Future Directions for Evaluation and Practice of Animal Assisted Interventions

Challenges in Researching Animal Assisted Activities: Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?
Steven Klee, Ph.D., Associate Executive Director – Clinical and Medical Services, Green Chimneys
Jay Davidowitz, Ph.D., Senior Supervising Psychologist, Green Chimneys

Steven Klee, Ph.D. is the Associate Executive Director for Clinical and Medical Services at Green Chimneys. Dr. Klee joined the Green Chimneys staff as director of treatment in 2004. He holds a BS from the City College of New York and an MA and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Louisville. He has presented on clinical topics internationally and has published numerous articles in professional journals. He is a member of the American Psychological Association, Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy and the American Board of Professional Psychology. In addition, Dr. Klee has held adjunct professor positions at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn.

Jay Davidowitz, Ph.D. came to Green Chimneys in 2005 and serves as the training director of the predoctoral internship program in clinical psychology. He holds a Bachelor’s degree and Ph.D. in Psychology from Fordham University and has completed a postdoctoral fellowship in Clinical Psychology at Central Islip Psychiatric Center. Dr. Davidowitz has held (adjunct) Assistant Professor positions at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Fordham University, Post College and Quinnipiac University.

The main points from Dr. Klee and Dr. Davidowitz’s presentation are as follows:

• Rather than going from research to design, animal assisted research depends on what is available to design. Research needs safeguards for both children and animals. Common difficulties in AAI research are that animal people are not usually clinical researchers, clinical researchers are not usually well-informed about animal care and behavior, and researchers cannot control all aspects of access and training.

• Green Chimneys undertook an experimental study to examine how children’s competencies are affected by the presence of an animal. The study compares the performance of children on math competency, symbol recognition, and other measures in the presence of a live dog with their performance in the presence of a stuffed animal. Data are still being analyzed.

• Recommendations for developing an institutional research agenda include getting everyone on board (administration, clinical staff, and farm staff): 1) look at what is naturally occurring in your agency for possible research directions; 2) start with small, controlled studies, choose studies that can be built upon; 3) get IRB
approval; 4) set aside time for training research assistants about animal handling; 5) locate funds for research; 6) identify study pool of psychology students to assist with research; and 7) involve Dr. Alan Kazdin at all stages.

Drs. Klee and Davidowitz’s powerpoint presentation is in Appendix P.

**Bridging Clinical Practice and Research in Animal Assisted Interventions**

Aubrey Fine, Ph.D., Professor, College of Education and Integrative Studies, California State Polytechnic University

Psychologist Aubrey Fine, Ph.D. has been in the field of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) for over thirty years. He has also been an active faculty member at California State Polytechnic University for 26 years. His leadership among faculty and teaching excellence earned him the prestigious Wang Award in 2001. He is the editor of *The Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy*, which is now in its second edition (Elsevier/Academic Press, 2006). He has also published other academic books, numerous articles, and video documentaries on related subjects such as parent/child relationships, learning/attention disorders, and sports psychology. Dr. Fine’s newest book *Afternoons with Puppy* (Purdue University Press, 2007) is a heartwarming account about the evolving relationships and outcomes among a therapist, his therapy animals and his patients over the course of over two decades.

The main points from Dr. Fine’s presentation are as follows:

- Animal assisted interventions involve a partnership between animals and humans in which both have an impact on the therapeutic process. Animal assisted interventions are not only about the presence of animals, but the knowledge of how to use animals to move forward.

- Some of the benefits of participation in dog training programs are related to the experience as volunteerism. Youth develop pro-social skills from volunteering. Peer tutoring has been shown to improve social behavior, communication, attitudes, self-concept and self-satisfaction.

- Working with animals can lessen frustration and enhance patience. The strongest buy-in is that animal assisted interventions are novel and fun.

- Practitioners need to pay closer attention to need for program evaluation and documentation in order to bridge clinical practice and best practice research.

- Generalization of skills beyond therapeutic settings and maintenance are crucial to social skills training. Generalization includes temporal generalization that continues after treatment and generalization across settings in which treatment changes are displayed outside of therapeutic settings.
• To assess social skill deficits, researchers could consider social validity (peer acceptance, friendship status, parent and teacher judgments), school data (attendance, disciplinary referrals, and suspension), direct observations of child's behavior in a natural environment, and measurements of component skills.

Dr. Fine's powerpoint presentation is in Appendix Q.

Future Directions in Outcome Evaluation for Animal Assisted Programs for Youth-At-Risk
Martha-Elin Blomquist, Ph.D.

As an educator and researcher, Martha-Elin Blomquist, Ph.D. has over 25 years of experience studying the causes and prevention of juvenile delinquency, focusing in particular on legal and social policies and institutions that affect child and youth welfare. She received her MA and Ph.D. in Jurisprudence and Social Policy from the University of California, Berkeley and Boalt Hall School of Law. Dr. Blomquist was a Senior Fellow with the California Attorney General, Department of Justice Targeted Research Fellowship Program, Bureau of Criminal Statistics, undertaking research using the Bureau's various longitudinal arrest and disposition data bases. Dr. Blomquist has served on the Board of Directors for the Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault in Bakersfield, CA, where she also provided training for volunteers and assisted as a volunteer rape crises counselor. Her involvement with the Western Society of Criminology includes her terms of office as vice president and president. Dr. Blomquist's research and consulting experience include projects with the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the American Prosecutors Research Institute. Currently, Dr. Blomquist is a lecturer with the University of California, Irvine.

The main points from Dr. Blomquist’s presentation are as follows:

• Referring agencies and their missions are a source of evaluation criteria. Schools, mental health and foster care agencies and youth corrections programs provide definitions for a youth’s "at-risk" designation. They view animal assisted activities as a means for addressing deficiencies that interfere with a youth’s performance and relations in educational, family or public settings. They may diagnose deficiencies in knowledge or skill competencies, grade- and age-appropriate abilities and/or psychosocial functioning. Referring agencies also are a possible data source for researchers.

• Program staff can make use of exploratory data collection activities such as written reflections from youth, progress notes, achievements, and commentary or observations by adults, parents, outside animal experts, and adopters of animals trained by youth to develop instruments to measure program effectiveness.

Dr. Blomquist's paper is in Appendix R.