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## **Animal Assisted Therapy in Forensic Mental Health**



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Winston Churchill Fellow 2009

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## 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I also cannot go any further without acknowledging Aileen Galt, whose passion and dedication to AAT inspired me and started me on this journey. Aileen was instrumental in the consolidation of the AAT Centre in The State Hospital, despite much cynicism and scepticism! Thanks Aileen.

There are many staff in The State Hospital that I would like to thank, for facilitating my trip and taking on additional work in my absence! Thank you specifically to Stephen Milloy, Thomas Reid, Linda Robertson, Tommy MacLeod, David Newbigging, Gordon Girvan, Alex Bertram, Avril MacPherson, Anne Brewster, and Ian Russell.

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Finally I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me during the year of planning and then for keeping me sane via Skype while I travelled!

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND FELLOWSHIP AIMS

The State Hospital is the only provider of high secure care for patients from Scotland and Northern Ireland who are mentally disordered and have dangerous, violent or criminal propensities. A range of therapeutic, recreational, educational and social activities are provided for the patients to give structure to their day and help them meet specific treatment plan goals. One of the areas that provide this is the Garden Centre, which is a long-established activity in psychiatric hospitals; the patients can grow vegetables, plants and look after external gardens.

The addition of the Animal Assisted Therapy Centre to the Garden Centre has been a relatively recent development; historically there had been some birds and fish in the ward areas, but as a result of the conviction of certain individuals this has extended and is now an integral part of the off-ward activity timetable for patients. In the AAT Centre currently there are two pigs, two goats, two sheep, a cat, several rabbits, guinea pigs, chipmunks, fish, numerous hens and ducks, three geese and cockatiels. There are also four dogs that visit routinely. Despite some initial cynicism, this area is now recognised as a valuable adjunct to other treatment interventions.

The fellowship trip had two aims:

- **To improve the Animal Assisted Therapy Centre at The State Hospital** - As The State Hospital is the only AAT centre within the special (high secure) hospitals in the UK, we are often asked for advice about introducing AAT in relation to health and safety, selection of animals and so on. Consequently it is important that our knowledge is current, progressive and innovative. I felt it was important that we ensure that the service we deliver is in line with accepted guidelines, policies and procedures and reflects best practice and recent research. I hoped that the places I selected to visit would help me meet this aim; many are recognised as world leaders in the area of AAT.
- **To improve the rehabilitation pathway for the patients** - The patients clearly benefit from working with the animals while they are in The State Hospital and with the current focus on Vocational Rehabilitation it is pertinent to consider developing a pathway for the patients. They acquire skills in high security that can be developed when they step down to lower security and can ultimately provide them with options for employment or activity in the community. Evidence supports the beneficial impact of employment on mental health, for example as it provides structure to the day and increases social contact. There are innovative programmes in place in prisons which provide offenders with skills and I was keen to learn more about these.

When I started writing this report I had thought that it may have taken a slightly different form, with more of an overview approach. However, it became clear that in order to capture the range of approaches and situations I had seen, I needed to go through each one chronologically and extract the learning opportunities at the end of each section. Another relevant point to make is that many of the places I visited had restrictions imposed in terms of confidentiality and consequently this affected where I was able to take photographs.

### **3. ITINERARY**

**Norway** - University of Life Sciences

**New York** - Green Chimneys

**Indiana** - Westville Correctional Facility

**Utah** - Therapy Animals of Utah

**Denver** - American Humane

**Missouri** - Human- Animal Interaction: Impacting Multiple Species Conference

**Queensland** - University of Queensland, prison programmes

## 4. NORWAY

My first destination was Norway where I had arranged to meet Bente Berget from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in Aas. I had discovered a summary of Bente's PhD on the internet, entitled "Animal- Assisted Therapy: Effects on Persons with Psychiatric Disorders working with Farm Animals", and consequently made contact with her via email. Bente explained to me the now well-established system in place in Norway which promotes the rehabilitation of those with mental health problems. This is called 'Green Care'.

### 4.1 Green Care

Changes in Norwegian agriculture have led to the introduction of an innovative approach which provides additional opportunities for both farmers and those with special needs; the introduction of 'Green Care' over the last 15 or so years combines farming with teaching and care. The smaller farms are ideally suited to provide a diverse range of activities that can offer meaningful work for different target groups and the smaller farm can also provide a protective and caring environment for the individual.

Green care has the following aims:

- To develop good and varied co-operation projects between the agricultural sector, the health sector, social services and schools.
- To make use of farmers' knowledge and the farm as a good place to be, and use those values to improve the quality of life for people with special needs.
- To keep more people employed within agriculture, and increase farmers' income.

Green Care is an adjunct or alternative to traditional interventions for those with special needs, providing them with the opportunity to work on a farm. The farmer requests to become part of the scheme; this then puts in place an in-depth process which can take up to two years that ensures the farmer has the necessary skills, knowledge and support to provide this valuable activity. The farmer can take short courses at University specifically designed for farmers who wish to become involved in Green Care.

Each farm that takes part in this programme must sign an agreement with the local authorities. This outlines the responsibilities of the farmer, what the farm offers those with special needs, opening times, insurance, the level of guidance to be given from local authorities and the process for reporting on progress. Another important document is the financial agreement, as local authorities are buying this service from the farmer, who is also paid for the use of buildings and machinery.

It is essential that there is close co-operation between health /social care professionals and the farmer; consequently there is a robust system of communication in place, with ongoing support and dialogue and regular meetings to discuss progress.

There are currently around 200 farms in Norway that work with those with mental health problems. Bente described how the individuals are working in a safe community with the same farmer every day. This can be on a 1:1 basis or in small groups of two or three. There are occasionally large groups of eight to ten and the individuals in groups this size would not have severe problems. Attendance can be two or three times per week.

When I discussed the farmers' motivation with Bente, she told me that the reasons for involvement in the programme can initially be financial but most say that seeing the improvement in the patient is very motivating. They also see using their farm in a different way as positive and encouraging.

#### 4.2 Benefits of Green Care

Results indicate that Green Care is beneficial for all involved. The farmers report improved quality of life as they feel they are making good use of both their skills and their property. Individuals with special needs also report benefits, such as improved mood and improved physical health which then leads to fewer hospital visits. Involvement in Green Care gives them a focus to their day, increased social contact and the opportunity to learn new skills. From the perspective of the local authority, individuals with special and often complex needs are given a tailored programme in the local community. There is also a financial saving as those involved in Green Care report improved mental health and require fewer hospital visits.

#### 4.3 Green Work

As mentioned, Green Care has been around for some time. The latest development in this area is Green Work and this was introduced in 2005. Green Work is a work-orientated initiative, under the auspices of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). Again, this is based on the farm's resources. It offers:

- Practical and varied work experience.
- Personal development through work with animals and plants.
- Physical health promoting activity.

Many of those with mental health problems have been out of work for an extended period and the aim of Green Work is to provide a step towards work. It provides the individual with

structured, meaningful activity that is adapted to each individual's needs and functional abilities. The farms have a wide variety of work, including livestock farming, forest management and the cultivation of fruits, vegetables and grains. Following a period working on the farm, individuals may find it easier to make the transition to work, whether this is supported, full or part time.



Alexandra and Bente



Bente Berget plans to study the effectiveness of this programme. There are 90 places in Norway that do this and Bente wants to measure the effects - psychological / physical / social - and whether individuals are returning to work after Green Work.

The results of this study will be fascinating and could inform practice in Scotland.

“Det er noe med utsiden av hasten som er bra for innsiden av mennesket.”

*“There is something about the outside of the horse  
that is good for the inside of the human.”*

*Winston Churchill*

#### **4.4 Hilde Hauge- “Project for young people- Riding and Care of the Horse”**

Bente introduced me to Hilde Hauge, a PhD student in the department of Animal and Aquacultural Sciences, at the University of Life Sciences. Hilde’s study is looking at the impact of working with horses and the project is with a normal population of adolescents.

Hilde has observed that when the adolescents are working with the horses they learn to master a task, take responsibility, and achieve a feeling of self-efficacy. Like many others, she sees the connection with the horse as beneficial- and is hoping that the study will provide evidence that this is the case and that it will more specifically illuminate exactly what about the interaction is therapeutic.

Hilde and I had an interesting discussion about the impact of animals; she described how people are all on a spectrum from healthy to ill and that the amount and type of time they spend with a horse (or other animal) can vary, from a hobby to a specific therapeutic intervention. The effect of the animal is then different, depending upon where you are on the spectrum and the nature and length of time of the interaction. Animals have a beneficial effect; those who feel themselves to be well still enjoy the company of animals and feel relaxed, or enjoy the fact that they do not need to ‘try’- the animal makes no complicated social demands. This effect is then also felt by those with mental health problems. It may be that some of the benefits are more obvious if an individual has a specific need. This may seem like an obvious point to make, however the literature generally describes the impact of AAA/T on those who are ill and the reader could be forgiven for thinking that the effect is magical for those suffering with debilitating symptoms- and it is interesting to think about the effect as a spectrum. It is perhaps stronger for those who are low in mood, or stressed, but undoubtedly has an impact on all.

The study is a randomised controlled trial (RCT), with 100 students. A questionnaire is being completed five months before the start of the project and another five months after completion. Each person has an intervention once a week for four to five months, during which they are riding, grooming and just ‘being with’ the horse.



Sessions at the beginning and end of the project will also be video recorded. Hilde hopes that the video will reveal what is good about the interaction with the horse—for example is it beneficial if they are with the horse stroking it, or is it horse riding itself that has an impact.



Hilde is assessing self-efficacy, self esteem, how the adolescents function socially and whether they are secure among friends. She hopes to include qualitative aspects gained from interviews with adolescents. Hilde anticipates finishing interventions by summer 2011 and having the study written up by 2012/2013.

It was great to meet Hilde and discuss her study; her enthusiasm for the project is infectious and its completion will add important data to the area of AAT. The quote at the beginning of this section is from

Hilde's PhD leaflet and I was amazed to see a quote from Winston Churchill in Norwegian!

#### **4.5 Ingeborg Pedersen- "Green Care: Effects of Therapeutic Horticulture and Animal-Assisted Intervention on Depression"**

Hilde then introduced me to Ingeborg Pedersen, a Research Fellow at the University, who is carrying out a PhD study looking at the impact of therapeutic horticulture and AAI on depression. The aim is to 'investigate possible positive mental health effects of work and contact with farm animals for persons with a depression diagnosis'. For the study, dairy farmers were recruited from seven counties in the eastern part of Norway. The farmers involved volunteered to participate in this project, as it gives them an insight into Green Care- and they are paid for this.

The participants are individuals with a depression diagnosis (BDI score  $\geq 20$ ) and the study is an RCT with 12 individuals assigned to treatment and 12 to a waiting list control group. The individuals engage in routine work with dairy cattle for three hours in the afternoon twice a week, for a twelve week period. Those in the treatment group receive any other treatment as usual, in addition to the intervention at the farm. The control group also receive their routine treatment as usual. Self-report questionnaires are used to assess aspects of mental health, filled in twice before the intervention, twice during and once at the end of the intervention. Ingeborg stressed the importance of determining lasting benefit and consequently questionnaires are completed three, six and twelve months after the end of the intervention.

An interesting aspect of this study is the video recording of the intervention (farm work) and analysis. Sessions are recorded at the beginning of the project and then again in the last two weeks. Ingeborg is using advanced software to analyse the videos and provide her with valuable data regarding verbal and non-verbal communication, physical contact with the animals, proportion of time spent on various tasks etc. It is hoped that the analysis may reveal to what extent the individual develops attachment to the animals and cares for them and whether this impacts on their relationships with people. The aim is to assess the impact on quality of life, self-esteem, affect and characteristics of different psychiatric diagnoses.

Staff in other places I subsequently visited commented on observing patients' development of positive relationships with people following on from AAT interventions- consequently this study could provide evidence that this is the case. Another interesting aspect of this study is the light it may shed on the lasting impact AAI can have on individuals with depression.

#### **4.6 Anne-Marit Wear: Equine Therapy**

Bente had organised for me to visit Anne-Marit Wear, a psychiatric nurse who has completed further training in equine therapy. She lives in Telemark, a county in southeast Norway. This was four hours or so away from Oslo and was a great opportunity to see some of the stunning scenery of that part of Norway.

Anne-Marit delivers AAT primarily to adolescents, but also to children and couples. She has a purpose-built stable block, in addition to ground outside, which provides a great environment in which to deliver this type of intervention. In the main clients are referred to her by doctors or psychologists, but they can also self-refer, or in the case of children be referred by parents. Anne-Marit keeps notes of each client's progress and then sends a summary to the doctor/ psychologist and a copy to the patient. The client signs an agreement at the start of the work agreeing to this.

She described to me with clarity and enthusiasm how important the horse can be in the rehabilitation of someone who has been bruised and damaged by experiences. The horse is a flight animal, so is not aggressive. However, it is also a large animal, so it can be intimidating but conquering this fear can be empowering. For some, being near a horse that is unleashed may be enough for the first day.

A crucial difference between horses and most other animals used in therapy is that the horse can carry the individual, with all their emotional baggage. Anne-Marit will always use the same horse with a client and in that way they build up a relationship with the animal.



## Some examples of AAT

Anne-Marit described an anxiety management technique that she has found to be useful, in which the client draws a rectangle on the horse's back. They then breathe in and out in a controlled manner as they draw each side of the rectangle. In this way they are using all their senses and this helps them to recall the breathing technique in a more effective way than if they had just drawn a shape on paper- they create a mark on the horse's back with their finger, can smell the horse, feel the coat. Clients report that they can remember this when they are at home; this helps them control their breathing and consequently their anxiety.

Many of Anne-Marit's clients are adolescents, for example, girls who have been abused. They struggle with physical contact and Anne-Marit works with them; she eventually gets them to a point where they can lie on the horse, feel the warmth of the horse and feel it breathing. This slowly begins to help them build trust, with Anne-Marit, with the horse and then gradually with others.

Anne-Marit outlined how important clear boundaries are, in light of the fact that many of the children she works with are lonely and vulnerable and some regard her as a friend. She tells them that she is a 'paid friend' but that she is glad they have come to the farm each day. Each situation can be used to explore issues, for example, when one horse has been away from the others, it is greeted on return by the herd. Anne-Marit will ask the client how this makes them feel- and can use this to explore issues.

She described how working with horses can be used to show the importance of boundaries. If the horse is pushing towards you, perhaps if there is another horse there and one wants attention, then it is acceptable to push the horse away. It will not be insulted and she discusses with the clients how boundaries are not negative but necessary and important.

Bente, Anne-Marit and I discussed the importance of the environment, the therapist and the animal- in this situation all three are therapeutic and result in improved mental health for the clients. However, the interplay between all three cannot be overstated.

Anne-Marit had made a delicious meal for us and it was a wonderful opportunity to relax in a Norwegian home, not a hotel! Her hospitality and warm welcome made the day a truly memorable one. She is remarkable in her dedication, ability and skill and it was a privilege to spend time learning from her.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

As the first stop on my Fellowship trip, Norway was memorable and thought-provoking. Although it was not designed in this way, starting a trip by spending time with those engaged in research was valuable in that it provided a filter through which I could view the rest of my experiences. It helped me to view programmes in an analytical manner and it also reinforced to me the importance of follow-up to determine the lasting impact of AAT.

The need to expand the research base for AAT was a common thread running through each visit; practitioners have the conviction that it is effective as an intervention and yet would love to see a credible, growing and undeniable bank of evidence that it is so.

The warmth of the welcome I received from Bente, Hilde, Ingeborg and Anne-Marit set a high standard for the rest of my trip, as they could not have done more to ensure my visit was an enjoyable one.

#### **4.8 Learning**

- The well established programme of Green Care and Green Work has encouraged me to think how this could be transferred to a Scottish setting. At The State Hospital we are providing the patients with a level of skill and knowledge that could be developed and many patients express an interest in working with animals after discharge. 'Care Farming Scotland' is currently establishing a network of interested farmers and aims to provide a link between service providers and land managers; this is potentially a resource that can be accessed. Another important step is to ensure that skills and motivation is not lost when patients move to medium or low secure care, or community facilities.
- Hilde and Ingeborg indirectly encouraged me to think more critically about AAT- what specifically about the intervention is therapeutic and about the range of benefits that can be accessed, from quality of life to alleviation of severe symptoms. Discussion with them also reinforced to me the importance of longitudinal studies that demonstrate the lasting benefit of AAT.
- The time with Anne-Marit illuminated techniques that can be used in AAT for individuals, such as those with anxiety, low self esteem or depression and how the animal can assist the therapist give the individual skills and strategies to help them cope and recover.
- This first visit highlighted a point that was made later in the trip- that the environment, therapist and animal are variables in this equation. All three individually need to be 'right' and also need to work together effectively for the intervention to be successful. It also prompted me to think about the complexities of detangling this in research to elucidate the relevant data.

## 5. GREEN CHIMNEYS, NEW YORK

*"...the process of giving care to others, the acts of nurturing, touching, holding, protecting, giving food, and guiding, evoked the same feelings, and the same physiological events as being nurtured. In its most simple form, when we care for others we feel as if we are cared for. That is why owners are so certain that their pets give them overwhelming love."*

*Aaron Katcher*

### 5.1 Introduction to Green Chimneys

It is almost impossible to read the literature around the topic of AAT and not come across Green Chimneys. Consequently I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit the school and was certain that it would be an illuminating experience!

Green Chimneys Farm was purchased in 1947 by the Ross family, and 'Green Chimneys School for Little Folk' opened in the summer of 1948 as a boarding school for children aged between two and six. The founder, Dr Ross, had himself been to a boarding school and found that the company of the headmaster's dog helped him cope with being so far away from home. He subsequently developed a vision of a school for young children that was also a working farm in the country and the school is the result of his vision, motivation and dedication.

There are currently 190 children in the school, with around 80 as boarders. The children in the residential programme are generally from New York City and surrounding area and they are aged from five to teens. They are referred as a result of significant problems which have resulted in exclusion from schools, issues at home and in the community; frequently they have been in-patients in psychiatric facilities. The referral to Green Chimneys is generated by school districts, social services and mental health facilities.

Case conferences every six months bring together all the staff involved in the care of the child: social worker, dorm staff, psychiatrist, psychologists, occupational therapists, special education teachers, speech therapists, recreation therapists, health professionals. There is comprehensive discussion about the child and plans and objectives developed.



*The original Green Chimneys school, now an administrative building*

## **5.2 Nature-Based Programmes**

Green Chimneys uses a range of clinical approaches to treatments, including milieu therapy, family therapy, individual, group, work and medication therapy. The nature-based programmes support and enhance these approaches. Nature-based programmes at Green Chimneys are Animal Assisted Activities, Animal Assisted Therapy, Horticulture Therapy, Humane Education and Sustainable Agriculture.

They observe a range of clinical benefits from nature based programmes and these are noted in Michael Kaufmann's paper "Conceptual Foundations, Implementation and Impact of Green Chimneys Nature-Based Programs", (presented to Green Chimneys Board, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007). The complete list of these is noted as an appendix, however a selection of these is: the ability to demonstrate and feel care for other living beings, an increase in self-esteem through increase in competence and the development of the anticipatory response.

Children at Green Chimneys interact with animals and plants as part of the healing process. The road they have come is not an easy one and they are often depressed and feel unwanted. Relationships with adults can be perceived as threatening and difficult, yet to recover they need to establish a connection with adults. It is at this point that animals can be so important. The child can care for an animal and receive the unconditional acceptance and affection that is invaluable in rebuilding, (or building) their self esteem and self worth. The activity of looking after animals is responsible, necessary and enjoyable. Carrying out this task with others begins to connect the child with others who value what they value, who are caring for the animals they are caring for and so it encourages the child to tentatively reach out and make the connection.

## **5.3 My experiences at Green Chimneys**

My visit had been co-ordinated by Miyako Kinoshita, Farm Education Program Manager, and after a friendly welcome and some lunch I was shown my programme for the next couple of days. The classes I observed and staff I met gave me a wonderful opportunity to see first hand the benefits of AAT.

The first area I went to was the lower barn where the 17 horses are kept. The stable area was immaculate; each horse has its own bridle and grooming equipment which was clearly labelled. A large board showed where the horses were, using photos of the horses- the photo could be moved to show the horse is in a particular field, or stable. There was also a chart for the animal's food; clearly showing what each portion size means- e.g. a cup is.....a handful is..... This chart was an inspiration to me, as it demonstrated clearly a way of explaining amounts and requirements that could assist patients in their understanding, and increase independence in feeding the animals.

I observed a lesson with one young boy. One member of staff worked with the child, and clearly had a therapeutic relationship with him. Time was taken with each stage of the process; he prepared the horse, groomed it, put on the tack.



The member of staff used every opportunity to discuss how the horse was feeling, asking the child to notice its body language and what it meant- i.e. flicking his ears back may mean he is slightly unhappy- so the boy had to watch what he was doing and modify his behaviour. The horse also gave the boy **good** feedback when he was enjoying what was happening. The member of staff displayed fantastic patience with the boy and great communication skills, giving lots of positive feedback and support.

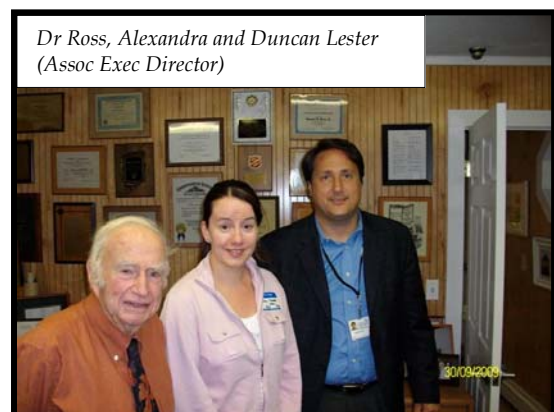
I had the privilege of a tour of Green Chimneys with Michael Kaufmann, Farm and Wildlife Director. Michael has an extensive knowledge of AAT; prior to working in Green Chimneys he worked at in the University of Denver School of Social Work, developing an innovative programme for Animal Assisted Social Work and also worked for American Humane. In addition to the horses there are sheep, pigs, rabbits and other animals. There are cattle, a wildlife rehabilitation area and a diverse range of birds as well as dogs and cats.

A tour of the horticulture area revealed a fantastic resource, with neat beds and raised beds where the children can plant vegetables and then eat the results of their labour. The school itself was bright and clean, classrooms were inviting and inspiring with walls covered in the children's work. The school uses the milieu approach, with the aim being that every aspect of the child's life contributes to healing and recovery. The teachers and staff aim to enrich the children's lives and use all resources available.

The wildlife programme at Green Chimneys is valuable in a different way. Children are taught about how some animals can be dangerous at times, about how they need their own space and about boundaries. Opportunities to use these illustrations are not missed, for example, the children's own right to personal space and the need to respect that of others. Green Chimneys also has some birds in this area that are imprinted on humans and so will stay forever, but there are those that are only temporarily injured and will return to the wild. This gives a great opportunity to talk about how the children are coming to Green Chimneys to get better and then they move home / away.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

I was delighted to be able to meet the founders, Dr Ross and his wife. He told me about his dream of starting a school for little folk and his pride in the school was evident. He and his wife remain very much involved in the school and were visible for much of the time I spent there. Dr Ross' focus now is primarily on fund raising as the funds received from the government do not meet their total expenses; money comes from the nursery- which is for young children from the neighbourhood, from the payments from the educational system who are paying for the children, from fund raising, and seasonal events. It was a privilege to meet Dr Ross- Green Chimneys is held in high regard world- wide as a leader in the field of AAT and Dr Ross was charming, knowledgeable and inspiring.





While I was visiting Green Chimneys a former student of the school was murdered in New York City and this had a visible effect on the staff. The student's mother wrote in the obituary about the positive effect of Green Chimneys and her son's interaction with animals. The fact that through the grief of losing her son the mother remembered the impact of the school and AAT, speaks volumes about the success of this approach and the dedication of the staff. I was left with the impression of a warm, motivated group of staff who care passionately about the recovery of the children they care for and a superb example of the impact AAT can have on those at a crisis point in their lives.

## 5.5 Learning

In terms of learning gained from the visit, there are a few themes:

- The benefits of clearly organised animal areas, boards that explain feed requirements and other animal care issues. This promotes literacy, independence and initiative.
- The importance of using every opportunity as a learning opportunity- whether it is explaining factual information, discussing awareness of the patient's behaviour on the animal/ other patients, opportunities to work on team work and communication, encouraging empathy through discussion of the emotional state/ needs of others, even basic living skills such as hygiene.
- It clearly demonstrated to me the concept that I had been vaguely aware of but had not been able to articulate: when working with someone who has been severely damaged through illness/ life experience/ medication etc, it is through working together with the animals that trust is built up through the shared activity, shared interest and care for another living being. This then gradually extends to one person and then slowly extends to others. Through care and nurture of the animals, the individual receives unconditional acceptance, which increases their sense of self worth and this in turn encourages them to risk human connection.
- It reminded me of the importance of a sense of responsibility and how this can impact on self esteem and self worth. There are many opportunities to give patients greater responsibility and although in the forensic environment this must always be balanced against risk, there are still many situations where this can be done safely.

## 6. 'PRISON TAILS AND MIXED UP MUTTS', WESTVILLE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, INDIANA

*"Introducing animals into prisons may be the most impressive and significant of all human-animal interactions. Because people are by nature nurturers, without suitable nurturing objects or appropriate nurture they cannot be expected to function satisfactorily in society".*

*Leo Bustad (Founder of the Delta Society)*

The first prison programme visited was in Westville Correctional Facility, Indiana. Cris and Sarah Stevens are the founders of Mixed Up Mutts, a rescue organisation and training centre. They find troubled dogs and take them to the Prison Tails programme in Westville, where Cris is the Prison Tails Lead Trainer. Regan Dietz is the Prison Tails Director.

### 6.1 Background

The prison is huge in comparison with The State Hospital, with 3400 offenders, housed on a 500 acre site. The programme is called Mixed up Mutts / Prison Tails and it began from a need to re-home dogs from the Mixed up Mutts shelter. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find stable foster families for the dogs as often these placements proved to be unpredictable and inconsistent. It was realised that prison can provide a far more stable and static environment and the Prison Tails programme was born. From the prison's perspective, everything is provided; money to run the programme comes from donations and from adoptions.

There are currently 32 offenders in the programme, which involves the prisoner having 24-hour care and responsibility for a dog. On completion of the programme, prisoners are able to receive a 'Certificate of Completion' from the Dept of Labour Apprenticeship Program. To receive this they must complete 2000 hours in the program. Along with the certificate, they are also then eligible for a six month time cut in their sentence. The company of a dog, a certificate from the Dept of Labour and a time cut all make this an attractive programme and consequently there is a waiting list of potential candidates.

### 6.2 Candidate selection

Before any of the prisoners are accepted onto the program they are interviewed by Regan, to determine whether prisoner has experience of working with animals, what they wish to get from the program and if they have allergies. There are also specific criteria: the individual must have a high school diploma/ GED and be prepared to stay in the program for a year. There must be no history of violence towards children/ animals or domestic abuse, they must have good health, have around two to eight years left of their sentence and commit to 2000 hours.

Prisoners work in teams of six and Regan carefully selects the teams, bearing in mind the personalities of the prisoners, as well as their level of skill and ability.

### 6.3 Programme Content

The programme is a training programme and as such the prisoners are given lots of information about the new role they will be fulfilling. They are given a pack that contains general dog care information such as grooming, vaccinations and diseases and a comprehensive training manual.

The prisoners have the dog beside them in their cell and have 24-hour responsibility for the animal. They have a structured daily routine that starts with getting up early to take the dog out and then they work through the day, training the dog using short sessions.

The handlers keep a daily journal in which they record the dog's behaviour and progress. This is then handed in each week on a Monday. Also, on the first of each month the prisoners hand in their daily training summaries and receive new documentation. I was told that there had only been one occasion when a prisoner has been fired for not handing this in- and this is evidence of the motivation and enthusiasm for the programme.



A personalised training video is made by each handler with their dog. Regan commented that the offenders can be nervous and apprehensive about completing this and mumble in the video, but on seeing the completed video they are keen to re-do it and produce a result of which they can be proud.

The handlers work as a team, not only in training but in taking care of their living quarters and training areas; they are responsible for ensuring that these areas are clean and in good order. This was a point that was raised by the offenders when I spoke to them- they were keen to stress this as a benefit of the programme. They stated that it taught teamwork, trust, tolerance and co-operation- social skills that they didn't have to use 'on the street'.

An interesting point expressed was that there were surprises with regard to who made good handlers, challenging their pre-conceived ideas. A further benefit of working as a team is that dogs do not just become socialised to one individual; they are used to working with a range of personalities, voices and temperaments. This can only result in the dogs becoming more adoptable. At the end of each assigned dog's training session, they will be tested according to the American Kennel Club's 'Canine Good Citizen' certification program. Detailed information about this is in the packs given to the handlers.

It was apparent that the handlers had many challenges in this programme and not merely the acquisition of practical skills. If their dog needed to go outside during the night, they had to notify the officer in their area. They also faced issues when interacting with non-handlers, for example when exercising the dogs in the yard. They cannot tell other offenders what to do and have to use a range of social skills to negotiate the situations they come up against. Daily life in the prison can also interfere with the best laid plans, an example of this is an 'emergency count' where all prisoners must return to their dorm /room to be accounted for, and this is not a quick process. There was an emergency count during my visit to the prison, which gave me an insight into the issues faced by both prisoners and staff running the programme.

Opinion in the prison towards the programme appeared very positive; one opinion expressed by staff was that offenders in the programme became more responsible. The current superintendent has adopted a dog from the programme and was keen to praise the programme and the valuable work they do.

There could be several reasons for this positive attitude to the programme: the staff will see the impact that participation in the programme has, the professional manner of the staff involved and also the fact that they run a staff training class. This takes place as part of the annual mandatory training for staff and is basically an orientation to the Prison Tails programme, explaining about the funding, handlers and what is involved. Creatively, Regan involves handlers in this training, four individuals attend and say what it means to them and another four demonstrate basic obedience and correction.

When I asked how other prisoners viewed the programme I was told that it was mostly regarded in a positive light, sometimes with envy. It was also noted that it has helped some prisoners overcome fear of dogs.

#### **6.4 Benefits**

I had the opportunity to talk to the handlers on two occasions and ask them about the programme. They were confident and enthusiastic in their description of the benefits. They described learning the need to respect other's ideas and develop tolerance of the different personalities of others. They were glad to be learning a skill and some expressed a desire to use the skill and the qualification as 'animal trainer' upon release, seeing it as a way to future employment.

One man said that it helped him speak to others that he would never have approached before the programme and so had changed his outlook. There were opportunities to develop literacy skills, using the daily logs and evaluation of the dog's progress, and opportunities to help one another in this process. Another said that it had taught him patience; he described himself as not being a patient man, but that he had had to learn this skill while working with a young dog.

I asked them directly why they were involved in the programme and I feel it is useful to incorporate quotes from some of the prisoners here:

*"Dogs train us....it's kinda backwards, but they train us."*

*"The time cut is good, but training dogs is better."*

*"I'm learning to train dogs.....they recognise and understand body language so I need to learn about it."*

*"I love dogs."*

*"I'd do it with or without the time cut...time goes by fast."*

*"This dog has a different temperament from the first dog.....  
I get a sense of accomplishment."*

*"I want to do further education on training dogs...you learn about your weaknesses and strengths....maybe as a future career."*

*"I love dogs....the programme helps the days go by."*

*"I love to be around dogs."*

*"I want to do the same thing upon release...  
.this is a second chance for someone like me."*

*"You gotta know patience when training dogs.....  
maybe work at this part time in the future."*

*"Teach you patience....learn about the CGC."*

*"Learning opportunity."*

*"Had been the time cut, but now its because the dog is  
so happy to see you when you return to it."*

*"This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> dog programme I've been in."*

*"I had limited experience of dogs, I didn't know anything,  
but now the dog is the topic of conversation, an ice-breaker."*

## 6.5 Adoption

An obvious question to ask is about the impact of adoption; it is evident that the handlers invest so much of themselves into the training and care of the dog. The prisoners said that they do become very close to the dogs and described the effort they put into the care of their animal. They were keen to say that it was 'worth it, you're saving a dog's life'. The fact that they work in teams of six also helps, as they are close to other dogs and have developed good relationships with other handlers. Regan stressed that dogs are replaced as soon as is possible; the handler can then move on to the next challenge, the next dog in need of care and training and this helps them deal with the adoption.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The success of this programme is clearly a result of the dedication of Regan, Cris and Sarah. I was struck by their motivation, enthusiasm and the therapeutic relationship they had with the handlers. In the short time I was there it was apparent that they were regarded with respect by the prisoners and I would like to note here my gratitude to them for allowing me to visit their programme. This programme is vocational in its outlook, with the prisoners gaining skills and a certificate that is evidence of this. It does however, also encompass many of the other AAT aspects, such as providing the prisoners with unconditional love and acceptance, providing a link with others that then improves their level of interaction and teaching the handlers skills such as patience and tolerance of others. Walking around the prison with the dogs and the handlers, we were approached by non-handlers who wanted to talk to the dogs and the presence of dogs in that environment can only be described as a positive addition. This links to a point raised at the conference in Missouri which I shall outline later, about the intrinsic benefits of interaction with the natural world.

## 6.6 Learning

- This programme is inspiring. However, it is debatable whether the programme in this format could be transferred to in-patient psychiatric care. The main issue is one of unpredictability; fluctuating mental states can mean that a patient is not always able to care for an animal. It would require considerable debate about risk and contingency for the concept of a dog living in a patient's room to be implemented. Having said that, this has prompted me to consider alternatives to this model, that still allow shelter dogs to be cared for in the hospital.
- What the programme did demonstrate is that there is clearly a place for vocational intervention in the area of AAT and secure care. It could be argued that there are additional benefits that can be gained from implementing a similar programme in a mental health setting. Specifically: patients can be given the opportunity to gain skills in animal care, patients gain the benefits of unconditional acceptance and the enjoyment of working with dogs, and clinical staff can use the process to facilitate the development of a therapeutic relationship and are provided with opportunities for assessment.



- This programme emphasised to me the benefit of using shelter dogs, for both the dogs and the prisoners. The dogs receive care and training, but what struck me was the difference it made giving prisoners the chance to care for the animal. Interaction with someone else's pet can still be enjoyable, but caring for an animal that has been neglected appears to open up a whole new raft of gains for the prisoner.

## 7. THERAPY ANIMALS OF UTAH

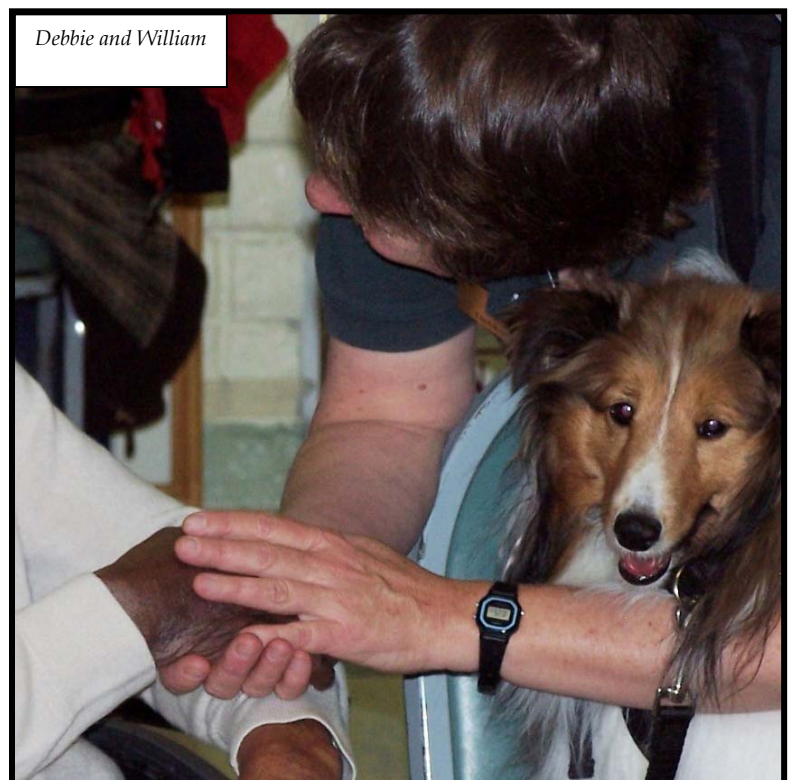
The overwhelming impression I am left with of Utah is one of awe! The state is more beautiful than I could have imagined and the people that I met looked after me from the moment my plane landed until my plane took off again at the end of the week. They were so kind, so generous, that I cannot express my gratitude enough to them for making me feel like one of the family!

I was met at Salt Lake City airport by Gaelyn Derr, Executive Director of Therapy Animals of Utah (TAU), and Nancy Walton, Programme Director, who settled me into my hotel and organised to collect me the following morning. The next day I was met by Gaelyn and after lunch together we drove to Provo, where Debbie Carr lives. My initial contact with TAU had been via Debbie, so it was exciting to finally meet someone I had been emailing for so long.

### 7.1 Utah State Hospital

We met Debbie at the Utah State Hospital, where she works with her Sheltie, William. Debbie had previously worked as a psychiatric nurse with children and is now a Pre-school education teacher specialising in working with three to five year olds with Autism. Debbie has been a Delta Pet Partner since 1995 and is now a Pet Partner Instructor, Evaluator, Evaluator Instructor and an 'AAT Applications for HealthCare Professionals' Instructor!

Utah State Hospital is, as it sounds, the facility for the state and we went to the children's unit. The average length of stay is one year, after this the children go to step-down facilities/ foster home/ parents.





Children have a range of diagnoses: ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder), behavioural difficulties, autism, violence. They have been unable to be cared for in two other settings and the hospital is basically the end of the line for them. The sessions I was able to observe were with Kaylyn Ellis, an Occupational Therapist (OT) based in the hospital. Kaylyn is doing a pilot study examining the effects of AAT in this setting, assisted by students from Brigham Young University. I wasn't surprised to hear that, as with many other professionals involved in AAT, they know that it works, but would love evidence to back their opinion. Three different children came to the session with Kaylyn, Debbie and William:

- The first was a boy of around eight, with a diagnosis of autism. He was delighted to see the dog and his face lit up. Much of the session was about interpreting the dog's behaviour; about the child's behaviour and how it affected the dog. For example, why did the child think he was wagging his tail- because the dog is happy to see him, why did the dog rest his head on his knee- because the dog trusts him. Kaylyn asked the child how he let people know if he was upset and they spoke about how the dog may do this. This increased the child's self-awareness, for example how others may perceive him and how he can let people know if he is upset. They also used photos of the dog and of people to further illustrate this. He had the opportunity to brush the dog, give the dog water and small treats, so there were also opportunities to assess dexterity and develop skills in this area.
- The second child was also a boy, aged around 10. He had a diagnosis of ADHD. This child was shy, but again pleased to see the dog. At one point his speech became louder and he started talking about guns; the dog then moved away from him. Kaylyn and Debbie were able to use this as a learning opportunity. They asked him why he thought the dog had moved away; he was able to identify it was because his voice had become louder and that although the dog couldn't understand the words, maybe he could sense it wasn't a good, calm topic. Following this conversation he did become calmer and gradually the dog moved back beside him again. In previous sessions Debbie had been showing the child how to get William to do tricks and he was keen to do this again. He was so pleased and animated when doing this and also took the activity a stage further by using a clicker once he was shown this by Debbie. Also interesting was that he displayed empathy by asking if he could give the dog water at the end of the session, in case William was thirsty.
- The final child was a girl aged around seven. Occasionally she had a very bright smile, but it faded quickly. She had a calm quiet manner and William snuggled in to her and slept and her delight in this was evident. At one point she asked if Debbie could bring in a 'girl dog' instead of William and it transpired that she is currently the only girl in the unit and needs female company. She also was able to get William to do tricks with the assistance of Debbie and again this had an obvious effect on her self esteem, she was learning a skill and gaining competence, as well as benefiting from the unconditional affection from a gorgeous dog.

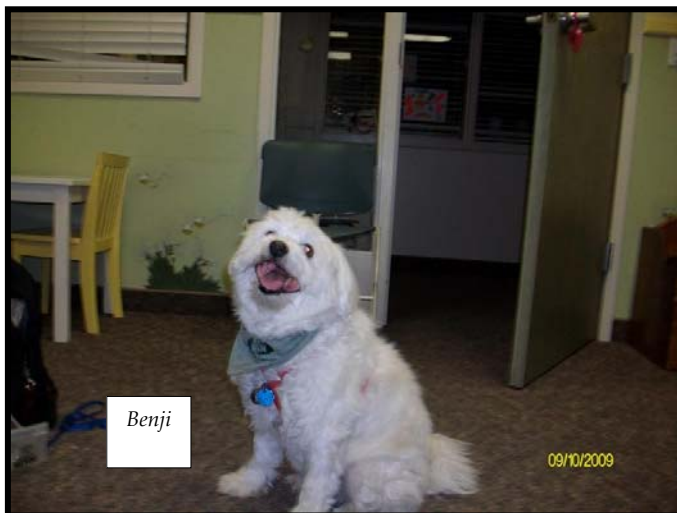
Through each session Debbie and Kaylyn gave the children positive feedback: “look how calm William is now”, “that’s so kind of you”, “good job bud” and the children responded to this. Kaylyn is currently writing up the children’s progress and is building up great evidence that the children are responding to the dog and modifying their behaviour. Other staff in the hospital are positive about the AAT, as they see the changes in the children following the sessions.

Following the TAU recommendations, Debbie had taken along a bag with various brushes, water dish, photos of William and treats and this proved invaluable; the children asked to brush William, selecting their favourite brush, or the one they felt he liked. This then opened up many different possible avenues of conversation. As a member of TAU, Debbie keeps her own (anonymous) record of the session for her own use.

The staff discussed later with me how the animal is a bio-feedback system, giving the child immediate feedback on their behaviour.

## 7.2 Children’s Shelter in Salt Lake City

Following the visit to Utah State Hospital, I had the opportunity to observe a TAU visit in a children’s shelter. This is funded by the county, but also relies on charitable donations for clothes, toys and other resources for the children.



The length of time that children live there varies, at the time of my visit there were only four, but there can be over 20 children at one time. They are removed from situations of domestic violence and other potentially dangerous and damaging situations. Here I met Jim, a TAU volunteer, and his dog Benji. He told me that he occasionally sees visible effects of abuse, such as bruising. He described some examples of traumatic cases that he was aware of and his motivation

was inspiring- he knew that his visits made a difference to these children. Further evidence of the success of his visits was seen in that one member of staff in the shelter planned to register his own dog with TAU having seen the impact AAT could make.

We saw three siblings, a girl of two, a girl of seven and their brother who was 11, plus another boy. All the children were delighted to see Benji; they were animated and smiling and the only way I can describe it is to say that by showering them with affection, Benji was giving them a gift.

Jim has been visiting this shelter for four to five years; he also visits in other settings with Benji, but it was a real privilege to observe the impact Jim and Benji had on this small group of extremely vulnerable, needy children.

The only question I was left with after this visit was about the support that Jim may need. As this is a specific area of expertise and he often comes into contact with heart-wrenching situations, it would seem important that he has the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this to prevent stress.

### 7.3 Senior Care Centre

An important role of the experienced staff in TAU is to mentor those who are new to AAA/T and approve them as handlers. I went with Nancy Walton and Gaelyn Derr to a Senior Care Centre where Cynthia Maytum was being mentored as she worked with her dog, Bruiser. The centre was one where the residents received skilled nursing care, so there was much to be aware of with regards to hygiene, medical equipment and unpredictable residents.

Observing this session clearly demonstrated to me the importance of mentoring. Nancy was able to direct Cynthia where appropriate, make suggestions as to ways to hold the dog and give advice re good things to say. I was really impressed by Cynthia's natural ability to help the residents. When a resident became tearful because her pet had died some time ago, Cynthia was able to redirect the conversation, turn the visit into a positive experience and leave them looking forward to the next visit. Others we visited were animated, talking about how soft the dog was, how pleased Bruiser was to see them and requesting further visits.

What I observed was AAA and the benefits of it in this setting were again indisputable. Although the residents enjoyed Cynthia's company and pleasant manner, the factor that made the difference, that was the focus of the interaction, gave the residents tactile pleasure and provided them with affection, was Bruiser.



The following day my hosts had organised a get-together at Nancy and Gary Walton's home. Many TAU volunteers came to this and it gave me the opportunity to talk to others about the work that they do, and also to give a short presentation on the work that we do in Scotland.

It was a lovely evening, and a great chance to relax in friendly company. By this point I had been travelling for a few weeks and meeting the same people for a few days in a row meant that they were fast beginning to feel like old friends! The highlight of the evening was Debbie's specially-learned rendition, accompanied by the guitar, of 'Loch Lomond'!



A visit to Utah would not be complete without a trip to Salt Lake and Gaelyn kindly suggested that we make the trip. Although the smell at the lake is not the most pleasant, it is truly stunning. After we had been to the Lake, we drove on to meet Debbie Hamilton. Debbie has a mini-horse that she uses for AAT along with lots of other horses- mini and not so mini! She was able to explain how horseriding can be used in a range of ways, meeting emotional goals such as

learning to trust, gaining self esteem through mastery of a task and in meeting physical goals such as improving core stability.

#### **7.4 Secure Adolescent Unit**

This was another very different setting in which to observe AAA/T. I sat in with two groups of children and two volunteers.

The first group was of six children, with volunteer Merrill Gurney and his guinea pig, Max. It was a mixed group and they mostly appeared to be in their early teens. Much of the session was educational; Merrill had brought along books and photos of Max and of other breeds of guinea pigs. The children asked lots of questions, petted the guinea pig and interacted well with each other. There was an OT from the Unit present throughout the session. This was clearly AAA, but the children did appear to enjoy the activity of being in this small group, with the attention of Merrill and his guinea pig.

The second group were again mixed, in their early teens and the OT remained in the room. This time the handler had a Leonberger dog and she told me that initially the children had been intimidated by his size, but that his charming personality had won them over. He was a gorgeous, obedient, calm dog. One of the activities the handler asked the children to do was to look through the books she had brought, choose a dog breed and explain why they had chosen that particular breed. She used this to discuss why certain dogs are bred, what 'group' they come from and lifestyle issues that need to be considered when you are choosing a dog. She also had a stack of large cards with pictures of a wide range of dog breeds and asked the children to guess the breed. This provoked lots of enthusiastic guessing and great satisfaction when a right answer was given! The children then had the opportunity to ask the dog to do tricks, (sit/ speak/ lie down/ circle) and reward this with treats. They clearly enjoyed this, smiling and displaying obvious satisfaction and pride when he did it for them.

One girl was very attached to the dog and sat on floor beside her, quietly and repeatedly stroking her. She stayed the longest, even after the other children had gone. She asked lots of questions about the dog and seemed sensitive, vulnerable.



I was told that previously the handler had been able to take the children individually away for an hour and that this had been very interesting and beneficial, but couldn't do this any longer as there was insufficient staff! This is all too common a complaint and sad in the light of the situation these children have found themselves in. The girl who remained with the dog the longest said that she liked it because of the affection, companionship, that it relaxes her, she thinks it is fun etc. Out of all the children that I met at those two sessions, she appeared to 'need' AAT the most and seemed to be clutching at the short opportunity she had to have some quiet time with the dog.

Much of what I saw at the adolescent unit was AAA; aims could have been extracted about group skills, communication etc with the animal as the catalyst. There was also the purely educational element to both sessions, with a living animal as the motivating factor to learn. The exception to this was the girl, whose needs appeared greater. With the knowledge of the OT and the handler she was allowed longer; relaxing once the others had gone and enjoying the unconditional love and feeling of calm coming from the repeated stroking and playing with the dog's coat.

The volunteers I observed here were very experienced and confident and the success of the sessions was down to their skills. They were not only being a handler, but were managing a group of potentially difficult adolescents. They maintained interest of the children throughout, kept control of the group and left them looking forward to the next visit- it was impressive to see.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

As I mentioned at the start of this section, I cannot thank Gaelyn, Nancy and Debbie enough for making this visit remarkable. They ensured that I was able to see a cross-section of the facilities they visit, to meet other TAU volunteers, observe mentoring, and through all this they were incredibly hospitable, friendly and caring.

I would like to highlight a valuable publication, "101 Creative Ideas for Animal Assisted Therapy" by Stacy Grover. Stacy, a TAU member that I was delighted to meet at the conference in Missouri, completed this book this year and it is a fantastic resource for those engaged in AAT as it assists the selection of appropriate activity to meet identified goals. This can be ordered from [www.aatideas.com](http://www.aatideas.com).

The volunteers are 'Pet Partners'- the Delta terminology for handlers and their animals. They take pride in their affiliation with Delta and this has encouraged me to learn more about the organisation and the rigorous standards they demand.

Although the TAU handlers are volunteers, the in-depth training and evaluation that they go through to become Pet Partners means that it is not something they do lightly. They are professional, smartly dressed, identifiable as TAU staff and also keep in contact with one another as a group. This motivation, enthusiasm and professionalism means that they are welcomed in a range of facilities, from care homes to secure settings and that they inspire others to get involved in AAA/T.

The only point that I feel I could comment on is the lack of structured reflection for the volunteers. Some of the handlers work in difficult situations and it could be beneficial for them to take time regularly to reflect on their work, how they feel it is going, discuss any concerns they have and receive formal support. The TAU staff are at the end of the phone and I know would provide ample support if any volunteer asked, but there are benefits to providing routine reflection for staff.

## **7.6 Learning**

- Observing Debbie and Kaylyn in Utah State Hospital has encouraged me to think about the use of animals as a bio-feedback mechanism. This is something that we are aware of, but do not use enough. There are many opportunities when working with the patients and the animals that could be used to encourage them to reflect on their own behaviour. For example, the need to remain calm with no sudden movements when feeding the animals and to speak quietly when holding one of the smaller animals.
- The mentoring I watched showed me the importance of training for staff and the valuable role that shadowing can play. The staff need to have a combination of skills working with animals and skills re working with people experiencing mental health problems- and when considering staff changes in the future, mentoring is an essential aspect that should not be overlooked.
- TAU is involved across a wide range of facilities, and I observed AAA and AAT. This visit gave me a real insight into the impact animal assisted interventions can have across a spectrum of ages and needs, as there is no comparison between reading about the transformative effect and seeing it with your own eyes.
- The exacting standards of the Delta Society have encouraged me to re-examine our own policy and documentation.

## **8. AMERICAN HUMANE**

I had the privilege of spending time with Diana McQuarrie while I was in Denver, Colorado. She is the Director of American Humane Animal-Assisted Therapy and is inspiring in her dedication to the promotion of excellence in the field of AAT. There are now over 200 handler-animal teams serving 50 facilities in the Denver-metro area, and approximately 120,000 lives per year are impacted by the human-animal bond.

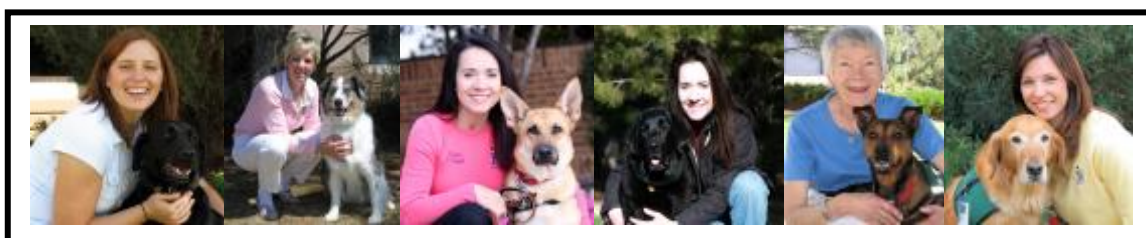
American Humane's Animal Assisted Therapy team's mission is to "enhance the lives of people and to promote the human-animal bond through animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy. Our vision is a more humane and compassionate world for all."

*“Therapy animal teams represent the future of how animal-assisted therapy services will be delivered and American Humane is honored to give people the opportunity to pursue this work with their pet, work that will make a critical difference for people and their health. We are deeply passionate about our work. It is with our own families and companion animals in mind that we engage in our mission every day. The American Humane Animal-Assisted Therapy team strives to build healthy communities through compassion, integrity, respect for all, and endless dedication to our mission of promoting the human-animal bond.”*

*Diana McQuarrie, Director*

It is of central importance to American Humane that the credibility of AAA/T is maintained and that as an organisation they deliver an excellent service. Of crucial importance, therefore, is that therapy teams are well trained to deliver this service and have an awareness of the complex issues around the delivery of AAA/T. It is also vital that the animal has the necessary skills and aptitude for the work- and that they enjoy it!

Consequently American Humane conduct training courses and evaluation for animal-handler teams based on rigorous Standards of Practice. They also teach continuing education courses to healthcare professionals on how to incorporate animal-assisted therapy to help achieve treatment goals. They work in partnership with those receiving AAA/T by routinely consulting with them to gain their perspective on the service being delivered. They are involved in delivering AAA/T in a range of settings, including acute care, hospices, long term care, homeless shelters and government facilities.



*Meagan Owens & Tuna, Mandy Bell & Chaco, Diana McQuarrie & Gidget, Diana & Rigo, Anne Przbyla & Katie, Amy McCullough & Bailey*

Diana has recently completed work with Allie Philips, vice-president of American Humane’s Public Policy Office, and developed a booklet entitled ‘Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK) Program’. This has been done in co-operation with the Delta society and can be accessed from [www.americanhumane.org/human-animal-bond/programs/therapy-animals-supporting-kids/](http://www.americanhumane.org/human-animal-bond/programs/therapy-animals-supporting-kids/)

This is a highly specialised area of AAT and the booklet provides guidelines for the incorporation of therapy animals into the fields of criminal justice and child welfare. It is a growing area of expertise and one which assists children who have endured trauma survive the subsequent ordeal of medical exams, forensic evaluations and court testimony.



## 8.1 Mental Health Center, Denver, (MHCD) with Mandy Bell and Chaco

MHCD is the community mental health centre for Denver County, however it is not a state or City agency, but a private charitable organisation. They include AAT as an intervention and note on their website that “Animal Assisted Therapy has shown promising results in reducing aggressive behaviour by providing students opportunities to develop pro-social skills with the families, other students and program staff”.

I was able to sit in on a session in MHCD and this was perhaps the clearest example of AAT I observed. A therapist, Trish Goetz, worked with Mandy and Chaco, her stunning Australian Shepherd, during an hour long session with a young boy.



They all sat on the floor and Chaco sat beside the boy throughout. He was experiencing difficulties grieving and Trish explained the different stages of grief to him. By giving him this information she was giving him permission to grieve, explaining to him why he felt as he did. While he was talking and particularly when discussing sensitive and difficult issues, the boy repeatedly twisted Chaco's coat around his fingers. It was evident that having the dog there, with his head on the boy's knee, was making this process easier for him. In this complex situation, the three (therapist, handler and dog) made an excellent team, they were used to working together and it was remarkable to observe.

As with all American Humane volunteers, Mandy adheres to Delta standards regarding cleanliness and also the routine re-evaluation. As she was working directly with a therapist, there was support and supervision available through discussion before and after each session.

One aspect that was very evident in this situation and that was discussed after the session, was the importance of the interplay between all relevant factors: therapist, dog, dog handler, environment and patient.

There are clear learning points here; there is a need to be aware of all the variables when considering AAA/ T and how a change in one could impact significantly on the success or otherwise of the intervention. This also highlights difficulties when planning research, as it is not easy to extricate the benefits of the dog from this therapeutic situation for evaluation, with so many potentially confounding variables.

## 8.2 Denver Children's Home

Diana had organised for me to go to Denver Children's Home; this was to observe an AAT session and also to meet Dr Jerry Yager, Executive Director and psychologist.

Denver Children's Home is a non-profit organisation in Colorado, providing a comprehensive continuum of care through residential and outpatient programming for deeply traumatised, abused and neglected children. Nearly 75% of the children have some form of emotional/ mental disorder, many have substance abuse problems and 98% come from families whose income is below the poverty line. Some 30 children can live in the home; 60 benefit from the day

Denver Children's Home



treatment programme and an additional 50 benefit from outreach services. At the time of my visit there were 12 girls and 13 boys resident in the home, aged 11-18.

The children receiving treatment benefit from a range of interventions: Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), Motivational Interviewing, Neuro- Sequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) along with an accredited educational input, medication management and experiential therapy such as art, yoga, music and recreation.

## 8.3 Dr Jerry Yager

My meeting with Dr Yager was truly one of the highlights of my travels. He spent time with me discussing the theory behind the trauma- informed care, neurosequential approach that underpins much of what they do at the Home and I found this illuminating in terms of understanding how AAT can be effective.

As he explained, the human brain continues to develop after birth and this allows us to adapt to different environments. It is clear that the brain develops and organises as a reflection of developmental experience, organising in response to pattern, intensity and nature of sensory and perceptual experience. It is also important to note that the brain is organised in a hierarchical manner and that the first place sensory input (light, sound, smell, taste, touch) enters the brain is the brainstem and diencephalon, which are incapable of conscious perception.

As these waves of neural activity move up the brain they are processed by the limbic and cortical areas and are matched against previously stored patterns of association. Consequently the brainstem, midbrain and limbic system may start acting on this incoming information even before it reaches the cortex- so there can be a fear/ alarm response before the information has been fully processed and interpreted.

The brain makes associations between sensory signals co-occurring in any given moment in time; this capacity allows humans to learn, create images of the future and survive, however it also can make humans vulnerable to false associations. The brain takes associations from a single or specific event and generalises to other situations, for example, the brain can generalise from the single abusive father to all adult males.

The next relevant point is that neural networks change in a use-dependent manner. Patterned, repetitive activity, therefore, changes the brain. If a child is neglected, for example by receiving less love and experiencing stress, then the brain will not receive sufficient patterned activity to develop normally. The implication of this is that there must be repetition in those neural systems that mediate the symptoms. Therapeutic interventions need to influence the brainstem initially, as attempts to treat symptoms that are related to higher parts of the brain while disregarding the brainstem will not be successful.

However, it is significant that there must be an emphasis on repetition to achieve the goal and the number of repetitions can be so high that it is discouraging for those involved in the care of the child. Bruce Perry writes in "Applying Principles of Neurodevelopment to Clinical Work with Maltreated and Traumatized Children" that "Dogs have the capacity to provide the unconditional accepting and repetitive nurturing experiences required to help some of these children". He highlights the need for interventions to be frequent, predictable, and patterned and notes that dance, drumming and music can also provide the repetitive sensory input that may influence brainstem neurobiology to reorganise in a therapeutic manner.

The treatment that has resulted from these principles of neurodevelopment is used successfully in the Home and I will not go into the treatment in detail here, suffice to say that it looks at the sequential sensory processing, assesses the behaviour and has outlined appropriate treatment for each stage. For example, there are listed brainstem/ diencephalons/ limbic/ cortex behaviours with associated basic treatment suggestions.

Dr Yager sees a place for AAT, along with other treatments, for children who have been traumatised. To begin to repair the damage, interventions must be repetitive. When a child is greeted by an enthusiastic teacher/ carer, there is that moment of welcome, affection, wide smiles and the message that the child is valuable. Then it is gone, that genuine 'you are important and I'm pleased to see you', and the routine of the task at hand begins. With a dog, on the other hand, every time the child greets the dog, steps out of the room and then back in again, strokes the dog, or plays with the dog, he receives the same enthusiastic greeting every time.

The dog then can provide many, many positive responses for every one of the adult's. This point is illustrated humorously by Dr Marty Becker in his book "The Healing Power of Pets", where he describes the consistent enthusiastic welcome he receives from his dogs **every** time he comes home and compares this to the response he gets from his family! He describes how every time he turns down his drive his dogs are waiting, ready to race to meet him, and "collide into my body in a delighted frenzy of fur". It is in this response, each and every time, that Marty describes "the stresses of the outside world slipping away, the ritual instantly connecting me back to simple pleasures, with no expectation of my performance"

In the case of the traumatised child, the repetitive nature of the interaction with the dog may then go some way to repairing the damage that has been done and regulate the brainstem's stress response systems, that will then allow further therapeutic work to be implemented.

As the brain of a young child is more malleable than that of an adult, it is difficult to extrapolate the results of this research to the adult forensic population. However, what has remained with me is Dr Yager's emphasis on the fact that healing can take place, that repetition is important and the importance of relationship in this process for recovery to take place. It is evident from other research into AAT that dogs can provide this consistent, predictable and therapeutic response and that they do so repetitively. Having this explained clearly to me was a bit of a 'eureka' moment- and gives scientific substance to the tacit benefits of AAT.

#### **8.4 Anne and Katie**

I was met by Anne Przybyla and her dog Katie, and she kindly let me observe her session in the Home. We went up to one of the dorms, where five girls lived. One girl opted to take Katie outside for a walk and she played games with her. She had been in the home for four months and when asked what it was like replied with typical adolescent attitude that 'it sucks'; she then went on to describe how she always looks forward to Katie's visit each week and that she loves the dog.

The next girl we spent time with stayed inside; she also played games and hid treats for the dog. She had been learning how to teach Katie to do tricks and she clearly demonstrated affection for the dog. Anne had brought with her a tub of questions, with one side focused on the dog and the other on humans, for example, 'why should Katie exercise?' and 'why should you exercise?', 'how do you know if a dog is depressed?' 'how would someone know if you were depressed?'. These questions provided lots of openings for conversation about personal experience and lots of learning opportunities for the girl.

Anne filled in paperwork after each session, noting goals and progress towards these. The goals could be in relation to boundaries, trust, socialisation, self esteem, companionship.

Anne's background as a psychiatric nurse gave her a greater awareness of issues than some of the other volunteers; she was instinctively aware of how one girl was using transference to express her emotions regarding moving on from the Home, saying "Katie is so sad that I'm moving, look how sad she is". All the girls expressed positive emotions regarding Anne and Katie visiting; one said that her time with Katie made her "feel calm inside".

Denver Children's Home had an impressive therapeutic milieu and this appeared to go throughout the home, including the dorm areas. I observed staff responding calmly to challenging situations; when children were pushing boundaries and shouting, the staff responses were consistent, always using calm, modified tones. This then had a calming effect on the children.

I was aware that there was no formal supervision for Anne in this challenging work. She had advantages, in her background as a psychiatric nurse and also in the support from the staff at the Home; however there was no formal opportunity for her to reflect on her experiences. The girls she was speaking to (often alone) have generally experienced significant trauma, and this can emerge in discussion. It also appeared to me that Anne could contribute more to the treatment of the children. Her role is as a volunteer and it is valued, but from what I observed of the girls' interactions with Katie, and from the girls' own perspective, there are possibly greater therapeutic gains to be harnessed.

## **8.5 Colorado Mental Health Institute, Fort Logan**

I was able to visit Colorado Mental Health Institute at Fort Logan, one of Colorado's two state psychiatric hospitals. It has 153 inpatient beds, and 20 residential beds. There are facilities for child and adolescent, adult and geriatric care. There are a range of interventions available for patients, including psychotherapy, milieu therapy, behaviour modification and medication therapy.

Volunteers from American Humane visit Fort Logan and although no sessions were taking place at the time of my visit, I was able to talk to Melissa Munder, Volunteer Services Director. She described the positive impact of the AAA/T sessions on the patients and was very clear that this was regarded as a beneficial intervention.

Melissa was able to provide me with examples of their short evaluation forms, for both patients and observing clinicians. This assists them to gauge the success of the programme. I was also given a copy of their policy for 'AAA/T in the Clinical Setting', which covered definitions of AAA and AAT, accountability, guidelines and procedure, risk management and infection control issues. When comparing this to the guidelines in place in The State Hospital, there is unsurprisingly a greater emphasis on liability and insurance. I also noticed that it is mandatory that 'animals are to remain on the leash at all times'; we have found in The State Hospital that there are real gains in having a dog off the leash as this demands the patient modify his behaviour to ensure the dog stays close by, with the associated boost to self-esteem when the dog chooses to do so.

## 8.6 Conclusion

My visit to American Humane in Denver provided me with a wealth of information regarding AAA/T, from official Delta publications and guidelines to the knowledge I gained from the sessions I observed. I was impressed by the high standards that were maintained proudly by the volunteers, no doubt a result of Diana and her team's dedication, motivation and belief in AAA/T as an invaluable intervention.

I am indebted to Diana, Amy McCullough and Meagan Owens for their wonderful welcome, and for all the assistance they gave me to ensure that my visit with them was truly memorable.

I am also grateful to Mandy Bell, Trish Goetz, Anne Pryzbyla, Dr Jerry Yager, Melissa Munder and all the others who were so helpful, welcoming and informative.

## 8.7 Learning

- Dr Yager's information regarding brain development has been one of the most important points of the trip- it has increased my understanding not only of the impact of childhood trauma/ neglect and the reason this scars individuals to such an extent, but of the reason why AAT can be a successful intervention, due to the need for repetitive, therapeutic activities and responses.
- The discussions with Mandy, Trish and subsequently with Diana highlighted the critical role of the therapist, dog, dog handler, patient and environment. This has emphasised the complexity of carrying out research in this area, but has also made me consider the need to be aware of all five dimensions when planning interventions.
- The need for supervision for those delivering AAA/T was highlighted, as was the case in Utah.
- As in Utah, the rigorous standards and documentation used by American Humane have inspired me to reconsider our existing policies and procedures.
- The use of volunteers by facilities has prompted me to consider the additional benefit that could be gained by investigating this as a possibility for The State Hospital. There are security and confidentiality concerns, but these are not insurmountable.

## **9. 'HUMAN -ANIMAL INTERACTION: IMPACTING MULTIPLE SPECIES' CONFERENCE, OCTOBER 20-25, 2009. KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI**

Attending a conference in Missouri provided the opportunity to meet other professionals and volunteers with an interest in AAT. The event was entitled 'Human -animal Interaction: Impacting Multiple Species' and consisted of two sequential conferences, the 18<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Society for Anthrozoology, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Human Animal Interaction conference.

It was a unique opportunity to benefit from listening to both researchers and practitioners in the field of human animal interaction. The range of topics was diverse- from "Shared feelings: Neuropsychological Interfaces Between Animal and Human Emotions" to "How to Effectively Incorporate Therapy Animals to Help Children of Abuse Heal", and the background of the delegates was just as diverse.

### **9.1 Animal- Assisted Interventions and Physical Health**

The value of dogs in improving physical health was highlighted vividly by Dr Rebecca Johnson, from the University of Missouri, in her presentation "Walk a Hound, Lose a Pound, & Stay Fit for Seniors". She presented the results of her study into the association between dog walking and physical functioning. The study used a three- group, repeated measures design and tested the efficacy of a 12 week shelter dog walking programme for community dwelling adults over age 65. The three groups were shelter dog walking, human walking companion and a no- treatment, or control group. The shelter dog walking group immediately expressed affinity for the shelter dogs and their walking ability improved significantly. The individuals stated that their balance and walking confidence improved, and expressed their enjoyment of the activity. The conclusion of the study is that dog walking may be a beneficial way to improve or maintain functioning in older adults. It is important to note that the dogs came from a shelter and that the intervention is consequently mutually beneficial.

Several other studies and presentations explored the link between physical activity and dog walking, and this has implications for practice with psychiatric in-patients, particularly in The State Hospital where there is a recognised issue with obesity and associated health problems. There are a range of interventions in place in The State Hospital tackling the lack of physical activity, but evidence appears to suggest that dog walking is another way of increasing participation in exercise in a way that is enjoyable, beneficial and sustainable.

### **9.2 Animal-Assisted Interventions and Emotional Regulation**

Dr Birgit Stetina from the University of Vienna's presentation was titled "Dog-assisted group training with drug addicted criminal offenders: evaluation of AAT on emotional competencies and emotional status in comparison to other interventions". The concept of emotional competencies can be defined as skills regarding recognition, understanding, regulation and the expression of emotions.



Criminal offenders are known to have problems in this area and so the study focused on the effects AAT can have on this population. 61 male offenders participated in the study, which used a quasi-experimental pre-post design. Although participants in the work- reintegration group showed improvement, participants in the dog-assisted training showed significantly higher improvements than the others in relation to regulation of emotion, self control and showed a significant decrease in depression and aggression. There were problems with the study in relation to drop-outs due to transfer and release of prisoners, however overall it could be concluded that AAT is suitable as an integral component of treatment and may even be more valuable than other programmes regarding regulation of emotions.

### **9.3 AAT- Benefits and Guidelines**

There were presentations about the benefits of AAT and about the vital importance of clear guidelines to protect both animal and patient.

Aubrey Fine, the author of the invaluable 'Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice' explained that AAT can be used as an adjunct to therapy, complementing the way the professional works.

He explained that there are several ways in which this can be done. The animal can be a 'social lubricant', as the presence of an animal eases stress. Animals can also be incorporated into teaching, e.g. obedience training. The individual then can learn about nurturing, discipline and other skills through the animal training. Animals can be part of the milieu; the therapist then being perceived as more friendly and the environment as more comfortable. This then creates a therapeutic milieu. Finally the animal can be a catalyst for emotion. For example, through the use of therapeutic touch- with the animal as the surrogate. There is evidence that petting can soothe and relax. There are situations where this has led to talking about when the shelter animal was abused, in turn leading to the disclosure of painful events by the individual. It is also worth noting that the successful shelter dog can provide inspiration through its survival through difficulties.

A presentation by Amy McCullough of American Humane outlined 'Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions in Health Care Facilities' and stressed the importance of adhering to rigorous standards in the provision of animal-assisted interventions. Her presentation reflected the unflinching high standards of American Humane and was beneficial for the wide audience: care must be taken to ensure that best practice is employed, that animals are suitable and properly trained and that volunteers undergo re-evaluation every two years. There must also be explicit policies with regard to risk management; all stakeholders must be aware of and adhere to these. An underpinning principle of these standards is that AAT interactions are beneficial to both dog and individual, and keeping this in mind guards against some of the difficulties that can be encountered.

It was encouraging to hear results of studies which supported existing literature and gave scientific backing to ideas that are accepted as fact among those who are involved in AAT: pet attachment can have a significant mediating effect on loneliness, dogs can be a social bridge between strangers, animals offer love and unconditional acceptance which can make be significant to those with chronic illness, the presence of animals can be seen to improve quality of life and finally that the presence of animals can have the secondary effect of reducing the stress of staff who work in the institutions / homes / centres where AAT is implemented.

#### **9.4 Interactions with the Natural World**

Finally several presentations at the conference touched on the theme of interactions with the natural world and of the benefits of this. This was outlined most clearly by Ms Rebecca O'Connor in her presentation 'Working with the Wild: Falconry and Combating Nature Deficit Disorder/ Improving Human Health'. The importance of engagement with nature was explained: learning how to recognise danger, acquiring or re-acquiring a sense of wonder, the need for respectful engagement and preservation of natural resources. Research appears to suggest that people with access to natural settings are healthier overall and that this interaction gives a perspective on life that encourages healthy living.

Interestingly this presentation resonated- the patients are vocal about the benefits of working outside with the animals, and of the fresh air and exercise that go hand-in-hand with the activity. Prior to involvement with AAT, I would have been sceptical at the transformative effect of interaction with nature. It may be a temporary change, but when seen in individuals damaged by decades of illness and anti-psychotic medication, or with a grim history of violence and aggression it cannot fail to impress. Observing a patient hold a warm, recently hatched egg, or a tiny chick, or a baby rabbit and see the instant effect on their face has to be seen to be believed. I agree it sounds clichéd and this is an aspect of AAT that cannot be quantified, but for that brief moment the interaction with something living, with nature, effects a change.

## **10. QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA**

*"Animals have an amazing impact on humans. The connection between people and animals is powerful when used in the helping professions. Clients often gain motivation, hope or joy from animals in the face of incredible life obstacles"*

*Teri Pichot & Marc Coulter*

Travelling further around the globe, I arrived in Brisbane, Australia. I had made contact with Claire Eddie, a psychologist engaged in research in the area of AAT in correctional institutions. She had organised for me to view two programmes in different locations.

## 10.1 Numinbah Correctional Centre

Claire and Alexandra



I drove 100km south from Brisbane, towards the Gold Coast, to Numinbah Correctional Centre. I had been expecting to see an intimidating, severe institution, but the low-lying buildings were located in just the most beautiful valley, surrounded by jacaranda trees in bloom. The prison is an open prison, with two main categories of offenders- those who have spent a long time in the system, are progressing well and near the end of their sentence, and a group they call 'backpackers'- petty crime, fine defaulters, etc who are there for a short period. There are 25 women in the prison, and it has the capacity for 104 men.

## 10.2 Pups in Prison

The programme in the centre is called 'Pups in Prison' and was started in 2006. A partnership has been implemented with the Animal Welfare League (AWL), and the prison cares for dogs and puppies from the shelter. We went first to the women's section, where we met one dog, with the woman who was identified as its primary carer. The dog was a little Jack Russell, clearly at home in the environment and relishing the attention it was receiving from everyone. The main carer attends to all of the dog's needs- food, water, cleaning up after it and socialisation; this all means that the dog is far more adoptable. The carer provides a written report on the dog: what food it enjoys, its behaviour, any problems, any medication needed. Although one prisoner has the responsibility of looking after the dog, it is apparent that most of the women take an interest in it; it appears very much 'part of the furniture' and undoubtedly has a beneficial impact on the milieu.

In the summer months, the prison can take a dog that has had puppies from the AWL; they look after the puppies for nine weeks, at which point they return to the shelter for re-homing. The dogs benefit, as the mum and puppies can be fostered together without being split up into smaller groups, and the puppies also receive equal socialising, increasing their 'adoptability'.

Due to the location of the prison and the fact that the dog area (although fenced against snakes) is open to the elements, they aren't able to take puppies in the winter. However, they can take larger dogs and often take dogs that are 'problem dogs', as part of the 'Dogs in Crisis' programme (where dogs can be given temporary accommodation due to domestic violence/ relationship break down), or if the dogs have kennel cough, and they can stay in the prison until recovered.

The female prisoners I met were keen to express how much benefit they received from working with dogs. They said that it teaches patience, as the dogs can be difficult and unused to people. They described the unconditional love they receive from the dog and how this helps them as they are separated from their children/ family.

The prisoners described how it gave them a focus and that having the constant responsibility helps them cope with prison. They described how having the responsibility of a dog means they have to focus on something other than themselves and just how miserable they feel about their detention. It also helps them feel that they are doing something useful, and builds links with the community.

It was also evident that there are wider benefits- they are able to access opportunities in the shelter to work, when they are at the appropriate stage in their sentence. Low risk prisoners can complete community service two days per week at the AWL. One woman I met had done so well at the AWL that she now assists in medical procedures in the receiving area when the dogs arrive in the shelter. She is currently training as a vet nurse and has been offered a job in that shelter on discharge. This is glowing evidence of the success of the programme- it not only helps the prisoners during their sentence but gives them vocational options for the future.

The prisoners spoke about how it can be hard when the dogs have to leave, but that knowing that the animals are well trained, and will be adopted via a rigorous adoption programme, makes it much easier. As soon as a dog leaves it is replaced by another and this also helps ease the sadness of losing an animal they have become attached to.

This programme has just been introduced in the men's unit, where the main carer of the dog is a long term prisoner. Claire explained that this has been useful for a few reasons: the prisoner can commit to what he is doing as he is not going to leave imminently and also that his status in the prison is useful for the dog's protection and acceptance. Interestingly, Claire commented that short-term prisoners were more likely to speak to a long-term prisoner if he has a dog, when there would usually be a distance between the two groups. This reflects research into AAT that shows the presence of a dog can increase social interaction and assist when communication can be stressful.

The prison also has a dairy, which unfortunately has been identified for closure. Offenders care for the calves, feeding them by bottle until they are old enough to feed alone. I was introduced to the woman who is currently looking after the cows, and her motivation and enthusiasm shone through. Her scars were testimony to a troubled past, but she spoke about how working there gave her a focus, a place where she could just come to have 'time out'. She told me that all the cows had names, and described how they would come and nuzzle up to her, how they knew when it was feeding time and would go the same pen each time, and how when they were older (and in a different field) they'd be crying when they heard the ritual noises of feeding time. The woman displayed real affection for the animals; after one cow had been put down, the vet had just left it to be disposed of, and so she wrapped it in blankets before it was buried. She spoke at length about how she had shed tears over the cows. She had considerable knowledge about the animals, gained from own experience and others in the prison.

As we have seen in The State Hospital, animals can extract compassion and empathy from surprising individuals, who appear to have little of either for humans! The benefit of this is that you are then provided with some common ground, a 'way in', and as was described so clearly to me at Green Chimneys, it encourages the individual to begin to reach out and engage, and trust.

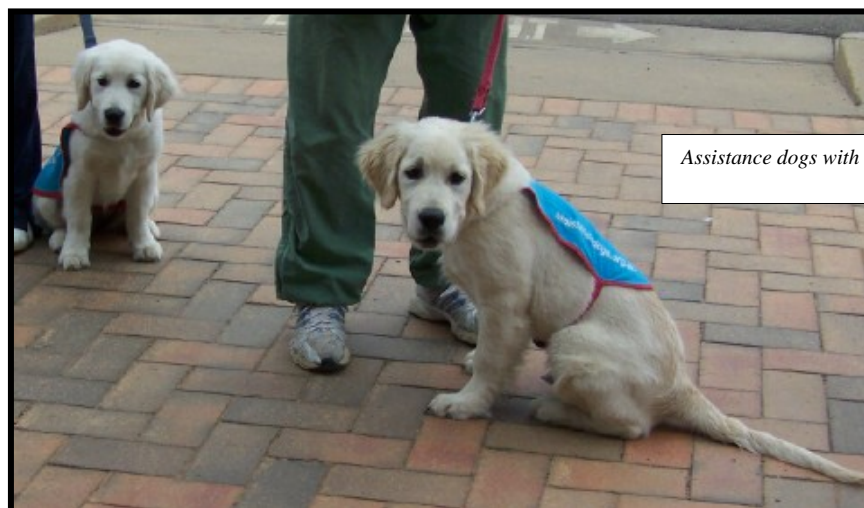
The success of the programme is evident, from the views of both staff at the correctional facility and from the prisoners themselves. They are gaining skills such as patience and teamwork, along with the practical skills of caring for dogs. The prisoners have the benefit of knowing they are engaged in something worthwhile; helping the dogs by providing care when it is needed, and by eventually providing families with delightful, sociable pets. They also have access to meaningful activity in the shelter, which can lead to permanent employment.

### 10.3 Darling Downs Correctional Facility

Darling Downs has a capacity of 140 male offenders, and is located 15km south of Toowoomba in southern Queensland. Claire accompanied me to the centre, and as this facility is not an open prison it had a very different feel to Numinbah.

The minister for Police & Corrective Services, Judy Spence, had visited correctional centres in the US where she observed successful dog programmes and on her return asked Queensland Corrective Services to investigate introducing a similar programme. Consequently, the Pups in Prison programme was established, with an innovative partnership between Assistance Dogs of Australia (ADA) and Queensland Corrective Services.

The programme sees eight week old puppies come to the facility, where the prisoners take over the care of the dogs, socialising them and carrying out basic training. When the programme is finished, the dogs return to ADA's national training centre and after six months intensive training are matched with people with physical disabilities. Judy Spence said that "caring for the dogs will provide prisoners with new levels of responsibility, self- esteem and communication skills, while also teaching compassion, patience and cooperation; attributes that will help the prisoners when they rejoin the community".



*Assistance dogs with their ADA jackets!*

The programme is now in its third year and eight dogs have gone through the programme in total, four each year. There are eight men involved this year, and four puppies. Shortly after we arrived we met the men together with the puppies, Labradors and Golden Retrievers. They were as adorable as puppies can be and had evidently stolen the hearts of all the men.

Claire explained that Jenny from ADA comes in to the prison to help with the training. She visits at the beginning, and then volunteers help out with the ongoing training, with subsequent visits from Jenny to check that all is going well.

The prisoners explained to me how they use positive reinforcement and ignore any negative/ unwanted behaviour, with the desired effect. They had only been there for a week and already could follow basic commands.

As with the female prisoners at Numinbah, the men were keen to stress the benefits of the programme; their affection for the dogs was clear and they compared it in some respects to bringing up children, with the need to develop patience and tolerance while maintaining discipline.

The dogs stay in the rooms with the prisoners and again the attention to the dog's comfort was evident- ensuring they had a fan blowing at their cage to keep them cool if needed. If vet cover is required, the prisoner would notify an officer and a vet would come in to the centre. There have been no issues with prisoners not involved in the programme; although they have communal living areas the other men appear relaxed around the dogs and interested in their welfare.

A large grassed area gives them dedicated space for training and this is kitted out with cupboards / washing machine / wheelchairs etc to enable them to teach the dogs the necessary skills to assist someone who is physically disabled. The dogs are also taken out to K-Mart, so that they can become accustomed to crowds and a more diverse group of people than they would encounter in the prison environment. The handlers keep detailed records of the training they have carried out, goals achieved by the dogs, food eaten, toileting and if any medication is required. This record goes with the dog when it leaves.

When the dogs have completed their training they are assessed by ADA and following this there is a graduation ceremony. This is a significant event for the prisoners, marking the end of a year of hard work and close working with their four-footed friend. The men described how it was hard to say goodbye to the dogs as they left for their intensive training in Sydney, but they felt they had been doing something worthwhile and of real value.

Unlike the programme in Indiana, there is no 'time cut' with this programme. The men are involved in 'Pups in Prison' because they love dogs and see it as a great opportunity. They spoke about the programme with pride and were keen to tell me they recommended it be introduced in Scotland.



There is a procedure in place for the Pups in Prison programme and this can be accessed from:

[http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/resources/procedures/Offender\\_Management/Documents/ofmpropupinpris.shtml](http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/resources/procedures/Offender_Management/Documents/ofmpropupinpris.shtml) [accessed 16/04/10].

There is also an agreement document/Code of Practice between the provider organisation and the relevant Queensland Corrective Services Centre. This can be accessed from:

[http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/Resources/Procedures/Offender\\_Management/documents/ofmappupagreementtmp.doc](http://www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au/Resources/Procedures/Offender_Management/documents/ofmappupagreementtmp.doc) [accessed 16/04/10]. This second document has been particularly thought-provoking for me when considering the extension of the work in The State Hospital to include a liaison with an animal shelter.

Claire is involved in a research study about the impact of the Pups in Prison programme on staff and prisoners. She is looking at whether there is an impact on anxiety / depression / self esteem and also if there is a reduction in re-offending. Claire noted that many of the prisoners said that they had not needed to think about anyone else for a long time and that they had not considered what life may be like for a person with a disability. Consequently it can be seen that involvement in the programme appears to help with the development of empathy. One prisoner said *“I love being part of it. Knowing what it is for. Helping someone to have a better life”*.

There also appears to be an impact on communication, with improvements in confidence. An example of this is a prisoner who was shy and anxious at the beginning of the programme, but some months later was eager to talk about his puppy’s achievements.

From the perspective of staff, it also appears that involvement in the programme is beneficial, as one describes *“from an offender perspective, it has taught many prisoners to display genuine affection. It has improved their social skills because it provides common ground for communication. It has also allowed offenders to do things for other people”*.

The two quotes in italics are taken from Claire’s update on her project in the Newsletter of the Centre for Companion Animal Health, issue 5.

However, the project is being affected by the high rate at which prisoners are being transferred out/on. This research will provide valuable information regarding the use of companion animals in a correctional centre setting.

#### **10.4 University of Queensland: Prof. Jacquie Rand**

Prof. Jacquie Rand is the Director of the Centre for Companion Animal Health (CCAH), at the University of Queensland. The vision of the Centre is *“to be an international leader in improving the health and welfare of companion animals, and enriching the lives of pets, their owners and our communities”*.

The work at CCAH has three strands: partnering with individuals and industry in studies that focus on improving animal health, the human-animal bond and looking at solutions to prevent unwanted and problem pets. Prof. Rand described some of the studies that are currently underway in conjunction with CCAH. Maggie O'Hare, a Fulbright scholar from the US, is examining the benefits of companion animals for sufferers of autistic spectrum disorder. It is believed that AAT may provide an alternative to current treatment approaches. In her study, she uses guinea pigs in the classroom of children who are diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder and preliminary results indicate improved work and concentration with good reports from parents, teachers and children.



Jacquie Rand

Claire Eddie's postgraduate study in Darling Downs is also being carried under the supervision of Prof. Rand.

Another study is looking at the benefits of AAT for older people with Alzheimer's disease. Preliminary results of this study are encouraging; the programme has been well received by the participants and staff.

It can be seen that the research at CCAH is touching a wide range of groups- children, older people and offenders. Each group has its own particular needs and issues and it appears that the researchers are successfully collating evidence that AAT is effective as an intervention in different ways in these diverse groups.

Prof. Rand also highlighted to me the link between the three strands of work at the University of Queensland- the inclusion of shelter dogs in prison programmes, thereby increasing their 'adoptability' and saving them from euthanasia while helping the offenders through AAT, the research into animal health improving the lives of the animals and their owners, in turn benefiting the human-animal bond and so on. Jacquie also stressed the importance of further research in all three domains and the centre's constant need for donations to allow this work to continue. She is inspirational in her dedication to improving the lives of companion animals and in promoting the human-animal bond through the acquisition of data that provides evidence of its effectiveness.

## 10.5 Conclusion

Observing the two prison programmes affirmed for me the value in vocational programmes in animal care. The prisoners are gaining relevant skills, which can open doors to some form of employment or occupation for them and at the same time receiving all the attendant benefits of animal-assisted interventions. No-one had anything negative to say about the programmes, only praise, and from my observations prisoners were motivated, devoted in their care of their animal and keen to talk about the difference participation had made to them.

## 10.6 Learning

- This has shown me clearly that integrating shelter animals into an animal programme has great value- and inspired me to aim to incorporate shelter animals into the programme in The State Hospital.
- It has also highlighted the need to approach this with appropriate attention to detail- for example, drawing up an agreement with the shelter.
- The use of ADA volunteers has encouraged me to consider integrating volunteers in our programme- specifically in relation to dog training.
- Prof Rand's work at CCAH is contributing to the growing body of evidence- and is particularly interesting as it highlights the link between animal health, the human animal bond and helping unwanted pets.

## 11. CONCLUSION

From a personal perspective this truly was a remarkable experience. Travelling around the world, meeting numerous people from many walks of life and having the opportunity to learn more about one specific subject is, as many Winston Churchill Fellows have said, a once in a lifetime experience.

The trip helped clarify in my mind that there are three strands to the work we do: vocational activity, AAA and AAT. We are currently providing all three and this trip has been the prompt for us to consider the way in which this is delivered.

In terms of vocational activity, the introduction of a shelter dog programme is an exciting challenge. It meets many objectives, for example: providing structured activity, teaching skills, opening doors for future activity /employment, and providing all the benefits of interacting with animals such as unconditional acceptance. As noted, there are potential issues, but these do not preclude the implementation of an adapted programme.

There remain those in the hospital who benefit from a more focused AAT approach and the trip has provided information as to how this should be developed and extended. Finally there are also those who benefit from AAA and the trip has provided me with a wealth of information as to how this can be provided in line with current standards.

Seeing first hand the programmes in place in prisons in the US and in Australia, and Green Care and Green Work in Norway has confirmed for me the potential for this activity to provide patients with options for activity /supported employment /employment when they move on from conditions of high security. Although very different, those programmes use animals to encourage participation in routine, structured activity and the acquisition of skills.

The programme in Norway has given me much to think about in terms of linking up the activity that is provided in The State Hospital and other hospitals. It would also appear that there needs to be a comprehensive network of this type of activity for the patients on discharge, and that there should be communication between organisations / individuals and the staff in The State Hospital to ensure that we are providing the patients with the correct skills. These skills can then open up opportunities for the patients, and the recovery of the patients is the ultimate goal for all involved in animal assisted therapy.

### Impacts of Nature-Based Programs

#### Clinical Benefits:

- Caring- to be encouraged to demonstrate and feel care for other living beings.
- Trust- to experience trust towards farm/ garden staff and with the animals.
- Emotional regulation- to develop the ability to function appropriately despite emotional challenges with farm/garden staff, peers and with plants and animals.
- Relationship building- to become part of the greater “we”, that cares for the gardens and animals, to feel a healthy sense of belonging to a group that shares common goals and interests. Learning how to build healthy peer relationships and to relate with adults.
- Self esteem- as competence is experienced and the child feels accepted, self esteem can become strengthened.
- Anxiety reduction- fears can be mastered and behaviour patterns can be learned to cope with anxiety.
- Empathy development- the ability to gauge and imagine another’s emotional state, both human and animal.
- Task mastery- to be able to actively participate in caring for animals and plants.
- Conceptual mastery- to become knowledgeable and competent around plants and animals.
- Vocational responsibility- to experience what a work ethic is and to feel real responsibility.
- Body localisation- child develops the ability to locate and identify parts of the horse’s/ animal’s body. This activity aids in developing an awareness and understanding of one’s own body.
- Health and Hygiene- child develops an understanding of the principles of health and hygiene. In care for horses, animals and plants, students are led to understand and utilise good habits.
- Balance and rhythm- child develops the ability to maintain fine and gross motor balance and to move rhythmically while working around animals or riding horses. Child is continuously involved in interpreting and reacting to the animal’s movements.

- Directionality and laterality- child develops the ability to know and respond to right, left, up, down, forward, backward and directional orientation. Activities focusing on directing an animal or working in the garden in a specific direction are used to aid the child in developing sensitivity to directionality of his body and space.
- Time orientation-child develops an awareness of determining feeding time, exercise time, and resting time for the animals, students develop an awareness of the appropriate activities based on the weather and seasonal change.
- Anticipatory response- child develops the ability to anticipate the probable outcome of his behaviour with the animals and plants. If he yells or acts out, the animal will become frightened and react negatively. This aids the child in predicting the consequences of his own behaviour and that of others in a given situation.
- Comprehension- child develops the ability to use judgement and reasoning in riding and working with animals and plants. This enhances his ability to use judgement and reasoning when interacting with other forces in his environment.
- Perceptual and cognitive- child develops and is stimulated through training in spatial orientation, body image, hand-eye co-ordination, motor planning and timing, improve attention span, memory and concentration.
- Physical- child develops to effectively influence muscular strength and tone.

M. Kaufmann, 2007 *“Conceptual Foundations, Implementation and Impact of Green Chimneys Nature-Based Programs”* Green Chimneys Board Presentation, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2007.