roles).

One day, Dr. Levinson's dog, Jingles, was in his office when a client arrived unexpectedly. Observing the immediate bond that developed between his client and the animal, Dr. Levinson realized he could integrate the human-animal connection with patient treatment. Subsequently, he published several papers promoting the use of animals as therapeutic aides, describing how animals can facilitate social contact between humans. Due to Levinson's pioneering work, therapists started to use animals in their practices and scientists began to study these phenomena.

A favorable union

Animals are loved by many and occupy an important place in their lives. Surveys generally indicate that 50% of the United States population owns a pet. In most cases, the pet holds a special status — it is a member of the family.

Why is the presence of an animal important to so many people? While more research is needed to fully answer this question, we do know that the human-animal bond satisfies several basic psychosocial needs. For example:

- People feel more “in control” of their lives when taking care of a pet.
- Because pets are often viewed as friends, the presence of animals can alleviate feelings of loneliness.
- Pet owners, especially dog owners, generally maintain higher levels of physical and social activity. They go outside more frequently and, when walking their dogs, other people often stop to talk to them. Sometimes, this is the only time neighbors talk to each other.
- Owning a pet can help people, especially children, understand the world around them. Recognizing this, many schoolteachers use small animals such as fish and hamsters to explain the life cycle to children.

These beneficial effects often lead to increased self-esteem. However, it is important to note that these effects vary from person to person, depending on the individual's level of interest in the animal.

It is believed that the benefits of the presence of animals are seen more easily during stressful periods. For example, when senior citizens have insufficient social networks, affection for their pets is believed to be positively related to their health. In fact, affection for a pet appears to compensate for the absence of other significant people in an elderly person's life. Furthermore, people without confidants who experience the death of a loved one seem to have fewer symptoms of depression if they have an emotional bond with their pet. Other studies show that

animals can provide significant psychological support during periods of intense stress. For instance, senior citizens who own dogs and suffer from stress or depression visit doctors' offices less often than those without dogs. In addition, elderly people with pets at home often take fewer medications than those who do not have pets.

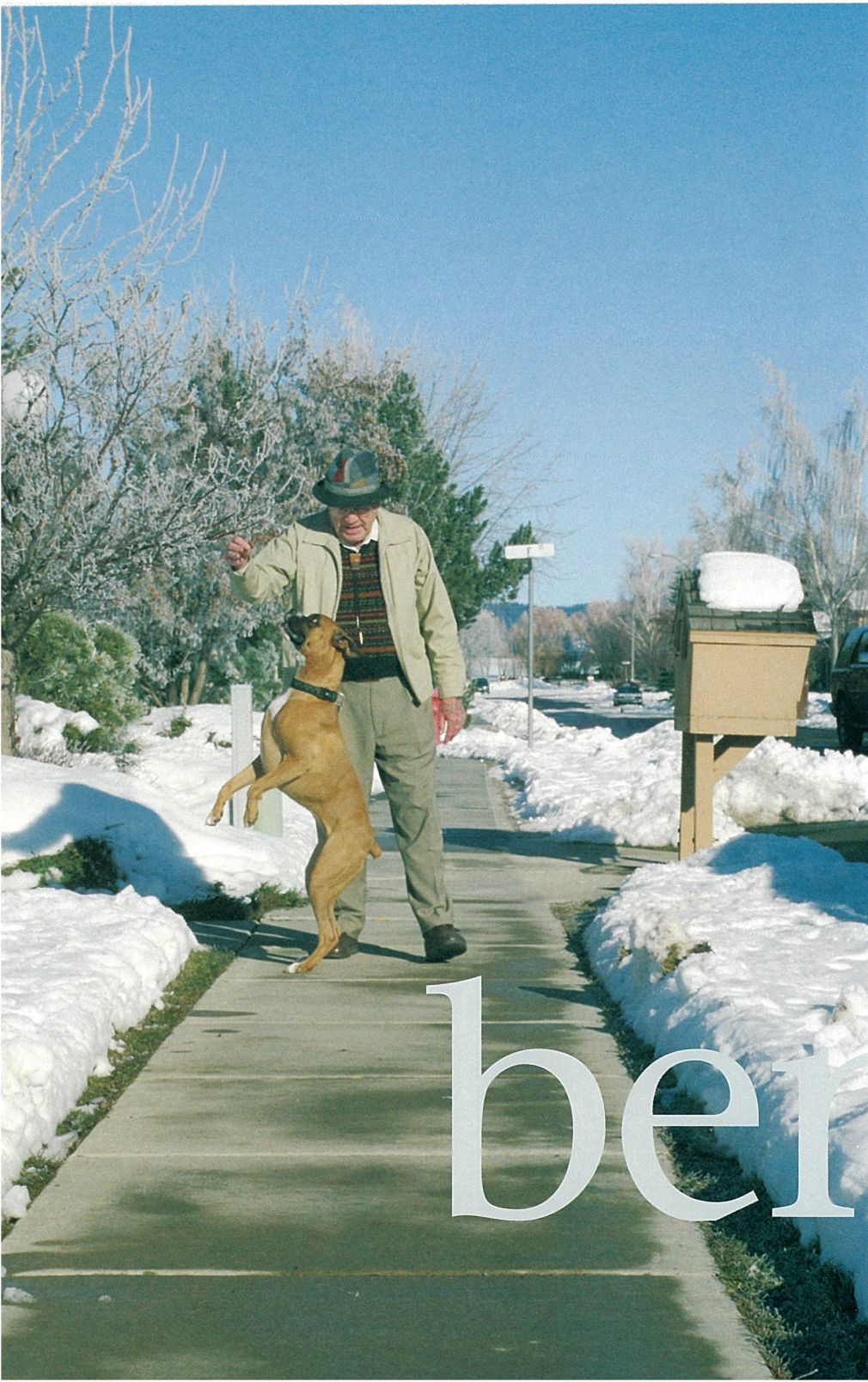
The animal as a versatile and powerful treatment aide

Numerous examples of the use of animals in therapeutic contexts can be found in both popular and scientific literature. The media has also taken an interest in AAT/AAA. We have all seen accounts of therapists using dolphins with children with autism. While these therapeutic programs are interesting, they are not common due to their prohibitive cost and complexity. Dogs and cats, because they are easy to transport and handle and because they adapt readily to new environments, are the most frequently used animals in AAT/AAA.

People with different physical, psychological, and emotional conditions can benefit from AAT/AAA. While not exhaustive, the following list illustrates the diversity of conditions where AAT/AAA may be used in addition to more traditional therapies:

- learning disabilities
- personality and behavioral disorders
- cognitive impairments
- developmental delays
- poor social skills
- loneliness and depression
- attention deficit disorder
- lack of interest and withdrawal
- lack of sensory stimulation
- physical rehabilitation
- delinquency
- poor self-esteem
- mental retardation





Pets can also be used successfully by therapists working with people who have been victims of violence or with helping new residents adapt to life in long term care facilities.

In some instances, animals are used to help people cope with physical limitations or disabilities. Perhaps the most well known examples are guide dogs, hearing dogs, and service dogs which help people confined to wheelchairs. Strictly speaking, this is not AAT or AAA. Their specific purpose is to make people as independent as possible in their activities of daily living. Nevertheless, it has been noted that the greatest benefit of this partnership may be the integration of people with special needs into society. As people are sometimes uncomfortable in the presence of those with disabilities, they often avoid interaction or stay emotionally distant. However, the presence of a service animal may provide a link for social interaction, keeping people with special needs from growing socially isolated.

Multiple benefits

Whatever the nature, frequency, or duration of an AAT/AAA program, properly selected and trained animals are wonderful therapeutic aids — first and foremost because interacting with animals comes naturally and petting dogs or cats does not require any special skills. The presence of an animal can relieve anxiety when facing the unknown. Using an animal in a therapeutic setting may facilitate the work of the therapist. Indeed, people accompanied by an animal are generally perceived as being friendlier and more accessible than people without animals.

Being near pets has a calming effect. They are a source of unconditional affection, regardless of a person's behavior or physical appearance. Petting an animal can be comforting and may help alleviate sadness. The presence of an animal may also inspire playfulness and laughter. This carefree mood brings pleasure, spontaneity, and change to the daily routine of people with either cognitive, psychological, or physical impairments.

An animal may prove to be the impetus for physical activity. For example, dog owners are, on average, more active physically, and it is believed that this increased activity has beneficial effects on their cardiovascular systems. Incorporating pet-grooming tasks into physical rehabilitation plans may increase patients' activity levels and help them adhere to their routines by bringing novelty and innovation to their regular therapy session.

In addition to improving the overall quality of life of AAT/AAA recipients, animals may also help people gain a sense of self-reliance. A well-trained AAT/AAA practitioner can transform a simple activity, such as grooming or exercising an animal, into an opportunity for making a patient feel useful and, at least in part, instrumental in the well-being of another life. Instead of always being the recipient of care, the person becomes the provider of care.

In a care facility or hospital, an animal may serve as a social facilitator. The presence of a dog, cat, or bird often promotes conversation and interactions between residents. By providing topics of conversation that are neutral and non-threatening, an animal allows for the quick establishment of warm personal contacts. Very often, the mere presence of animals in such a setting increases the number and the quality of interactions between the residents, their families, and the staff.

Trying to understand the human-animal bond

It is always interesting to watch people — children in particular — interacting with animals. It seems that most of us are captivated by animals. How does this human-animal bond develop? Why is it so important to humans? While many theories have been suggested, none provide complete explanations. We don't really know why one person enjoys animals while another person does not.



A satisfactory and complete explanation seems, at least for the moment, difficult to achieve. The different species used in AAT/AAA, the cultural and historical variations, and the functions animals serve in people's lives (as pets, sources of income, or food) contribute to the complexity of studying the human-animal bond. This is a new area of research for the scientific community and it is too soon to reach an acceptable consensus. In addition, many experiments have had problems in their methodology and the data obtained have not been sufficiently reliable for the formulation of an adequate scientific theory. Furthermore, data are often anecdotal and based on clinical impressions. However, the most recent research on the human-animal bond is much more rigorous in its methodology, making it easier to construct scientifically acceptable explanations.

Another aspect of AAT/AAA that makes a satisfactory and complete explanation difficult to obtain is its multidisciplinary nature. AAT/AAA involves numerous fields of study such as ethology, psychology, social work, and human and veterinary medicine. Therefore, it is not surprising when researchers sometimes offer differing explanations why AAT/AAA works. Despite these obstacles, the explanations proposed provide interesting hypotheses.

Ethological studies suggest that some physical characteristics of young animals (small jaws, small limbs, a large head, big eyes, and the general characteristic of helplessness) induce parental behaviors such as feeding or grooming in the adult animal. This process is referred to as a "neotenic response", and it is believed to be an important component in the emotional attachment of parents to their offspring. Humans, also, experience these neotenic responses. For example, when people see a baby, they will usually move closer, smile, use a high

pitched voice, take the baby in their arms, etc. People often exhibit similar behaviors around animals, particularly young animals. One may presume that these behaviors are in response to the neotenic characteristics of the animal. Moreover, the domestication process of a species often leads to a neotenic transformation of that species, thus potentially increasing the neotenic responses of humans towards them. For example, it is believed that dogs, through a man-made process, evolved neotenically from wolves. Modern adult dogs retain the youthful physical and behavioral characteristics of wolf puppies thereby making us want to care for them.

It seems, then, that although we have gained some insight into the human-animal bond, the question remains: Why do we appreciate physical contact with animals? Why do we feel the need to pet a dog when we see one, and why does it feel so pleasant?

We know that the act of touching is extremely important for human beings. Research has shown that if you ask a favor of a person while touching his or her arm, he or she will be more likely to comply with the request. In a different study, when asked to complete a questionnaire about themselves, students reported more feelings of well-being when the experimenter had his hand on their shoulders for a few seconds. Yet another indication of the beneficial effects of physical contact is a noticeable decrease in cardiac rates and blood pressure when receiving a massage. Similarly, the growth rate of premature children has been shown to increase in response to massage. Sadly, satisfying this need for physical contact is becoming less acceptable in our modern society; the expression of friendly physical contact between people is now rare. Those who live in nursing homes, or who have been hospitalized for long periods of time, are often the ones who suffer the most. However, receiving a visit from someone involved in AAT/AAA accompanied by his or her dog or cat may help fulfill this important need. To care for and caress an animal helps create strong emotional bonds essential for a well-balanced life.

What is AAT/AAA

In lay terms, Animal-Assisted Therapy, Animal-Assisted Activities, and pet therapy are blanket terms referring to the positive impact animals are believed to have on human health. However, the terms Animal-Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Activities are sometimes used incorrectly. For example, some people might speak of AAT when referring to having a fish tank at home. Proper definitions are needed to avoid confusion.

There are many ways in which humans and animals can be united. The following partnerships are those most frequently cited in scientific studies about the beneficial aspects of interacting with animals.

- Owning a pet

Simply having the opportunity to play with or take care of a pet often increases a person's well-being. In recognition of this, many care facilities set up aquariums or birdcages for the benefit of their residents.





- Senior citizens and pets

Senior citizens often do not own animals due to a lack of money. This is unfortunate because they are probably the ones who would benefit the most from having a pet. As people get older, their social and family connections often disintegrate. The presence of a companion animal helps counter the negative effects of lost social interaction. To help low-income senior citizens acquire companion animals, some humane societies give them (or sell at low prices) cats and dogs. Furthermore, some humane organizations or volunteer associations can help the elderly walk dogs, groom cats, or change litter when these tasks become too difficult. As the population gets older, this type of program certainly becomes one worth promoting. Unfortunately, such programs require much management and are usually costly to run. Given these factors, few humane societies have the resources to initiate this type of program.

- Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA)

AAA has become very popular. Volunteers and their pets go to nursing homes and hospitals in order to visit the residents. In the past, most of these people had no special training, but now many organizations supervise and train volunteers for AAA. These organizations have developed tools to help select suitable pets for these types of activities. They have also developed guidelines and codes of practice for AAA.

- Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)

The fourth program often mentioned in scientific literature is Animal-Assisted Therapy. AAT involves a healthcare professional using a carefully selected and trained animal in a therapeutic setting. The animal serves as an aide in creating a therapeutic alliance between the therapist and the client. During an AAT session, the therapist makes use of the animal's capacity to stimulate people, thereby improving the client's condition. In some facilities, AAT is part of the residents' regular plan of care.

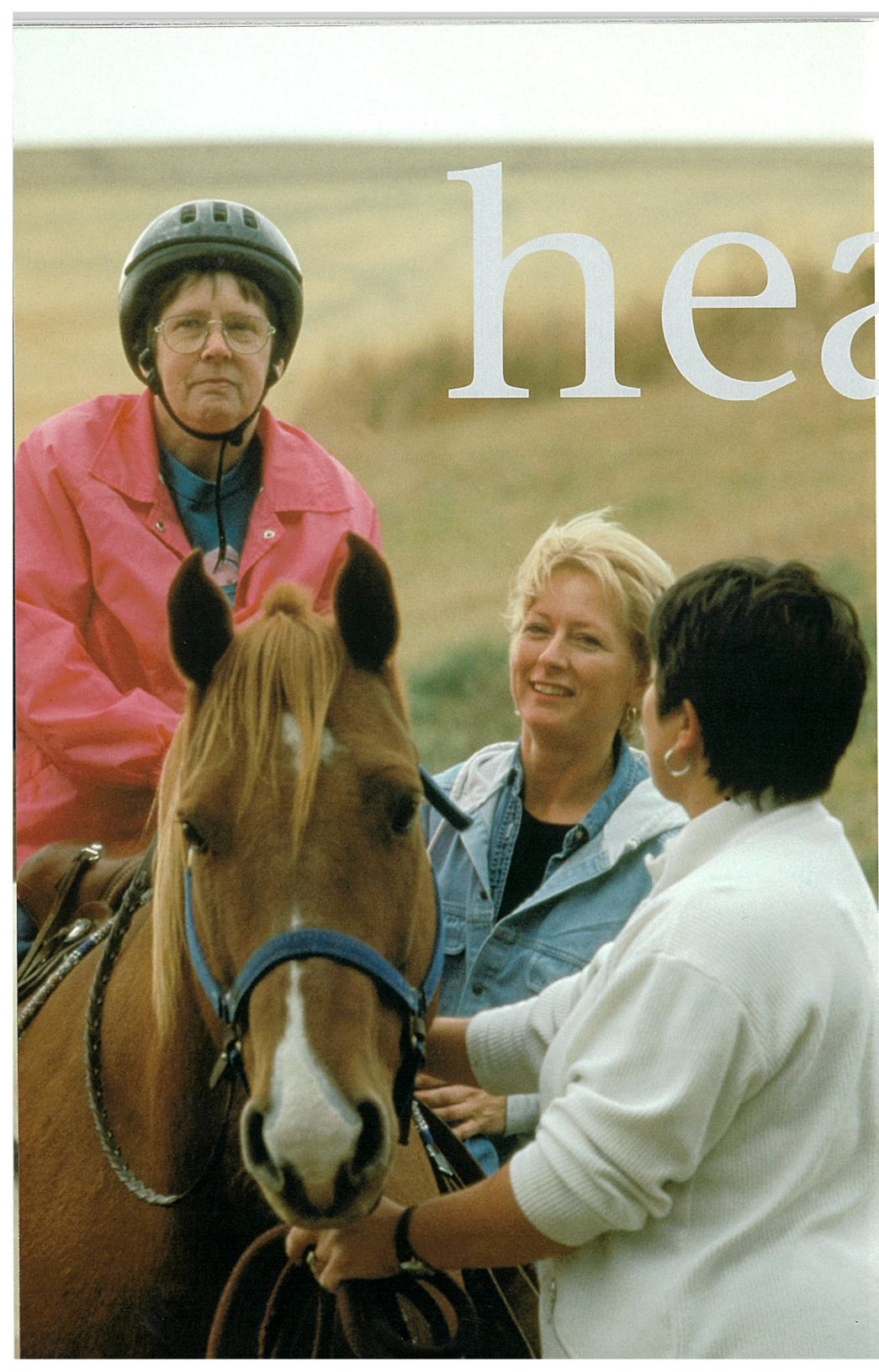
AAT differs from other programs involving the use of animals in that (a) the person in charge of the activity is a trained professional, and (b) AAT is goal-directed. Using a specially selected and trained animal, the therapist attempts to elicit reactions that are aimed at maintaining or improving the physical, psychosocial, cognitive, or emotional condition of an individual.

Getting ready

Deciding to start an AAT/AAA program in a care facility, a rehabilitation center, or a hospital is in no way comparable to an individual's decision to acquire an animal for his or her family. In the latter case one may assume that after a brief meeting all members of the family agree with the decision. However, things are different in a large institution. The desire to introduce an animal is often not unanimous. For example, some residents or employees may be afraid of animals. Similarly, the administration may be concerned with zoonotic diseases (diseases transmissible from animals to humans, and vice versa) or may think that introducing animals would increase the workload of the janitorial staff. These concerns need to be addressed before introducing an AAT/AAA program.

One of the first steps in starting an AAT/AAA program is to educate the staff and the administration about AAT/AAA and to make sure the institution is ready to welcome animals. During this preliminary stage, residents and staff who are allergic to animals or afraid of them should be identified. Special efforts need to be made to avoid disturbing people who don't want to interact with animals. It is important to stress that AAT/AAA is not desirable for everybody. No one should ever be forced to interact with an animal if s/he does not want to. Instead, the administration should provide the person performing AAT/AAA with a list of persons who might benefit from interacting with animals and who have expressed interest in such activities. The person performing AAT/AAA should be properly trained to insure s/he interacts appropriately with the clients. Also, a basic knowledge of animal behavior and animal care is necessary. Constant supervision of interactions between animals, residents, and the staff is essential.

Selecting the right species of animal for AAT/AAA requires careful consideration. For example, while a rat may be valuable when working with teenagers with behavioral problems, it might prove to be a poor choice for elderly people with Alzheimer's Disease. Once the species has been selected, the next step is to choose the specific animal. The difference between an appropriate and an inappropriate animal can determine the success of the program. Obviously, not all animals have a suitable character for this type of activity. Using a dog or a cat that is unstable or nervous and therefore in constant psychological discomfort will affect its ability to perform the activity. Choosing an excitable horse for a therapeutic horseback riding program could have disastrous consequences for both the rider and the animal. Suitable candidates are chosen for their friendliness towards people, their stable character, their kindness, their good behavior, their lack of aggression, and their ability to understand basic commands. The selection process should be performed by someone with adequate knowledge of the species: a veterinarian, an ethologist, or a certified trainer.



health

It is of the utmost importance to monitor the health status of the animals involved in AAT/AAA as zoonotic diseases pose a threat to both animals and humans. Therefore, anyone involved in AAT/AAA should exercise caution. People with compromised immune systems should be especially aware of the danger of these diseases, since they are most at risk for contracting them. In addition, people with allergies or asthma need to be identified before the start of AAT/AAA to avoid complications that may arise due to the presence of animals. Zoonotic diseases are not frequent and, with proper management, are usually preventable.

In order to limit the risks of disease transmission, a prevention program needs to be in place. It should include the following:

- Annual visits to the veterinarian (or more frequently if recommended by the veterinarian)
- Supervised introduction of animals in the institutions (the person in charge of the activity has to be familiar with the animal s/he is working with and follow predetermined guidelines)
- Regular grooming of the animal
- Regular hand washing. This is probably the most important point. People involved in AAT/AAA sessions should wash their hands **both before and after the activity**. This applies to the handler as well as the people visited and helps protect both humans and animals from disease transmission.

An animal with an unknown health status should not be used in AAT/AAA. In addition, if there are any doubts about the animal's behavior or temperament, one should refrain from using it in these programs. Finally, if the animals live on-site, proper housing and handling procedures must be clearly established and followed in order to ensure the well-being and security of all involved.

People-Pet Partnership

Dr. Leo K. Bustad, Dean Emeritus of Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, was an outstanding educator, scientist, and humanitarian. He envisioned a world where there would be "reverence for all life". He believed that it is necessary to promote an awareness and appreciation of the importance and connection between all living things. To this end, Dr. Bustad founded People-Pet Partnership, a pioneering organization that, through its community service programs, promotes the importance of the human-animal bond.

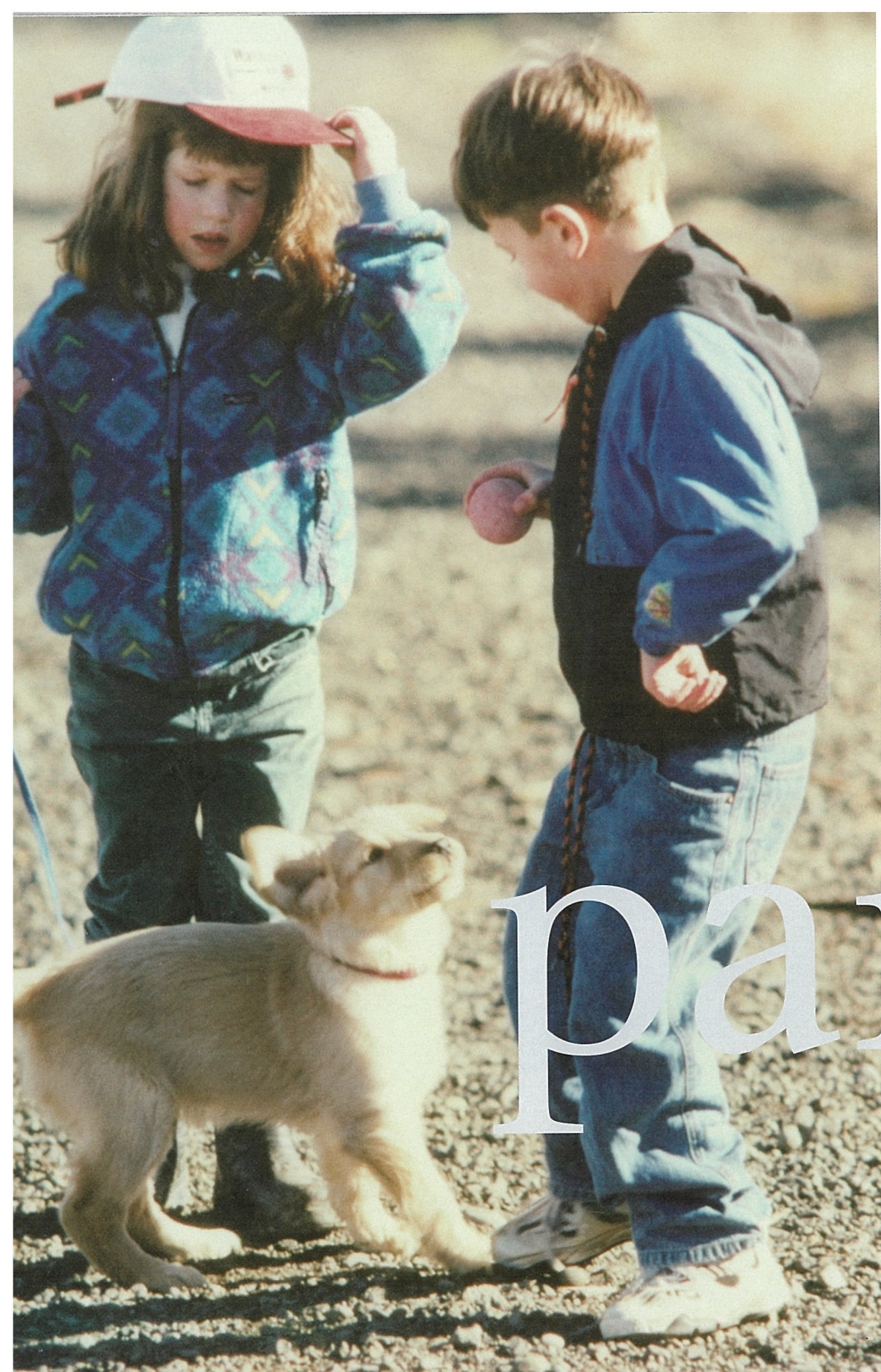
People-Pet Partnership began in 1974 with companion animal visits to local care facilities. In 1975, PPP initiated several educational programs. The first was offered to veterinary students, and was concerned with community outreach, education and ethical responsibilities. Gradually this course evolved, requiring students to present material on responsible companion animal care and environmental stewardship to area residents and in local elementary schools. In 1979, a recreational, therapeutic horseback riding program for people with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities was created.

Entering its third decade of operation, People-Pet Partnership now oversees three programs that use animals to improve people's lives in a variety of ways:

Pet Education Partnership (PEP)

Children taught to extend justice, kindness, and mercy towards animals act in this manner as adults. PEP encourages this through education. Specifically, this is accomplished by showing children the benefits of interaction with companion animals and teaching them how to be responsible pet owners. Furthermore, PEP educates students about their responsibilities toward all animals and their environment as a whole.





Teaching children about responsible pet care and the human-animal bond is an important part of developing caring adults. However, many educators do not have the time to develop a curriculum on their own. Therefore, PPP has produced a manual, *Learning and Living Together: Building the Human-Animal Bond*, which includes sections on how to start pet education programs, train volunteer instructors, and teach effectively. The manual also includes detailed lesson plans for pre-school to middle school children and for students with learning disabilities. The lessons emphasize responsibility and empathy through relationships with companion animals. The manual also focuses on breaking the cycle of violence. Extensive bibliographies accompany each lesson plan, and follow-up materials are provided for relevant classroom activities.

Companion Animal Partnership (CAP)

Humans are social creatures who need to be nurtured in order to stay physically and emotionally healthy. Unfortunately, we often find ourselves far removed from sources that gave us comfort as children — the natural world and satisfying relationships with other individuals. When we spend an extended period of time in a care facility due to injury or age, a visit from a caring individual partnered with a companion animal can be welcome. In this way, the enjoyable experiences of childhood are revisited.

CAP was initiated to alleviate the “loneliness of spirit” that often exists in care facilities and hospitals. CAP staff and their temperament-tested, obedience-trained companion animals visit residents at local care facilities. They provide AAT/AAA, while making new friendships.

Palouse Area Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH)

The joy of sitting astride and controlling a horse is an empowering experience for an individual with physical, mental, and/or emotional challenges. PATH's mission is to provide recreational, therapeutic horseback riding for people with these challenges. Horseback riding gives individuals with disabilities a chance to strengthen and relax muscles, increase joint mobility, and improve balance, posture, and coordination in a way that makes learning fun and interesting. Acquiring these skills fosters the development of confidence and self-reliance while riders learn the basics of caring for a horse.

In addition to these three programs, PPP also conducts research on human-animal interaction and its applications. PPP explores how animals in therapeutic settings can contribute to the well-being of humans. Specifically, PPP addresses the following questions:

- Who benefits from AAT/AAA?
- What constitutes a thorough AAT/AAA session?
- How can interactions between animals and people receiving therapy be adequately measured?
- What is the role of the therapist?

Answering these questions — and others — will eventually result in new and innovative ways of improving human health.



Zoothérapie Québec

Zoothérapie Québec was created in 1988 and specializes in animal-assisted therapy. Throughout the years, it has developed a wide range of clinical, consultation, training, and program implementation services. These services are provided to educational and health establishments on a contractual basis. Zoothérapie Québec's staff is specifically trained to use animals as therapeutic adjuncts in their work.

Zoothérapie Québec has experienced amazing growth since its inception. In its first year, 240 people from a single establishment were

served. In 2000, 31,600 people from 68 schools, care facilities, and hospitals were visited by a staff of 12 professionals and 18 specially selected and trained dogs.

Zoothérapie Québec offers both individual and group activities and serves people with a vast array of disabilities. Most clients have severe cognitive and physical limitations and do not respond well to conventional therapeutic techniques. They show memory and judgement deterioration or have limited intellectual capacities. Their ability to process information, to express their thoughts and emotions, and their capacity to orient themselves in time and space is often limited or non-existent. Each person requires an individualized approach adapted to his or her specific needs. In many cases, AAT seems to provide clients with this personalized therapeutic plan.

The opportunity for people to interact with animals is not the goal of AAT but rather the means. Animals help establish a fundamental relationship between the therapists and the people they serve. Furthermore, with the help of the animal, therapists develop a series of activities aimed at improving the well-being of their clients. These activities are designed in cooperation with the school, care facility, or hospital treatment team. The hope is that the improvements seen during AAT will generalize to other spheres of the clients' lives.

development



Zoothérapie Québec's success can be attributed to many factors. By implementing and adhering to the highest quality professional standards early on, Zoothérapie Québec set the precedent in AAT/AAA for all of Canada. A leader in its field, Zoothérapie Québec creates and experiments with new AAT/AAA applications for diverse clientele. It has partnerships with several Canadian and European universities and supervises undergraduate and graduate internships. Finally, in addition to its regular AAT services, Zoothérapie Québec acts in close cooperation with local organizations such as the police department, social service agencies, and community centers.

One of the most recent programs developed by Zoothérapie Québec provides a prime example of the organization's impact on its community. Zoothérapie Québec and the local police department have created a visitation program that identifies and supports elderly people confined to their homes. Through this program, a policeman and a Zoothérapie Québec staff member bring a companion dog to visit these senior citizens. During the visit, they obtain information about the person's social network and the safety of his/her home. They also

inquire as to whether the person would be interested in participating in social activities, receiving friendly visits from a volunteer and his or her dog, and if assisted home living services are needed. If the person expresses an interest in these friendly visits, a volunteer — previously trained and under continuous supervision — schedules regular appointments. The animal helps facilitate the first contact between volunteers and clients. Besides providing opportunities for much needed conversation, these visits allow the volunteer a chance to discretely monitor the person's physical and cognitive state. When necessary, a referral is made to the proper health services.

Zoothérapie Québec also works with youth. In particular, schools often request that the organization develop programs for children who have difficulties adjusting to school due to learning disabilities or behavioral problems. The staff uses animal care and training activities that provide children with the opportunity to experience control and responsibility. While playing with the dogs, children learn tolerance for others, and how to work together with their peers. While brushing the animals, children are invited to relax and focus on the experience. These quiet moments are the perfect occasion to express their feelings. Aside from these routine activities, special activities are often incorporated. For example, children might be asked to prepare a dog exposition. Over the course of several weeks they read about different breeds of dogs, dog behavior, and dog care. Then, in small groups, they prepare posters or short lectures on dog-related topics. By the time the day of the exposition arrives, the kids are proud to share their knowledge with the rest of the school. In this manner, kids not only learn about animals, but also gain self-esteem through their success. Throughout the process, the children improve their social skills and present an improved self-image to their teachers and peers.

learning

Onward and Upward

The many aspects of the human-animal bond are both time-tested and fascinating. With services such as AAT/AAA increasing in popularity, we expect to gain further insight about the rich and complex relationship we share with animals. Numerous studies have already shown that animals hold an important place in people's lives. Challenges in years to come include increasing the scope of this knowledge, further exploring the many ways animals can participate in human well being, and promoting AAT/AAA and making it accessible to as many people as possible. Organizations such as People-Pet Partnership and Zoothérapie Québec are actively working on meeting these challenges and others. In doing so, we will be one step closer to achieving a better understanding of all living creatures, and building compassion towards them. In the words of Dr. Leo K. Bustad, "onward and upward".



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