

SOCIAL EDUCATION AND ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS, A GOOD DUO?

According to the [Asociación Estatal de Educación Social \(ASEDES\)](#), we understand to mean by Social Education, the citizen's right which takes the form of a pedagogical profession recognition, which generates educational contexts as well as mediators and training activities which are social educator professional's field of competence, enabling:

- The inclusion of the education subject to the diversity of social networks, understood as the development of sociability and the social circulation.
- The cultural and social promotion, understood as opening up new possibilities for the acquisition of cultural property, to extend educational, employment, leisure prospects and social participation.

It is a relatively new profession, focused on supporting the individual. By "education" we understand that is the transmission of values, knowledge and skills to an individual, as well as the support in the process of personal growth and maturity. With "social" we refer to all groups and collectives of the population, in this case, especially those who are most vulnerable and therefore more exposed to certain weaknesses and with the greatest needs of this mentioned support.



It could deal with elderly people, or at risk of social exclusion, people with disabilities, with mental disorders... So, we understand that the social educator must work integrated into a multidisciplinary team, in collaboration with other professionals, to design interventions and activities with educational and therapeutic approaches, depending on the specific needs of each group.

Moreover, we define Animal Assisted Therapy and Education as an intervention coordinated by a health, education and/or social professional from within his profession field, in which the co-therapist animal is a key element to achieve the planned goals. The animals involved are selected and trained to work with a therapist, educator, social worker, etc. for the development of therapeutic and/or educational activities that contribute to learning, rehabilitation or integration of an individual or group.

Given that animal assisted interventions have proven to be valid for the promotion of learning in non-formal educational settings and for community enhancement with vulnerability and/or social exclusion groups, we consider that this discipline may offer a new intervention approach to the Social Educator figure. Thus, the animal can be shown as a support and facilitator in many facets in view of Educators work in different settings and with different groups.



Among the benefits of animal assisted interventions can provide to the social education field, we highlight:

Animals as **Social Facilitators** so as to able the interpersonal relationships and social skills enhancement of individuals with a lack of support networks, social adjustment problems, suffering from exclusion etc.

Animals as **Motivation Agents**, to change values and attitudes, to learn concepts and skills, to engage.

Animals as **Centre of Attention**, promoting better transmission of knowledge and decreasing anxiety, reactivity and individual defensive mechanisms.

Animals as **perception social support Generators**, feelings of usefulness and social contribution when working on mutual aid perspective.

Animals as **aid relationship Facilitators**, insofar, animals establish a climate of trust that enhances the positive perception of the professional, in this case the Social Educator.

In our opinion, animal assisted interventions are a professional area in which the Social Educator figure has not only a place, but it is certainly necessary in its educational aspect, especially in informal settings, from a community perspective and with collectives under social inequality.