



PO Box 675
Lee's Summit, MO 64063
(816) 810-1924

Helping Families Help Their Children
Connect to the World

Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education (CASSIE) Program

Pilot Project Proposal

Mission:

To provide students with Autism Spectrum behaviors the support and social skills training needed to be more successful in the school and community environments.

Rationale:

Service Dogs for Classroom/Facility - These specially trained ADA compliant service animals are paired with autism specialists and/or special education teachers who specialize in working with children who have emotional or developmental disabilities. The service dogs are integrated into the educational curriculum as motivators and serve as an innovative teaching tool for the children. Recent research and experience has demonstrated that the use of service dogs can be of assistance to counselors in the counseling of withdrawn and non-communicative children. The use of animal-assisted activity (AAA) is yet another useful tool which could be offered in inclusive special education programs and in school counseling programs.

Service dogs in schools are beneficial to students because they help teach responsibility, develop social skills and foster empathy. They create an atmosphere of warmth, intimacy and safety - in other words, an ideal learning environment. (WebVet) When a friendly, well-trained ADA compliant service dog is introduced into an elementary school classroom, teaching conditions improve considerably. Students as a whole become less hyperactive, less aggressive, and more attentive to their instructor. The service dog, by their very presence, becomes an effective classroom management tool. (Humane Society Youth 2004)

The presence of a service animal has been found to lower anxiety and motivate participation in the classroom (Delta, 2000). The animal's warm and calming presence can be comforting. AAA is not a style of treatment like Cognitive-Behavioral or Rational-Emotive therapy, however a service team can easily incorporate the service dog into current educational environments with little to no disruption to the classroom. Autism Social Skills training sessions can be integrated into individual or small group sessions with a wide range of age groups and persons with varying abilities or functionality on the autism spectrum.

Children with spectrum behaviors have a multitude of issues that they must cope with on a daily basis. Many are overwhelmed with sensory input, do not know how to interact appropriately with peers or authority figures, are easily frustrated and overwhelmed due to their lack of communication skills. Children on the spectrum have yet to develop the social skills necessary to interact appropriately within their school or community environment.

Empathy, moral conscience, respect and appropriate peer interactions are difficult at best to teach in a structured environment. Through the Paws 4 Autism Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education Program service teams will work with the children on a one to one basis and/or in small group settings to focus on the skills needed to improve their ability to function appropriately in the school and community environments.

During our initial visits, the autism specialist will encourage the children to pet, brush, hug or speak to the dog. These activities enable the child to experience unconditional love (maybe for the first time), build feelings of trust, empathy and respect and participate with the group. These interactions also allow the children to achieve outward focus and forget about their problems for the moment. The children learn to walk the dog on a leash, bring the dog water and reward the dog for obeying basic obedience commands, all with the help of the Autism Specialist. The latter activity allows the child to experience positive control and heightens their self-esteem when the dog listens and responds. These represent part of the many ways our dogs and specialist teams interact with the children. Once this basis of trust is developed, the team can begin to focus on specific social skills.

Animal Assisted Activities

Animal-assisted activities can be beneficial to the teaching process of children on the spectrum (Delta, 2000). The presence of the animal can facilitate a trust-building bond between the specialist and child. The animal relieves some tension and anxiety of learning social skills and interacting with the animal is entertaining and fun. Talking to the animal while the autism specialist listens is easier than talking to the specialist or working independently for the more difficult social interaction lessons. Also, animals often help the child focus on an issue as they interact with the animal. The animal may help the child get in touch with feelings. Sharing these feelings with or about the animal can initiate the emotional sharing process with the autism specialist. For the child, the animal is seen as a friend and ally, thus presenting a atmosphere safe for sharing. The animal offers nurturance through a presentation of unconditional acceptance and interaction. The experience of a child interacting with an animal can provide knowledge about boundaries and limit setting by observing and imitating the autism specialist and-animal interactions.

Common treatment goals in AAA are to:

- improve socialization and communication;
- reduce isolation, boredom and loneliness;
- brighten affect and mood, lessen depression, and/ or provide pleasure and affection;
- improve memory and recall;
- be presented with opportunities to succeed and feel important, and improve feelings of self worth;
- improve reality;
- improve cooperation and problem-solving ability;
- improve concentration and attention, and increase engagement;
- decrease manipulative behaviors;
- improve expression of feelings;
- reduce general anxiety;
- reduce abusive behavior;
- Improve an ability to trust; and
- learn appropriate touch (American Humane, 2005).

Common treatment interventions in AAA that assist in meeting the goals listed above may include

- practice teaching the animal something new;
- engage in play with the animal and other types of appropriate interactions;
- learn about and practice care, grooming and feeding of the animal;
- learn other information about the animal (breed, history, etc.)
- reminisce about the animal or past animals;
- remember and repeat information about the animal to others;
- take the animal for a supervised walk;
- receive and give appropriate affection and acceptance with the animal;
- discuss how animals may feel in certain situations;
- learn gentle ways to handle animals;
- follow a sequence of instructions with the animal;
- observe and discuss the animal's response to human behavior;
- interpret animal behavior as it happens; and
- generalize animal behavior to human circumstances.

Animals in the Classroom

There can be many benefits to integrating AAA into the classroom in school settings. Goals for students in classrooms using AAA include:

- Educating students about service animals vs. pets
- gaining knowledge about animals;
- learning humane animal care;
- motor and physical skill development through human-animal interactions;
- animal training;
- practicing discipline;
- incorporating an attitude of kindness and compassion;
- learning about nurturance;
- practicing loyalty and responsibility;
- experiencing human-animal bonding;
- learning responsible pet ownership

Animal-assisted activities may be used to curb violence in the schools. Animals in the classroom have empirically been proven to enhance humane attitudes toward animals and these more humane attitudes persisted in a one year follow up (Delta, 1999). This same study showed a generalization from humane attitudes toward animals to human-directed empathy. Thus, emotional connections made with animals can transfer to more empathic attitudes towards other persons.

Structure and Data Tracking:

Through coordination with the Special Education Coordinators, Autism Specialists and the IEP team, individualized Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) based curriculum will be created for each child that has been recommended for the Paws 4 Autism's Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education Program by District Staff. The curricula and results will be tracked using the ReThink Autism Web-based Autism Treatment Platform (www.rethinkautism.com). Full reporting and data will be available to evaluate the progress of each student and the program as a whole. Due to the nature of the reporting and tracking program, reports can be accessed at any time (ie: when needed for an IEP meeting) or during the

periodic program review. The ReThink Autism website is fully secure and safeguards are in place to preserve confidentiality of the student.

Benefits to School Districts:

School Districts are consistently faced with budget cuts forcing the reduction of services and staff available to their students. Given the current state of the economy, this is sure to continue. Through the Paws 4 Autism's Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education Program, Districts will be able to provide a highly needed service for a fraction of the cost. Benefits to the Districts include:

- The ability to deliver the needed individual and small group social skills therapies to students with Spectrum behaviors;
- The opportunity to participate in leading edge educational opportunities;
- The ability to provide for a documented need.

The number of teams available for placement will be determined by funding that is available through the generous donors of Paws 4 Autism.

District Requirements:

School Districts interested in having a Paws 4 Autism Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education Program in their schools will need to meet certain requirements to be considered. These are:

- Identification of Students in need
- Securing Parental Permission for Program Participation
- Coordination with Paws 4 Autism Specialists for initial curriculum creation and evaluation
- Space within the schools to provide social skills classes. This can easily be coordinated with the sharing of space with school counselors who are assigned to multiple schools.
- Participating Districts will be requested to maintain current staff levels in their counseling and special education/autism departments as this program is designed to be in addition to their current services and not a replacement for any program or service already in place.

Scope of Pilot Project:

The Pilot Project will be 100% funded for a minimum of one full school year.

The Pilot Project of the Paws 4 Autism Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education Program is intended to be implemented in two phases. During the initial phase, Paws 4 Autism intends to implement one specialist/dog team in no more than two elementary schools. As this is a revolutionary program, there are sure to be unforeseen issues that need to be addressed before implementing a District-wide program. It is our desire to begin phase one as soon as funding is secured.

Phase Two will broaden the scope of the program to include a total of three service teams to be shared between schools.

As the program is developed and improvements made, it will be rolled out to any school district that is interested in implementing such a program as funding becomes available.

The Pilot Program is intended to be implemented and fully funded for a minimum of one full school year (phase two). Once the Paws 4 Autism Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education pilot program has concluded, the participating School District will have priority placement for the following school year should they decide to continue participation in the program.

References:

Delta Society www.deltasociety.org

American Humane www.americanhumane.org

Animal Health Foundation www.animalhealthfoundation.net

Web Vet www.Webvet.com

Humane Society Youth www.humanesocietyyouth.org

Organizational Capacity to Carry Out Program

We estimate that the Paws 4 Autism CASSIE program to be approximately 80% of the responsibilities of our executive director for the first two years of the program.

Our capacity is limited by:

1. Number of trained ADA compliant autism service dogs available. In response to this Paws 4 Autism is putting together a breeding and training program. For the meantime, cooperative agreements are in place with multiple autism service dog training agencies.
2. Availability of Autism Specialists. In response to this we are communication and working cooperatively with multiple institutions of high education through internship programs and graduate placement programs.

Canine Assisted Social Skills In Education (CASSIE) Pilot Program Budget

<u>Administrative Costs</u>	Year 1	Year2
Salaries/Wages/Benefits (80%)	\$48,000	\$56,000
Equipment (printer/computer)	\$500	0
Materials/Supplies	\$250	\$250
Miscellaneous Other (printing, etc)	\$250	\$250
<i>Total Administrative Costs</i>	<i>\$49,000</i>	<i>\$56,500</i>

<u>CASSIE Program Costs</u>	Year 1	Year2
3 Dogs/Training Fees	\$75,000	\$75,000
Travel costs for Initial Training (3 team members)	\$6,000	\$6,000
Dog Supplies (Vests/tethers/leashes/crates)	\$1,500	\$1,500
Dog Food, Supplements, Grooming	\$4,500	\$4,500
Veterinary Care (annual exam, vaccines, Heartworm, flea/tick preventions, dental care)	\$3,000	\$3,000
Salaries/Wages/Benefits	\$180,000	\$180,000
ReThink Autism Lesson Plans & Progress Tracking with Individualized ABA Curriculum Support	\$6,000	\$6,000
Miscellaneous Costs	\$10,000	\$10,000
<i>Total Program Costs</i>	<i>\$286,000</i>	<i>\$276,000</i>

<u>Funds From Other Sources</u>	Year 1	Year2
Kansas City Educational Foundation	\$25,000	\$25,000
Truman Heartland Community Foundation	\$10,000	\$10,000
<i>Total Funds From Other Sources</i>	<i>\$35,000</i>	<i>\$35,000</i>

<u>Total Funds Requested</u>	Year 1	Year2
	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>\$307,500</i>