New Data on Animal Assisted Programs

The second day of the conference was devoted to presentations and discussions about new research and future research directions. Researchers provided new data on mechanisms of change in animal assisted programs, staff and participant perspectives on program effectiveness, and the role that animals play in achieving program outcomes.

Joan Dalton, Director, Project Pooch

Joan Dalton, the Director of Project POOCH, chaired the session. Ms. Dalton founded the program in 1993. She started with one dog and one youth. Since that time, Project Pooch has changed (and saved) the lives of hundreds of dogs and youths. Ms. Dalton has a BA and MST in education.

Perspectives of Youth in Animal-Centered Correctional Vocational Program: A Qualitative Evaluation of Project Pooch
Kate Davis, MSW, Graduate School of Social Work, Portland State University

Kate Davis, MSW, is a former faculty member of Portland State University’s Graduate School of Social Work. Initially interested in doing clinical work with the incarcerated youth and their dogs at Project Pooch, Ms. Davis was instead asked to conduct a research study to determine youth perspectives about their experiences at Project Pooch. The result is a qualitative report about the experiences of youth working with dogs in a correctional facility. Currently, Davis spends some of her time in private practice, helping pet owners cope with the emotional burden of chronic and emergency veterinary issues. Davis is also a family therapist who works with abused children and their families.

The major points from Ms. Davis’ presentation are as follows:

- Program participants are the experts on their experiences. In qualitative interviews, Project Pooch participants report that they gained skills in patience, relationship building, employment, learning and teaching, communication, anger management, empathy and self-discipline. They also describe gains in technical skills that would benefit them upon their release including public speaking, being interviewed, grooming and training dogs, running a kennel, computer use, responsibility and leadership. Youth report that they learned about emotions and behavior from the dogs and became attached to the dogs as their companions.

- While there is interest in determining whether programs provide skills that will generalize into post-program experiences, the experience in itself is adequate for those who are seeking humane care for animals and inmates.

Ms. Davis’ paper is in Appendix M.
Staff Perspectives on Animal Assisted Interventions for Youth At Risk
Avril Lindsay, LCSW, CGP, Program Manager, Children’s Village

Avril Lindsay, LCSW, CGP, has been practicing as a social worker at The Children’s Village for more than fourteen years. In her time at the Children’s Village, Ms. Lindsay has specialized in the treatment of trauma and psychiatric illnesses of children and adolescents, exploring creative ways to provide effective treatment. Ms. Lindsay is currently the Program Manager of the Children’s Village Crisis Residence. Since 2001, Ms. Lindsay has been involved in the East Coast Assistance Dogs program (housed at the Children’s Village) as a volunteer puppy raiser. She co-chaired the inception of the AAT program at the Children’s Village. Ms. Lindsay is certified by ECAD as an Animal Assisted Therapy team, with Jaguar, a Yellow Labrador/Golden Retriever mix, bred by ECAD. Ms. Lindsay has presented on the uses of AAT to residential treatment centers, hospitals, and conferences, as well as training AAT handlers at CV.

The major points from Ms. Lindsay’s presentation are as follows:

- Surveys found that the vast majority of Children’s Village staff report that the presence of the dog caused youth to calm down, relate better to each other, be less defensive, and behave better. Staff report that the dogs provided emotional support to the children, that children learned about body language from the dogs, and that they enjoyed touching and playing with the dogs. Most staff believe that in at least some cases youth who would otherwise require a therapeutic hold did not need restraints when the therapy dog was present.

- Therapy dogs can be diagnostic as well as therapeutic tools.

Ms. Lindsay’s paper is in Appendix N.

Mechanisms of Change
Arnold Arluke, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Northeastern University

Arnold Arluke, Ph.D. is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Northeastern University and Senior Scholar at Tufts University Center for Animals and Public Policy. His research examines conflicts and contradictions in human-animal relationships. He has published over 80 articles and nine books, including Regarding Animals (Temple University Press, 1996), Brute Force: Animal Police and the Challenge of Cruelty (Purdue University Press, 2004), Just a Dog: Understanding Animal Cruelty and Ourselves (Temple University Press, 2006) and The Sacrifice: How Scientific Experiments Transform Animals and People (Purdue University Press, 2006). He also edits with Clinton Sanders the Animals, Culture, and Society series for Temple University Press.

The major points from Dr. Arluke’s presentation are as follows:

- Social relationships among participants, animals, and staff in animal assisted programs are central elements in creating personal change in program participants.
Programs at Children's Village, Green Chimneys, Project Pooch, Forget Me Not Farm, and Erie County SPCA provided participants with at least seven types of social relationships: participant buy-in to the program; close relationships involving for the first time trust, intimacy, security, nurturing, and sacrifice; staff modeling of interpersonal and relationship skills; culture of success that empowers participants; weakening of hierarchies that encourages youth to be assertive, take responsibility and develop self-worth; development of empathetic skills from perspective-taking and identifying with the animals; and experiences coping with frustration.

- Animal qualities such as their encouragement of touching and lack of criticism foster close relationships for participants.

- To unpack the therapeutic magic of programs, researchers need to further explore the emergence and development of relationships between participants and animals and explore the extent to which these social relationships might be generically transferred to other programs for program replication. Further research is needed on extent to which changes are situational or whether they can be carried into other settings outside of the program.

Dr. Arluke’s paper follows.
Mechanisms of Change\textsuperscript{1}

Arnold Arluke  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA 02115

A number of speakers yesterday talked about the need to understand the mechanisms underlying successful and unsuccessful programs—that is asking how they work rather than whether they do. They also suggested that understanding the engine behind effective programs is a complicated task involving relationships that emerge between targeted youth and program animals and staff members.

I explored this question as an ethnographer—I immerse myself directly into the cultures I study—watching, listening, talking to participants, and sometimes participating with them—in order to understand their group perspectives and to provide a thick description of what their world looks like to them. Thanks to Green Chimneys, Children’s Village, Forget Me Not Farm, Project Pooch and the Erie County SPCA—all of whom generously opened their doors and lives to me—I spent a month doing fieldwork in these five programs. They were specifically chosen because they had national, and even international, reputations for being effective, based on anecdotal and research reports. (Of course, I had no comparison program to study that was ineffective). Two were service-dog programs, two were obedience-dog programs, and one was a farm animal program that also offered gardening.

My goal, then, was to produce insight—and encourage future research—into the characteristics of apparently effective interventions. All the programs I studied provided “participants” (i.e., the targeted children, adolescents, and young adults) with seven kinds of social relationships involving animals, staff members, and the programs themselves.

The first relationship is with the program itself. Participants “buy into” or wholeheartedly embrace their exposure to and training with animals, along with the programs more generally. Most obviously, they buy into these programs because most find it intrinsically appealing to be, play, or work with animals. Hands down, this beats every other activity they have. How much fun is phonics if you have not been doing well with it?

Participants also buy into programs when they see them as a way to develop or express parts of their personalities that have not flourished. Some, for example, may feel competent or responsible for the first time, and find this experience rewarding—especially when they are praised for it or see what it leads to. Others already have these skills, but are never in safe settings where they can act certain ways without being criticized or

\textsuperscript{1} A longer version of this talk will appear in late 2008 or early 2009 in the \textit{Journal of Social Issues} under the title, “How Animal Assisted Activities Help At-risk Children and Incarcerated Young Adults.”
losing status. The big guy who is able to nurture a program kitten may be used to people who would make fun of him for expressing any softness. In either case, satisfaction in discovering or unlocking these social skills for the first time can generalize or spill over into increased interest or belief in the program itself.

Finally, participants buy into programs when they identify with the animals’ plight and future. Farm animal and dog-obedience programs use animals having sad histories—they have been abandoned, abused, or otherwise mistreated. Participants often ask where these animals come from, why they are injured, or how they learn such bad behavior, to which staff members explain their troubled histories. In turn, many participants connect their own abused, homeless, or abandoned backgrounds to their animals. By making these connections, participants take comfort in their own situations and have hope for a better life—just as program animals have a safe and secure place and a hopeful future.

A second social characteristic of these programs is that participants have many opportunities to try on and experience close relationships with animals and people that involve trust, intimacy, security and sacrifice.

Some of these close relationships are with program animals. Here, participants not only train or care for particular animals over a long time but develop emotional attachments to some, which can be quite profound. Qualities unique to animals help to build these close relationships, including providing quick, easy, and uncomplicated physical contact with participants—something they don’t get with humans. Participants also immediately get something back that is positive—affection and attention—that is also lacking in their human contacts. Once established, close relationships with animals can yield major benefits. For example, they may be the closest, longest, and safest relationships ever experienced by participants with any living companion, whether human or nonhuman. Consequently, these relationships also allow participants to experience the loss of an emotional connection, and feelings of selflessness that follow when their animals leave programs for adopters or disabled clients.

Participants also can form close relationships with program peers that can have lasting significance. They are encouraged to help each other train animals by pointing out and correcting peers’ mistakes, thereby fostering teamwork and joint problem solving. And they are allowed to socialize informally with each other by talking, playing, teasing, or rough housing. Both experiences can lead to friendships.

Participants also can form close relationships with staff members. The latter tend to relate better to participants than do most other adults in these facilities. Resulting strong rapport and trust make participants feel the staff understands them and will do the right thing by them. In turn, participants reveal things to staff members that they cannot tell other teachers or administrators; doing so will get them into trouble (e.g., having a gun) or be too personal (e.g., having girlfriend problems). Not surprisingly, participants commonly feel they are part of a tight family—something that many never before felt.

A third relationship created is for staff members to take on healing roles with participants. Some of this is predictable role modeling of interpersonal and emotional skills never
shown to and reinforced for participants. For one, staff model nurturing behavior when they interact with animals or with participants themselves. Patience and control are also modeled—this is especially important because so many children in these programs are impatient and impulsive. Participants are shown how to gain control over animals, and then by deduction, how to control themselves. Staff members also model assertiveness, as opposed to aggressiveness. This is a new idea for participants because they are used to being a victim or perpetrator. Now, they are shown that they can have their own goals and motivations, without abusing or victimizing anyone.

Other healing roles are less predictable. I saw staff members assuming a destigmatizing role with participants to free them, at least temporarily, from destructive labels when they visit programs. Most staff members have very little information about participants’ mental health or criminal backgrounds. Program directors are not usually given such information and, even if available, the sentiment is that such information could adversely affect the staff by biasing their interactions with participants or making them worry about participants’ well-being once they leave the program. Also, programs do not want to focus on the participant’s mental health problems and, if staff had this information, they might bring it up when interacting with them.

Staff members also assume uncritical roles toward participants to make them feel safe and comfortable, compared to the way adults usually regulate and judge them in classes or therapy sessions. For example, some staff members do not control or criticize misbehavior, even to the point of not yelling if someone runs off. Staff members believe this uncritical stance parallels how animals uncritically accept participants. A less intentional way to be uncritical is for staff members to ride the coattails of the rapport created by program animals. Because they are associated with these animals, staff members are perceived by participants not as single individuals but as units with animals, sharing a halo of uncritical acceptance.

A fourth characteristic of these apparently successful programs is that they make participants feel empowered. Staff members and animals create a micro-culture of success where participants can usually acquire new skills, see positive results, gain new roles, and learn to speak of their own accomplishments.

Programs empower participants by teaching them to regard their work with animals as important and beneficial. In both service and obedience-dog programs many spoke about how their trained animals provided adopted families with new companions or enabled disabled clients to function more independently. Participants actually see the successful results of their training when adopters or clients return with dogs that appear well placed in their new homes. Participants also feel good because their efforts benefit animals too. In two programs, participants helped animals in need or “saved” them from death, as with problem dogs that could not otherwise be adopted.

Another way to empower participants is by preparing them for work outside the institution. Those in dog training programs can potentially earn a living by becoming obedience trainers, kennel workers, dog groomers, or animal caretakers. One program deliberately prepared its youth for future work by treating them as employees: they recorded their time on the job, got paid for their time, and sometimes had their work performance assessed. They also were expected to “give and take orders” as well as appear and speak professionally with outsiders who came to kennel a dog, receive dog training, or consider a dog for adoption. Also, in this program, students were constantly reminded about the parallels between their work with dogs and the kinds of job skills they will need.
after release, such as being polite and reliable when dealing with the public. More indirectly, participants also assume important roles, such as that of teacher to disabled clients, adopters, or peers, which teach social skills like responsibility that might carry over into their future lives.

Finally, participants feel empowered by learning to speak about and label their own improvement. They hear staff members who are quick to verbalize presumed changes in participants, no matter how subtle or ambiguous the change. Some participants learn to parrot and see these presumed changes in themselves. Articulating such change is also part of their socialization into these programs because they know the staff wants to hear that. One child, for instance, talked about his “anger management problems” that he now had “under control,” which was the same language used by his supervising staff member to describe his success. In a similar vein, many participants spoke about feeling much “calmer” because of their program experience, again a change commonly pointed out by staff members. Of course, giving participants a language to frame their emotions may have educational uses, whether, in fact, there really are such changes, by increasing their self-awareness.

A fifth characteristic of these programs—and one closely related to the empowerment of participants—is that they are less hierarchical and formal than those experienced by participants in classroom settings. Weakening the traditional hierarchy promotes personal change by encouraging participants to be assertive, take responsibility, and feel self worth.

Program hierarchy is softened in several ways. One way is to close the knowledge and competence gap between adult and child. Novices in the dog programs know nothing about animal behavior, care, and training, while staff members know everything. This gap quickly closes as staff members freely share information and skills with participants, a few of whom gain sufficient expertise to rival and even challenge the staff’s authority.

Hierarchy is also softened because animals occupy a tier below the children, in terms of authority and power, unlike the classroom hierarchy of teacher versus student. For once, the participants have someone below them. In addition, an informal hierarchical alliance is created when participants develop stronger bonds with individual animals than had by staff members—it is no longer adult versus only the child.

Animals also soften the hierarchy by bringing an informal air to programs compared to more formal settings, such as classrooms. One way they do this is by making conversation easier between child and adult. Participants can ask questions about animals, and adults can easily initiate conversation with participants through animals, when talking to them might otherwise be hard. Another way animals create informality is that they bark, snore, hee haw, defecate, urinate, vomit, attack, run uncontrollably, kick, or act out. These acts temporarily break the usual routine and provide occasions for laughter.

A different way to soften hierarchy is to reduce overt signs of the low, institutional status of participants in the overall facility. For example, one program director gives clothing to participants that does not resemble the uniform, drab clothes worn by other
youth in the facility (i.e., gray sweat pants and T-shirts); instead, they wear colored shirts bearing the program’s name, blue jeans, and Columbia rain slickers. Several programs also provide non-institutional food to participants.

Finally, hierarchical differences are softened when staff members stop themselves from making decisions so that participants can become decision makers. Although control is not abdicated for urgent matters, when it is, it provides an important experience for participants. For example, to deal with a mouse problem, one program director let participants come up with their own solution as part of her larger goal of allowing them to think through problems on their own. Staff members also reinforce participants’ authority or expertise by allowing them to disagree with their decisions. For instance, one young man with two years’ experience in a dog-obedience program sometimes disagrees with the director about how best to train his animals.

A sixth program characteristic is that participants encounter new perspectives by working with clients, staff members, and animals. Learning and applying these perspectives requires empathic skills absent or weak in many participants.

The first perspective they learn is that of the animals, both as individuals and species. For example, to train dogs successfully, participants are encouraged to “think like a dog” when teaching them new commands. Once participants become comfortable interpreting the dog’s perspective, they invariably conclude that their animals care about them, increasing their attachment and encouraging them to use and trust their newly learned empathic skills. Participants also are taught to generalize the animal’s perspective to adult groups, such as parents or teachers, by using animals as metaphors to teach lessons about human relationships. In one case, the program’s mascot allowed the staff to teach students important lessons about good parenting when the good-natured dog allowed several very frisky puppies to jump on her without stopping or getting angry with them. The program director told students that the dog was being a good parent by being patient with her demanding “kids.”

Participants also learn to see things from the perspective of adults, such as that of their disabled clients. In the service-dog programs, participants use wheelchairs in class and on field trips to role play their client’s disability. They learn that some people have it worse than they do, or they directly observe clients’ limitations. These programs also have students train disabled clients to use the dogs; as they get to know their clients, students learn that their clients have feelings and goals akin to their own.

A seventh, and final characteristic I will mention is that these programs allow participants to be frustrated when interacting with their animals and then to cope with this frustration. Working with animals can be challenging. This is certainly true for any novice, especially a young child with anger control and attention deficit disorders. A common early complaint, for example, is that the dogs just sit there and look at participants instead of listening and responding to their commands. Even more experienced students get frustrated at times. A few described dog training as a “battle” that got them annoyed at times. Facing and dealing with such problems is thought to instill greater self-control, patience, calmness, or self-awareness in participants.

Most participants learn to manage their frustration. They learn, in a practical sense, that when they get frustrated training dogs, they get nowhere with them. For example, some students say that if they are angry when they try to train their dogs, the dogs will sense this and shutdown and not want to work with them. Instead, they learn to be patient with their charges, as training the same behavior often takes many repetitions.
Participants also draw on their relationships with animals to lessen frustration and deal with impatience. For instance, one boy who had a "big struggle" with patience learned to "stop himself" from getting angry by realizing that "it's just a dog, calm down. It doesn't know any better." Another boy claimed that by simply looking at his dog's face "you are like, how in the heck I am supposed to get mad at him."

According to staff members, participants' new patience with animals transfers to becoming less frustrated with people. One boy, for instance, spoke about how he felt more patient with his own young child, instead of quickly becoming frustrated with its difficult behaviors. Another felt that learning patience with dogs helped him get along better with difficult peers in his unit.

In sum, all the programs I studied provided a similar set of social relationships to participants. For ethnographers interested in unpacking the therapeutic magic of these programs, the next steps are, first, to discover additional relationships and refine those that I reported—such as further detailing the emergence and development of relationships between participants and program animals; second, to explore the extent to which these seven relationships might be generically transferred to other programs or whether their success is more idiosyncratic and dependent on the personality of a dominant individual present in the program; and third, to look at whether or how these relationships interface with participants' lives in the community. Only by answering these and other hard questions can we begin to share your magic and increase its power in the future.
The Impact of Animal Visitation in an In-Class Humane Education Program
Kate Nicoll, MSW, LCSW, Executive Director, Soul Friends
William Samuels, Ph.D., Director of Research, People, Animals and Nature, Inc.

Kate Nicoll, MSW, LCSW is a clinical social worker with more than twenty years of experience working with children and families. Since her graduation from Smith College, Ms. Nicoll has practiced in a multitude of settings including inpatient psychiatric care, private practice, homecare, hospice, several hospitals and children's clinic. Four years ago, Ms. Nicoll founded the nonprofit, Soul Friends, Inc, a nonprofit established with a mission to provide innovative clinical and educational programs that promote the healing benefits of the human-animal bond. Soul Friend's curriculum-based programs include Healing Hearts, Come, Follow Me, and WE LOVE ANIMALS! She is the author of two books, Soul Friends: Finding Healing with Animals and A Therapy Dog at Work and Play. She has presented at local, national and international conferences on animal assisted interventions in her work with children.

Bill Samuels, Ph.D. earned his terminal degree in Experimental Psychology and Psychometrics from the University of Texas at Arlington. Dr. Samuels has created and evaluated education (including humane education) programs in a variety of settings including primary and secondary schools; colleges; and for after-school, government, non-profit, and community-based programs. His research interests include animal assisted interventions, human-animal interactions, pro-social development, resilience, and best teaching practices—especially for students who are at-risk and in non-traditional settings. An advocate of animal welfare and compassionate, student-centered learning, Dr. Samuels has published and presented research on humane education, education program evaluation, constructivism, and teacher professional development.

The major points from Ms. Nicoll and Dr. Samuel's presentation are as follows:

• Previous research suggests hands-on learning and presence of a live animal may have more impact on elementary school children than other types of presentations. Interventions should be developmentally appropriate, tactile, multi-sensory, and interactive. Cognitive processing in young children is anchored in immediate experiences.

• Students can benefit from humane education and animal assisted interventions in a classroom settings. The presence of animals increased effects of humane education program. Animal visitation is salient. Diverse teaching strategies may synergize.

Ms. Nicoll and Dr. Samuel's powerpoint presentation is in Appendix O.