

ANYTHING'S PAWS-IBLE

**Animal Assisted Therapy
Program Outline
August 2019**

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Animal Assisted Therapy Program Outline

Mission

To utilize animal assisted therapy to engage students in activities that focus on positively impacting their mental health while also creating an atmosphere of awareness and acceptance for educators as they strive to ensure our district's standard of excellence in education.

Goals

- Increase empathy and compassion within the school body
- Increase social-emotional competence in struggling students
- Reduce any negativity or anxiety and promote the feeling of family within the school environment
- Decrease the time required to establish rapport between School Counselor and students
- Decrease the time involved in student disclosure in a safe and judgment free environment
- Increase positive behavior among students
- Decrease negative feelings and mend relationships between dogs and students
- Teach correct dog interaction and safety

Definition

“Therapy dog” means an animal that is a graduate of a program through an assistance dog organization that is a member of Therapy Dogs International or a similar nonprofit organization that attempts to select the highest standard of training for animals for the purpose of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship to school district students. Therapy dogs are the personal property of a school district employee or volunteer and are not owned by the school district. Therapy dogs do not meet the definition of “service animals” under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“Therapy dog handler” means an employee of the school district or volunteer who has received training and passed an evaluation from Therapy Dogs International or a similar nonprofit organization for handling a specific therapy animal and who will be handling and overseeing care of that specific therapy animal for the entire time the animal is on a District campus.

Benefits

Physical - interaction with a dog reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses

Social - a visit with a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, promotes greater self-esteem and well-being, and focused interaction with others. Animals are a relatable companion for students with cognitive disabilities/impairments.

Cognitive - companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem solving and game playing. Using therapy animals as a talking point in the classroom during various subjects creates a relatable and engaging point of interest improving student involvement throughout the lesson.

Emotional - the presence of a therapy dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others, and lifts mood - often by provoking laughter. The presence of a dog is also proven to lower stress and anxiety along with promoting a feeling of safety amongst those present.

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Environmental – a dog in a facility increases the positive feeling of a school and lifts mood. This has been proven to continue after the interaction has finished. A dog can also create a positive environment by proving feelings of non-judgment, understanding and safety.

Services Provided to School

- Animal-assisted activities during counseling sessions – individual and group
- Animal-assisted education inside of classroom upon request of staff member
- Positive behavior incentive
- Possibility for intervention reading programs
- Modification of select materials to include therapy animals – increasing student involvement
- Incentive for obtaining goals and decreasing depression during student athlete rehabilitation from injury

Timeline

Our goal is to start with the school year of 2020. The animal will be used on a daily basis. The schedule would include all SISD campuses and consideration would be given based on need.

After assessment of the program by the district and securing funding, additional animals will be purchased so that each campus has access to a full time therapy animal.

Costs

- Moss Creek Goldendoodle and 12 week certification training- \$11,500
- Therapy Animal Certification-\$45 annually
- Annual Care/Grooming/Vet Care-\$2000-\$2400 annually
- Insurance/Legal-\$800 annually
- Travel Expenses-\$1000

Supporting Research

There is no doubt that children are drawn to animals however is there more to this connection then the simple fascination? The scientific research is still relatively new in this area but there have been numerous studies that believe animal interaction is extremely beneficial to child’s social and cognitive development.

Improves Environment

The theory that children receive developmental benefits from canine interaction is based on the concepts of: attachment theory, conceptualism, environmental psychology and child therapy. Dogs have a particularly calming effect on children; this is because of their non-threatening and non-judging nature. This ‘calm’ creates a safe environment for the child allowing them to engage at a level that previously would have taken numerous sessions to develop rapport. This engagement is seen in a child’s willingness to participate, alertness, responsiveness and an increase in self-disclosure. Dogs are also believed to be a beneficial tool in working with students on the spectrum as the dog’s social cues are easier to interpret.

Cirulli, Francesca, Borgi, Marta, Berry, Alessandra, Francia, Nadia, & Alleva, Enrico. (2011). Animal-assisted interventions as innovative tools for mental health. *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, 47(4), 341-348. https://dx.doi.org/10.4415/ANN_11_04_04

Encourages Traumatic Debriefing

Animal Assisted Interventions have proven very effective when working with traumatized children. The animal in these situations were either used as a social partner in the session or as a metaphor. Dogs are commonly used in sessions for activities such as: telling the dog (opposed to the counselor) about their experiences, explaining the incident through the dog’s perspective, and grooming the animal while engaging with the counsellor. These interventions are successful due to their ability to assist in the child’s regulation throughout the session, allowing the child to distance themselves from the incident while telling their story, and express themselves to a completely neutral party (dog).

O’Haire, M. E., Guérin, N. A., & Kirkham, A. C. (2015). Animal-Assisted Intervention for trauma: a systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1121. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01121>

Positive Effects on ADHD Symptoms

ADHD presents as an inability to control behavior, impulses and movements. ADHD isn’t curable however individuals can learn skills and techniques to decrease the effects of these symptoms. Animal-based interventions have shown to have calming and de-arousing effects on children. These effects promote the child’s ability to focus and engage in interventions that targets over activity, impulse control or agitation. Combining Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions increases a child’s chances of overcoming their symptoms and excelling in the classroom.

Busch, C., Tucha, L., & Talarovicova, A. (2016). Animal-Assisted Interventions for Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *A Theoretical Review and Consideration of Future Research Directions*, 118 (1), 292-331. <http://doi/full/10.1177/0033294115626633>

Academic Benefits

Animal-Assisted Activities have shown to have academic benefits in the form of achievements. Having a dog in a classroom reduces stress and anxiety while improving motivation. This is extremely beneficial during times of high stress such as testing. A dog can also increase motivation, focus and task persistence through being incorporated into classroom lessons. These benefits are achieved through using a topic of discussion that is tangible, engaging and unique to their school. In social studies a dog can be used to examine the roles of working animals, science can focus on reproduction or lifecycles, health can examine canine diet and math can work on the costs of owning a dog.

Beck, K (2015). The Impact of Canine-Assisted Therapy and Activities on Children in an Educational Setting. *Education Masters*, 6:312. http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1313&context=education_ETD_masters

Improvements to Literacy Levels

Schools all over the country have programs focused on improving literacy skills within their students. There have been numerous studies demonstrating the positive the effect a therapy dog has on these students. With the addition of a therapy dog into the program the children literacy performance increased. The greatest increases were seen in small group and individual settings. This is believed to be because of the calming effect of the presence on the dog. The children benefit in this environment because of the decrease in anxiety and blood pressure. The combination of these physical effects combined with the non-judgmental nature of the animal allows the student to feel confident and motivated to succeed. This belief in self, combined with the calming environment crated by the animal allows the student to practice their skills more readily thus improving their literacy level.

Hall SS, Gee NR, Mills DS (2016) Children Reading to Dogs: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *PLoS ONE* 11(2): e0149759. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0149759>

