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ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION (AAE)

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What it is.

Animal Assisted Education (AAE) is a “specialized application of Animal Assisted Intervention or Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) directed at students and classroom interactions but can also be any kind of skills-based learning activity that includes animals as teaching partners, regardless of the setting.

It is defined as working with an animal to help stimulate a child’s interest in any given educational activity. Examples of AAE may include reading to assistance animals, dog-bite prevention programs, humane education programs, and companionable zoos (similar to therapeutic farms). These programs are further described below.

AAE is the process of learning, and training, specifically developing skills and knowledge that is being assisted and enhanced by the presence of an animal.

How it works.

AAE involves the incorporation of animals into an educational setting. It can be done within the classroom or as an educational tool outside of the classroom. Positive interaction with animals can both improve human health and enhance our ability to interact with others.

The Visiting Animal in educational settings is either the subject of the lesson plan, a participant in the facilitation of the learning plan, or an enhancement to the environment for learning to take place.

Perhaps the most notable difference between AAT and AAE is that in therapeutic use, the goals are specific to the individual or group toward their rehabilitation or quality of life. Whereby in AAE, the goals are educational, learning based, and may or may not be measured.

AAE is directed and/or delivered by an educational professional with specialized expertise, and within the scope of practice of his/her profession. AAE may be provided in a variety of settings, may be group or individual in nature, and may be implemented for persons of any age. There are specific educational goals for each individual involved and the process is documented and evaluated.

Species of animals

Reptiles, fowl, dogs, cats, rodents, lagomorphs (rabbits) and mini equines are all incorporated into classroom educational animal assisted programs. The most popular species are dogs, cats, reptiles and rodents. When AAE occurs outside the classroom setting, it can involve many other species of animals and can take on different educational focuses. The following are examples of how AAE may be carried out.

SPECIFIC AAE PROGRAMS

Reading Assistance Animals In The Classroom

Children with learning disabilities or who have difficulty reading, and are often self-conscious and exhibit low self-esteem, often find reading to an animal less intimidating than reading aloud to their peers. By providing a non-threatening environment and a non-judgmental presence, animals are both supportive and nurturing. Reading-assistance animals (commonly dogs in classroom settings) help such children and youth to feel less vulnerable and intimidated when practicing reading. This type of reading increases self-esteem and self-confidence, helps them to forget their limitations, and provides a positive, relaxed, and fun atmosphere which promotes learning.

K-9 Kids Reading Program (Atlanta area)

“As part of a motivational reading program, Canine Assistance service dogs and representatives visit several schools throughout the Atlanta area each week during the school year to listen to the children read. In addition to overall academic achievement, motivation in reading skyrockets with the help of the dogs.”

(<http://www.canineassistants.org/programs/>) *For more information about K-9 Kids Reading Program, please contact:

Dr. Melissa Loree, Director of Education 770-664-7178, ext. 205

melissaloree@canineassistants.org

Paws for a Story - Northern Pet Therapy Society

“The Northern Pet Therapy Society offers a program where children learn to read by reading to animals. The program is designed to improve children’s reading skills and encourage the joy of reading through the assistance of handlers and companion animals. It is offered through schools, libraries, and other organizations.”

(<http://www.pettherapysociety.com>) The service is targeted to school aged children from six to twelve years, who are learning disabled and/or those with reading difficulties. *For more information about Paws for a Story Program, please contact:

14620 111 Avenue NW,
Edmonton, Alberta T5M 2P4
780-413-4682 780-440-3341

R.E.A.D.

R.E.A.D. is a program set to improve the literacy skills of children through the assistance of registered therapy teams as literacy mentors. It demonstrates how registered therapy dogs and their handlers can help to improve the literacy skills of children in an effective, unique and, most importantly, fun manner. Literacy specialists acknowledge that children, who are below their peers in reading skills, are often intimidated by reading aloud in a group, often have lower self-esteem, and view reading as a chore.

Research with therapy animals indicates that children with low self-esteem are often more willing to interact with an animal than another person. Further, during such interaction they are inclined to forget about their limitations. There are also physiological benefits to interacting with animals, including increased relaxation and lower blood pressure. The goal of the R.E.A.D. program is that children will find reading to an animal less intimidating, a special time for them that is helpful and fun, and a positive environment in which learning is facilitated.

The focus of the reading is age appropriate books with animal themes. The Intermountain Therapy Animals teams provide books that are "pawtographed" by the therapy animals for the children to read. As they advance to the next level of reading, a "pawtographed" book for that level will be given to the child to keep. R.E.A.D. programs can be implemented in elementary schools, preschools, after-school latchkey programs, healthcare facilities, local libraries and even in a child's home.

“Intermountain Therapy Animals anticipates many benefits to participants in the R.E.A.D. program. Children improve their reading skills in a unique and fun environment, the program can be implemented in many settings, the program promotes another way that animals can make a positive difference in children’s lives, and R.E.A.D. can potentially be successful with older children, as well.” (<http://www.therapyanimals.org/R.E.A.D.html>) *For more information about Intermountain Therapy Animals R.E.A.D. program, please contact:

Intermountain Therapy Animals at 801-272-3439 Humane Education Programs info@therapyanimals.org

Humane Education Programs

Research has demonstrated a clear link between animal abuse/cruelty and human violence/abuse. Humane education programs, therefore, aim at "instilling, reinforcing, and enhancing young people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour toward the kind, compassionate, and responsible treatment of human and animal life." (Ascione, 1997) These programs focus on developing empathy and pro-social behaviours in children and youth.

Alberta SPCA– Every Living Thing Program (Edmonton area)

This is a Humane Education website for teachers who aim to inspire compassion for animals, people and the environment. *For more information about the SPCA Every Living Thing Program, please contact:

<http://www.everylivingthing.ca/>

Calgary Humane Society – My Pet And Me, Friends For Life

The Calgary Humane Society Alberta Learning Curriculum offers a series of teachings about pet care, building empathy, etc. My Pet and Me – Friends for Life: Domestication of Animals:

Classroom Critter Care: Reptiles and Amphibians: “Don’t Feed The Bears!” Human Impacts on Wildlife: Bullying – Pets and Peers: Animal Protection – Police For Pets? Urbanization and Wildlife Careers with Animals *For more information about the Humane Society Education programs, please contact:

<http://www.calgaryhumane.ca/humane-education/teachers-students/>

The Humane Education department at 403-205-4455 ext 6544 or by email at humane.educator@calgaryhumane.ca

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ANIMALS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

COMPANIONABLE ZOOS OR THERAPEUTIC FARMS

Companionable zoos overlap considerably with therapeutic farms. They are geared towards any youth with behavioural, emotional, developmental and intellectual challenges. They can consist of anything from a few small animals (rodents, rabbits, a bird, etc.) housed in a classroom to much larger animals (dogs, cats, miniature horses, donkeys, goats, ducks, etc.) housed in a special building or on a farm. At companionable zoos, children help care for, learn about, play with, and “interact with animals as pets. They display touch-talk dialogue and affection and, when they are competent, demonstrate them to children in other classes or to adults in senior centers or hospitals. The children also have (Katcher and Wilkins, 2000) Companionable zoos often offer humane education programs, often providing AAT or a therapeutic component. Examples of companionable zoos or therapeutic farms include:

Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy Ltd.

Individual and group therapy, educational field trips, therapeutic education programs, retreats, mobile program,

volunteer opportunities, training in AAT and setting up programs are offered at Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy Ltd. *For more information about Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy Ltd., please contact: www.dreamcatcherassociation.com

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AB, or info@dreamcatcherassociation.com

Lak'ech Ecolodge And Ranch – field trips, permaculture, horticulture

Arabian Horse Reading Literacy Project (Near Edmonton, AB)

The purpose of the Arabian Horse Reading Literacy Project is to motivate children to discover the joys of reading and learning through the magic of contact with live horses. The goal is to spark the imagination of children so they will want to read and enjoy their own sense of creativity as they escape into a world of adventure. The 'kids' are motivated to want to read! The program involves school aged children and youth reading to horses, junior high writing programs, and etc. *For more information about the Arabian Horse Reading Literacy Project, please contact: <http://www.arabianhorsereading.com>

"Horses are outstanding teachers! The horses motivate kids to want to read." ~ Gary Millar
gary.millar@arabianhorsereading.com

Dog-Bite Prevention Programs

The goal of such programs is to help teach children and youth about dog behaviour and body language in an effort for them to understand dogs better, increase their savviness and safety around dogs, and reduce their phobias or fears about dogs. By learning to "speak dog" and learning what to do when faced with an aggressive dog, children and youth are at a significantly lesser risk for being attacked or bitten. Such programs sometimes provide education to parents on how to introduce a new baby to their existing dog, as well as information and resources on how to raise puppies in ways that do not promote biting and aggression. These programs seek to foster positive, safe and loving human-dog relationships, and dispel myths about dogs. They often happen in a classroom setting to help increase children's awareness of safe dog interactions.

Paws For Safety (Calgary, AB)

Paws For Safety is a school program for students in ECS to Grade 6 which provides interactive safety presentations to students in ECS through Grade 6. The program aims to reduce the number of dog bite incidents by teaching students safe behaviour. *For more information about the Paws For Safety program, please contact:

The City of Calgary Animal Services Public Education
Advisors-403-268-2002 or Public Education advisors
-403-268-1096 <http://www.dlcc.ca/dbp.pdf>

Or <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Pages/Animal-Services/Animal-Services.aspx?redirect=/animalservices>

Doggone It! Bite Prevention – Be A Tree Program

The “Be a Tree” program is a dog bite prevention seminar program for school age children. This program focuses on fun and interactive activities to teach children how to read dog body language and how to act safely around their own dog and strange dogs. Doggone Safe ***For more information about the “Be a Tree” program, please contact:** Kari Loftus, Box 1346, Calmar Alberta 780-267-5160 <http://www.doggonesafe.com>
http://www.doggonesafe.com/Be_a_Tree_program (These are both from Florida but available through instructor in BC – Canada West)

BUT, an alternate might be...

Humane Educational Curriculum - Alberta Education Program of Studies

The Alberta Education Program of Studies teaches children how to care for pets and treat all animals humanely as part of character and citizenship education. Animal abuse has been shown to be directly linked to bullying and domestic violence. Childhood cruelty towards animals can lead to violence against humans. Educating children early about humane issues can break this cycle. *For more information about the Humane Educational Curriculum programs, please contact:

Cochrane & Area Humane Society 62 Griffin Industrial Point, Cochrane, AB - T4C
0A3 (403) 932-2072
http://www.cochranehumane.ca/education/bite_prevention/index.html

Eileen Bona is a Registered Psychologist and the Owner/Founder of Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy, a private practice that partners with animals and nature to help children, youth and adults who have neurodevelopmental disabilities or mental health diagnoses. For more information, visit online: www.dreamcatcherassociation.com or call: (780) 809-1047

Bibliography

Ascione, F. R. (1997). Humane education research: Evaluating efforts to encourage children's kindness and caring toward animals. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*(123), 59-77.

Katcher, A., & Wilkins, G. (2000). The Centaur's lessons: therapeutic education through care of animals and nature study. In A. F. (Ed.), *Handbook on Animal-assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.