

Project of the Month “It takes me a little longer to get angry now”

This month of November we have awarded the Project of the Month to “**It takes me a little longer to get angry now**”, an animal assisted intervention for children and young people victims of abuse and violence carried out by **WAYSS Ltd**, an organisation located in Melbourne, Australia, that provides assistance and support to women and children experiencing homelessness as a result of violence. We want to highlight this innovative program because of the small mammals involved as co-therapists animals, more specifically guinea pigs, rabbits and rats from the centre of protection and animal rescue **The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**.



To implement this initiative, WAYSS Ltd works in collaboration with **Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia** and **Empathy Education & Training (EE&T)**, the latter is the entity which carefully selects the animals according to their temperament and health and also designs the exercises in order to achieve a satisfactory intervention in line with the objectives set out for each participant.

Children who experience traumatic events early in life, particularly complex trauma ongoing incidences of abuse and violence, often develop social, emotional, health and behavioural problems as adolescents and adults. The aim of the program is to promote a change in traumatised children, bearing in mind that the first condition of recovery from violence and abuse is safety (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). The presence of healthy, relaxed animals elicits a positive response from children, **seeming to convey a sense of safety and trust needed to share their experiences and express their emotions**.

Education about animal health, diet and welfare is another aim of the program. Taking care of them **fosters children’s bonding with the animals** and through this bond, they learn **to develop empathy for smaller and vulnerable beings**. It also helps them to extrapolate what they have learned and apply it to their hygiene and personal care habits as well as to **develop their affective qualities**. Due to the strong attachment children develop towards animals, sessions are structured to prepare them to managing separation when the program ends.

Sessions are held on the grounds of **The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**, a venue that adds great depth to the program. The parallels between animals and children, two powerless groups in society, are strong. It provides opportunities for the creation of **positive associations with adults and animals** to counter the likely damage from experiences of abuse and violence.



A qualitative methodology was chosen for the evaluation. This approach allows children to tell their own stories in their own voices, promotes new realities to be discovered by interactive dialogue between professionals and participants. The study provides concrete evidence of changes in these children's trauma symptoms, **their ability to regulate their emotions and their behavioural responses to anger and fear**. One child said **"It takes me little longer to get angry now"**.