APPENDIX K

Challenges in Evaluating Outcomes in Animal Assisted Interventions

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Challenges in Assessing Outcomes in Animal Assisted Interventions: A Journey With SHIP (Strategic Humane Interventions Project)

National Technology Assessment Workshop On Animal Assisted Programs For Youth At Risk

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Introduction

- Took advantage of this topic to review our 6 iterations of SHIP (during 2003-2007)
- The view from the outside is not the same as the view from the inside i.e., it is one thing to say it, another to do it!
- Discuss some challenges we confronted when trying to implement outcomes assessments of SHIP
**SHIP I - III with Battered Mothers and Their Children**

What did we learn from our outcome evaluation?

- Essentially nothing from pre-post questionnaires
- No idea how to code the tapes
- Reality check: 7 week intervention = 14 hours only to impact behavior ( + a little homework time)
- But... participants showed up – almost 100% attendance and smiled a lot! (We came to their location)
- And... participants told us verbally they were getting the message about rewarding desired behaviors and being more gentle and patient with people as well as dogs

**SHIP IV - VII: Switched to AMEND: Adolescents adjudicated for domestic violence**

Challenge: Could we complement each other?

- AMEND: 15 week program downtown YWCA
- $20/session, court-ordered
- Essentially lecture: parent and teen groups separate
- Focus on anger management
- Types of pre-post questions:
  - What is abuse?
  - Name 3 appropriate ways to manage anger
  - What is the cycle of violence?

**SHIP/AMEND Program**

- 7 weeks
- Volunteer staff of 7-8 includes 3 clicker trainers
- Meet at new SPCA Cincinnati site
- Clicker trainers select 3 suitable homeless dogs from shelter for clicker training

**Typical SHIP/AMEND Program**

6:30 – 8:30 pm on Wednesday

- Supper - Homework review
- Clicker practice
- Dog safety and intros
- Dog training/ Kennel clicking
- Training game with people (candy reward)
- Homework assignments (My Clicker Homework or Labeled Praise Homework)
SHIP/AMEND  IV-VI: Challenges

- Programs for at-risk youth are dynamic: With need for flexibility and creativity, what aspects are stable enough to measure? "Getting" the program

- Developmental, cultural and stability issues affect recruitment, program focus and retention
  - Little interest in dogs, allergies
  - High-risk neighborhoods and fear of dogs
  - Range of abilities
  - Capacity of caregiver
  - Runaways; hospitalization; separations
  - Follow-up with transient population

- Philosophical fit (skill acquisition vs. cognitive focus)

Feedback From SHIP/AMEND Participants

How is SHIP different from AMEND?:

"AMEND is group setting with discussions about family issues, drugs, gangs, violence, etc. SHIP is not anything like AMEND. SHIP is more one on one and energy is focused on development of relationships. Rewarding the dogs for obeying commands taught them control. Paralleling the idea with human behavior (we get what we put into something.)"

Feedback From SHIP/AMEND Participants

- "The SHIP program is more motivated and works as a group."
- "It's not just meant for anger. It is to bring families together."
- "Allows interaction with child and parents where the focus is on helping animals. Seems to help grow relationships among each other."

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Feedback From SHIP/AMEND Participants

- What are some useful things you have learned in SHIP?
  - "When a child is doing a good job, reward them in some way."
  - "I have learned how to work with a group and rewarding people for doing good to me."
  - "Use positives, not negatives."
  - "It’s all about positive reinforcement and behavior modification. It has been a good reminder and excellent example of positive reward increasing positive behavior."
  - "I have learned how to communicate and train a dog without speech."

One solution: “The Retrospective Post”

- Avoid the trap of the group baseline or pre-post questionnaires
- What or how much do you know now that you did not know before the program?
- How competent did you feel before SHIP and how competent do you feel now?

The Retrospective Post and SHIP

- Knowing how to approach a strange dog
-Treating a dog after clicking a behavior
-Giving a labeled praise when someone does something you like
-Timing your click to “mark” the behavior you want to reward
-Being a trainer in the training game
-Being patient when trying to teach someone a new skill

Other approaches

- In what ways have you changed? What have you learned?
  - Give 6 choices with #6 being “Other”; check as many as apply
- How do you intend to use these skills?
Using SHIP data to inform outcome assessment questions

Many of our participants were uncomfortable or fearful around dogs.

“How fast when come across a dog?”
“Ever been frightened or hurt by an animal?”
Totals “Fearful”: N = 25
“No problems”: N = 13

Add a retrospective post question to assess prior and current comfort around strange dogs.

Challenge and Solution: Meeting the Expectations of Multiple Funders and Stakeholders

- Serving many masters and one size does not fit all
- YWCA and Childhood Trust: Positive ways to manage own behavior and influence behaviors of others in a setting that fosters humane values.
- Kenneth R. Scott Foundation: Enhance welfare of homeless dogs

Challenge: Enlisting Help From Volunteer Staff in Outcome Evaluation Planning and Feedback

Debriefing (with food)!
Ideas from our ‘dog people’ for the Scott Foundation

SHIP VI Program Dog Statistics

- Number of dogs evaluated: 16
- Number of dogs used in group: 6
- Number of dogs caged trained (kennel clicking): 8
- Number of dogs adopted: 7
SHIP Program Dog Information

Dog Evaluation (1 unacceptable - 5 acceptable)
- Cage approach
- Treat through cage
- Getting out of cage
- Treat outside cage
- Accepts handling
- Clicker sound
- Reaction other dogs
- Reaction humans
- Clicker Training focus; four on the floor, etc.

Challenges: Maintaining quality, training volunteers, going to “scale”
- Training and debriefing and ability to offer program frequently
- Scale requires standardized measures among programs
The Wellness Project pre-post study on height gain in 7th graders over a 9 month period. Lost an average of 2 inches!

Current Plans to Assess SHIP Outcomes
- Humility does help!
- Will try retrospective post outcome evaluations
- Will continue to keep dog statistics
- Will use pie charts
- Will explore ways to do follow-up in 3 months
- Will explore ways to collaborate with AMEND to assess mutual outcomes
- Will check out approaches with INNOVATIONS