

"ANIMALS IN CLASSROOM" PROJECT. ANIMAL ASSISTED PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

Animal Assisted Education (AAE) is an aspect of intervention in which a professional or an educational team cooperates with an animal previously selected and trained to encourage the teaching/learning process of a student or group of students. Incorporating animals in educational settings can address learning goals to conceptual, procedural and/or attitudinal level.

Thus, the role of animals in these contexts may be purely academic, ie, to facilitate a lesson learning, a subject matter, or as a support to foster a positive climate for students, even reducing problems such as bullying.

Animal assisted education, like therapy, is headed by a professional with an advanced training within his framework profession, in this case belonging to the educational field, with specific expertise in animal assisted intervention. The contexts in which to carry it out are very diverse, both in formal educational settings, schools, institutes, universities, as well as in non-formal settings, natural areas, animal protection centres, farms, equestrian centres etc. the intervention may be both group or individual and can be implemented for people of any age.



Some organizations like PALS (Pets Access League Society) in Canada carry out educational programs as "PALS Story", in collaboration with Calgary Public Libraries bringing dogs for children who are having issues with reading, these children spend some one on one time reading to dogs. The program has proven that the children strengthen their reading capacity and their confidence levels are increased significantly.

In Spain some organizations as "Perros y Letras - READ España" are dedicated to the promotion of reading to an animal.

PALS also performs another program called "Puppy Rooms" working with universities and other post-secondary institutes providing some stress relief activities during exams period. This program is extremely popular among the students at the University of Calgary, St Marys University College and SAIT.

The "Buddy Project" is an animal assisted education program created by another american organization called "Animal Rescue", which teaches youth at risk for school failure how to train rescue dogs. The pair becomes a working team with the goal of providing mutually beneficial

experiences for both, the dogs and the students, with the intention that these learning activities become widespread to the educational environment improving school performance.



Currently Humanymal is completing preparations for "Animales en las Aulas" ("Animals in classroom"), a psycho-educational intervention assisted by dogs that is going to be developed during the current academic year 2014-2015, at the educational establishment I.E.S. Canastell Alicante.

The main objective of this program is to encourage the development of the students by offering a support tool to the difficulties they have to face; achievement of the curricular objectives of the education level, personal or family problems or any topic that interferes with learning. It is also proposed as a complement to the educational training where students are helped to improve their skills and abilities both academically and personally through animal assisted intervention.

"Animales en las aulas" is a pioneering project since we have no precedent at nation level in which animal assisted intervention is carried out in public education centres to complement the training of a full mid or advanced cycle.

In this project we have taken into account the educational process of the students and several factors that are affecting the proper academic progress. External factors such as the economic crisis we are suffering, loss of employment, increase in conflicts... facts that are endangering personal and academic development of the students, hindering their options or future opportunities.

We know the benefits of animals in therapeutic contexts and we know that these benefits are maintained in educational contexts, improving skills such as attention, memory, motivation on learning, this helps us to work aspects such as emotional expression, empathy, self-concept improvement, management of anxiety in stressful situations, factors that also affect school performance.



We adopt a global approach to the issue, we will work from the different intervention areas in order to achieve the maximum goals set at the beginning of the project and for this we have the direct involvement of a multidisciplinary technical team (psychologist, social educator, social worker, occupational therapist, among others), aware of the problem and prepared to face it.

Finally, we wish to express our appreciation to IES Canastell and the teachers for the trust and support shown, as a result "Animales en las aulas" is now a reality.