

# Animal Assisted Therapy and Clients with FASD

**Presenter:** Kristine Aanderson

**Date:** November 24, 2009



The FASD Learning Series is part of the Alberta government's commitment to programs and services for people affected by FASD and those who support them.

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## What Is Animal Assisted Therapy?



- A goal directed intervention
- The animal is an integral part of structured treatment

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## What Is Animal Assisted Therapy?

- What Is Animal Assisted Therapy?
  - With FASD Clients?
  - What Is Not AAT?
  - Who Can Do AAT?

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### What Is Animal Assisted Therapy?

- It is delivered by a professional service provider (such as a recreation therapist)
- Designed to promote improvements in physical, emotional, social or cognitive functioning
- It is documented and evaluated

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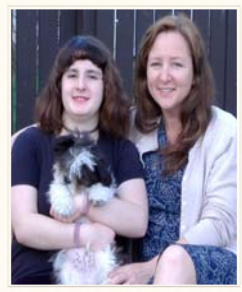
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### With FASD Clients?

- It has been suggested that one strength of clients with FASD is that they often work well with animals
- Working with animals gives an opportunity for professionals to apply principles of how to work with clients with FASD in a positive environment



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### What Is Not AAT?



- Pet visitation
- Animal assisted activities (no goals)
- Pet ownership

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### Who Can Do AAT?

- Psychologists
- Psychiatrists
- Child and youth care workers
- Physical therapists
- Occupational therapists
- Recreational therapists
- Mental health nurses
- Speech language pathologists
- School counsellors

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### Who Can Do AAT?

- Teachers
- Teaching aides
- Crisis counsellors
- Front line workers
- Respite care workers
- Any professional who does goal-oriented work with clients

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### What Kinds of Animals Can Be Used in AAT?

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## Cats



- They can teach clients about boundaries
- Can be used to comfort clients
- Work on fine motor skills through petting and brushing
- Are not as intimidating to some clients as dogs

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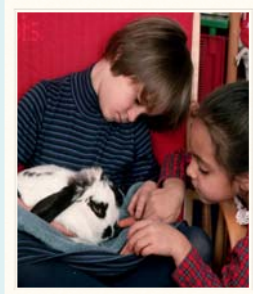
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## Rabbits

- Rabbits are great to calm clients
- A hospital in Israel actually named their therapy rabbits Clonex and Fergen after the most common tranquilizers used on children and adults



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## Birds



- An Edmonton psychiatrist uses his Goffan's Cockatoo to help children and teens dealing with addictions and those with FASD
- Birds have been shown to “connect” with people who have disordered thinking patterns

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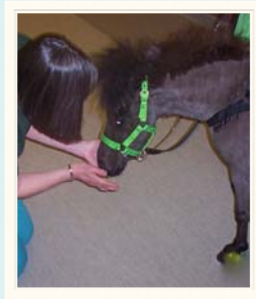
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### Horses

- Motivators to participate
- Excellent mirrors for client behaviour
- Can be used for both physical and psychological/emotional therapy



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### Fish



- Watching a fish tank can lower stress, anxiety and blood pressure
- Can provide a sense of ownership for clients when caring for the fish
- Additional safety issues

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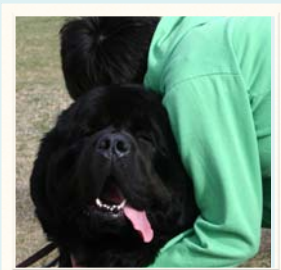
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### Dogs

- Most popular choice
- Unconditional love, no shame, smart, friendly, cuddly, versatile, etc.
- Can be used passively, such as petting the dog, or actively such as walking the dog or having it do tricks



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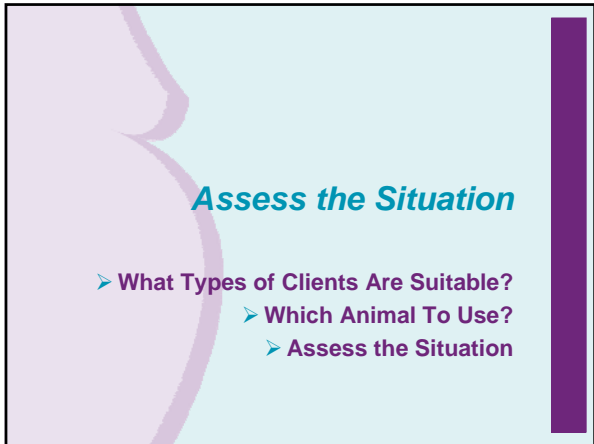
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**Assess the Situation**

- What Types of Clients Are Suitable?
  - Which Animal To Use?
  - Assess the Situation

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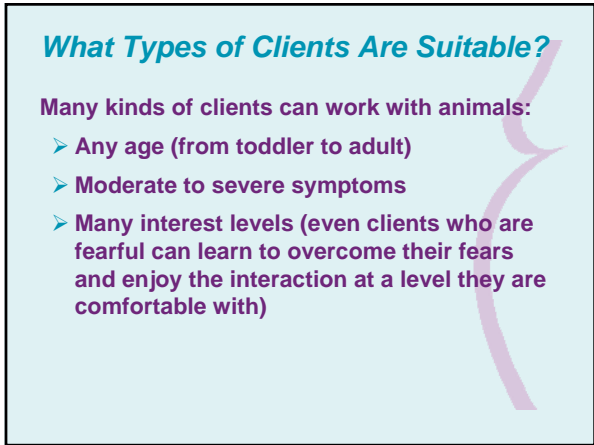
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**What Types of Clients Are Suitable?**

Many kinds of clients can work with animals:

- Any age (from toddler to adult)
- Moderate to severe symptoms
- Many interest levels (even clients who are fearful can learn to overcome their fears and enjoy the interaction at a level they are comfortable with)

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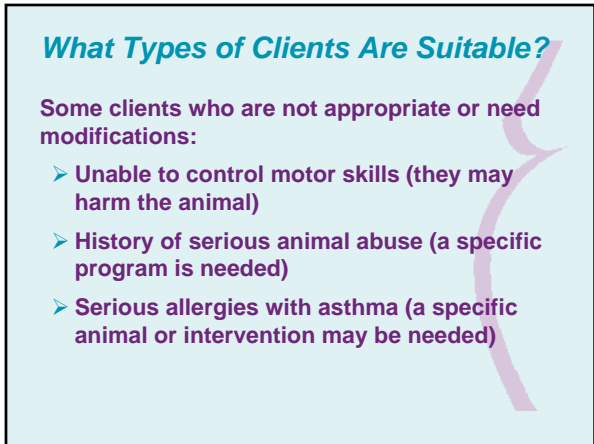
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**What Types of Clients Are Suitable?**

Some clients who are not appropriate or need modifications:

- Unable to control motor skills (they may harm the animal)
- History of serious animal abuse (a specific program is needed)
- Serious allergies with asthma (a specific animal or intervention may be needed)

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### ***Which Animal To Use?***

Different types of animals can be used for the same intervention

- Calming anxiety through brushing a dog, cat, rabbit or horse
- Working on anger management through training a dog, cat, rabbit, horse, bird or fish

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### ***Which Animal To Use?***



A goldfish trained to play soccer

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### ***Assess the Situation***

Are there logistical issues involved?

- What kinds of animals are available?
- What is your program/what are you willing to be responsible for?

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**Assess the Situation**

Are there safety issues involved?

- Can your clients be responsible for their behaviour?
  - A bird can easily be killed by a client with poor anger management
  - A fish tank can become toxic if something foreign is put in the tank
  - In these cases a larger dog or horse may be appropriate

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**Assess the Situation**

Is there a specific animal needed for a specific intervention?

- It is hard to work on fitness by taking a goldfish for a walk
- Look at the animal's personality and the client's needs
  - Such as having a calm cat work with an anxious client
  - A shy dog work with a shy client (the client helps the dog with their problem)

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**Assess the Situation**

Is there a client preference?

- Some clients respond well to some animals and are not interested in interacting with others

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## Benefits of AAT

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- ### What Are the Benefits?
- Increase motivation
  - Reduce depression
  - Reduce anxiety
  - Increase communication
  - Provide insight into behaviours
  - Catalyst for conversations
  - Incentive for therapy work
  - Increase activity level
  - Provide comfort
  - Help motor skills

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- ### Benefits of AAT
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- The clients work often without thinking that it is work
  - “Let’s just play with the dog today”
  - But it’s really AAT!

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**Additional Benefits**

- Can reduce stigma for treatment
- Instead of being the 'kid who has to go to treatment'



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**Additional Benefits**



- They can be 'the kid who gets to play with the dog'
- Unconditional Love
  - Many clients do not receive this anywhere else

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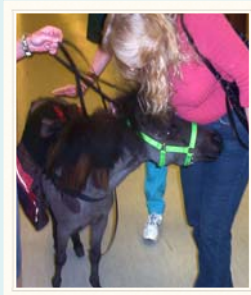
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**Additional Benefits**

- Teachable moments
  - Can examine the behaviour of the animal without being defensive or examine their own behaviour while interacting with the animal



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### **Big Five (5) Improvements**

- Decrease anxiety
- Increase participation
- Increase motivation in session
- Increase in social interactions
- Decrease depression



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### **Research**



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### **Research**

Through our demonstration project we were able to show that clients with FASD who participated in a residential treatment program that included Animal Assisted Therapy showed significant improvements.



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**Research**

- 60% decrease in physical aggression
- 80% increase in life skills acquisition
- 80% increased ability to cope with stress
- 80% increase in improved emotional health
- 60% increase in functioning outside of the therapeutic environment

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**Research**

Martin and Farnum (2002) investigated the effect of AAT on children with pervasive developmental disorders, including some clients with FASD.

The children (aged 3-13) were exposed to three conditions:

- Non social toy (ball)
- Stuffed toy dog
- A live dog

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**Research**

When the children were exposed to the live dog, they exhibited:

- A more playful mood
- Were more focused
- Were more aware of their social environments

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### Research

Lieber (2003) conducted a ten-week study where the AAT dogs visited the children in their elementary school.

Parents, school counsellors and special education teachers noted that:

- The children were less disruptive
- They formed better peer relationships
- They improved communication skills with adults
- Their ability to cope with anxiety improved
- Their overall behaviour improved

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*Schneider & Harley (2006) found that having an animal in your office can improve the evaluation of professionals by clients*

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### Research



- Professionals were rated significantly better
- Counsellors were perceived as more trustworthy/worthy of disclosure by clients when an animal was present

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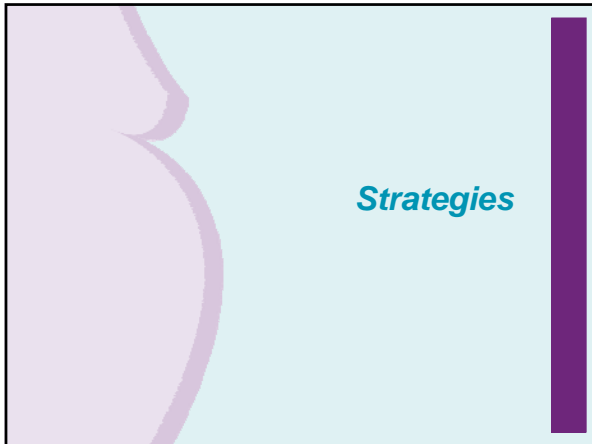
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**AAT and FASD**

**General strategies for clients with FASD**

- Use short-term consequences specifically related to the behaviour
- Establish achievable goals
- Provide skills training and use a lot of role playing
- Address issues of loss and grief
- Set the person up to succeed
- Reduce isolation

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**AAT Activities**

**FASD Strategy:** Use short-term consequences specifically related to the behaviour

- Have clear rules when the animals is present (such as no yelling) with immediate consequences (point out that it scares the dog and have the dog go away briefly)

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Use short-term consequences specifically related to the behaviour

**AAT Goal:**  
Reduce verbal outbursts



**AAT Strategy:**  
Show that it scares the therapy animal and have the dog go in its kennel

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Reduce isolation

- Have the client be the caretaker of the therapy animal for the day, as animals can be great icebreakers and social focal points, diverting negative/stressful attention from the client

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Reduce isolation

**AAT Goal:**  
Increase positive social interactions



**AAT Strategy:**  
Have the client get to know the animal, then take the animal for a walk and meet people. Have the client tell people about the animal (its name, games it likes to play, favorite treats)

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**AAT Activities**

**FASD Strategy:** Address issues of loss and grief

- Have the client talk to the animal. Have the client 'speak for' the animal to address their own needs.

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**AAT Activities**

**FASD Strategy:** Address issues of loss and grief

**AAT Goal:**

Process feelings associated with loss/grief issues



**AAT Strategy:**

Tell the client the animal's story (being taken away from family, being adopted, etc.) and ask the client how the animal felt at the time, how they feel now and what the animal would need to feel okay.

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**AAT Activities**

**FASD Strategy:** Provide skills training and use a lot of role playing

- Make the skills a fun game that they can play with the animal

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Provide skills training and use a lot of role playing

**AAT Goal:**

To improve self-care skills



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the client practice self-care on the animal. Play games like getting the dog dressed in the morning (with choosing appropriate clothes) or brushing the dog's teeth. Have the dog 'help' make the bed or put clothes away.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Use role playing

- Practice skills on the animal and watch the animal for feedback

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Use role playing

**AAT Goal:**

Improve boundaries



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the client set spatial boundaries with the animal (such as staying outside their 'bubble') and practice keeping the animal outside of them, or show how the animal has boundaries by allowing the client to invade the animal's space (until the animal backs up, or won't play with a toy) then practice interacting with the animal with appropriate boundaries.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals

- Make the animal the judge of when a skill has been acquired, rather than the therapist. With small goals, let the animal reinforce the client's successes

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals

**AAT Goal:**

Improve communication skills



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the client teach the animal a trick. Focusing on the client speaking clearly (so the animal can understand), not using too many words, selecting the appropriate word for the task. When the client speaks clearly, the animal will do the trick.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals; use role playing

- Animals are great incentives for social interaction. They can act as practice for good social skills. The dog provides immediate feedback about the client's progress.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals; use role playing

**AAT Goal:**

Improve social skills, body language



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the client practice their non-verbal social skills and verbal social skills with the animal.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals; use immediate, concrete feedback.

- Animals can be good social lubricants when practicing social skills with others.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Establish achievable goals; use immediate, concrete feedback.

**AAT Goal:**

Improve social skills - taking turns



**AAT Strategy:**

Have two clients play games with the animal, such as standing across a room and taking turns calling the dog to come. The dog cannot run back to the client (the incentive) unless they let the other person call the dog away.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Set the client up for success

- Clients may not like following instructions. An animal can be used to increase their likelihood of complying with instructions

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Set the client up for success

**AAT Goal:**

Improve ability to follow instructions



**AAT Strategy:**

Provide instructions of how to play with the animal (the dog will run and get the ball if you place it on top of the desk) or use the animal as an incentive to follow instructions (once the test is completed, then you can play with the cat)

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Build on strengths

- Clients with FASD are often good with animals

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Build on strengths

**AAT Goal:**

Encourage nurturing, empathetic behaviour



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the client care for the animal - take it for walks, feed it, play with it and show affection.

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Build good parenting skills

- Clients with FASD can be difficult for parents to work with and the animal can provide an opportunity to practice good parenting skills

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### AAT Activities

**FASD Strategy:** Build good parenting skills

**AAT Goal:**

To improve parenting skills



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the parents teach the dog a new behaviour such as sitting still on a chair. Teach and give them a chance to practice principles of shaping (start with low criteria and work up), appropriate punishment (such as taking a break, or putting the dog on a 'time out' without being angry), celebrating success, etc.

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### General AAT Activities

**AAT Goal:**

Participate in exercise, improve balance



**AAT Strategy:**

Walk the dog

Improve range of motion, balance, standing/sitting tolerance, visual tracking, social skills



Play fetch

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### General AAT Activities

**AAT Goal:**

Improve self care skills, fine/gross motor skills, sensory stimulation



**AAT Strategy:**

Brush the cat

Improve mood, reduce anxiety



Pet the animal

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### General AAT Activities

**AAT Goal:**

Improve range of motion, speech skills, word deficits, memory (for cues), following instructions, balance, standing/sitting tolerance, visual tracking, social skills



**AAT Strategy:**

Have the animal do a trick

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## General AAT Activities

**AAT Goal:**  
Improve classroom  
atmosphere



**AAT Strategy:**  
Have the class be  
engaged by doing  
projects about the  
dog

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## An Example



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## Reference

- Chimo Project
- Contact Information

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## Chimo Project

- What Is the Chimo Project?
  - What Do We Do?
    - AAT 'In-A-Box'
  - Our Affiliated Programs
  - How Can You Get Started?
    - Policy and Procedure
      - Animal Selection
      - Information Sessions
      - Chimo Project Manual
    - How Can You Get Involved?

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## What Is the Chimo Project?

An innovative non-profit that facilitates AAT in the community



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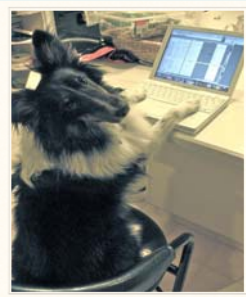
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## What Do We Do?



- We help facilities create AAT programs on site
- We train therapists in AAT
- We certify therapy animals

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### **AAT "In-A-Box"**

The Chimo Project offers facilities the opportunity to start AAT programs at their facilities using our proven methods

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### **AAT "In-A-Box"**

This program can be tailored to program needs and can offer:

- Assistance with Policy and Procedure and research (if necessary)
- Training therapists or train-the-trainer sessions
- Creating a framework to obtain therapy animals
- Other needs identified by the program

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### **Programs That Have Used Our "In-A-Box" Option**

- Elves Special Needs Society
- Central Okanagan Child Development Association
- Westlock Elementary School

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### Our Affiliated Programs



Currently supporting programs doing AAT at:

- Alberta Health Services Edmonton Region
- Alberta Hospital Edmonton
- Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital

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### Our Affiliated Programs

Currently supporting programs doing AAT or have assisted at:

- CASA
- Oakhill Boys Ranch
- Elves Special Needs Society
- SKILLS Society
- Bosco Homes
- TD Baker school
- Yellowhead Youth Center
- COCDA (Kelowna Special Needs program)
- The Family Center
- Independent school counselors
- Beechmont Residence

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### How Can You Get Started?



- Call us and we can help get an animal assisted therapy program going at your facility
- There are some important issues that must be dealt with before an AAT program can begin

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### **Policy and Procedure**

There are a number of policy issues that need to be addressed:

- Who can do AAT? Will professionals need to be trained in AAT?
- How will the animals be protected while working?
- How will the clients/staff be protected from bites/scratches?
- How will clients be selected?

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### **Policy and Procedure**

There are a number of policy issues that need to be addressed: (continued)

- What about allergies/asthma?
  - Will the therapy animals work in a specified therapy room and travel directly from the entrance to the therapy room?
  - Will the animals be allowed on furniture?
  - If so will a sheet is placed on the items to avoid hair settling on fabrics?
  - Who will clean the therapy room after the sessions to reduce allergens?

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### **Animal Selection**

- It is possible to use therapist owned animals, resident animals at a facility, staff owned animals/volunteer animals or handlers from the community
- Therapy dogs can be transition service dogs from schools (Chimo and Dogs with Wings have a coordination for transitioning service dogs)

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### **Animal Selection**

- To provide for the safety of staff and clients it is recommended that no matter what type of animal is used that they pass:
  - Obedience test - similar to the Canine Dog Neighbor or Rally Obedience testing
  - Temperament test - hair pulling/pinching, loud noises, sudden movements, etc.
  - Health screening - vaccinations, parasites, overall health, etc.

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### **Information Sessions**

- It is important that everyone at the facility knows what to expect from an Animal Assisted Therapy program before it begins

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### **Information Sessions**

- It is recommended that the AAT team have an information session for staff, management, maintenance staff, client guardians, etc.
  - Inform of the benefits of AAT
  - Let them know what policies have been put in place to protect their well-being
  - Address any misconceptions about the program (animals will be dirty, they will be responsible for cleaning up)

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## Chimo Project Manual

More information on how to start an AAT program is available in our book:

*Paws On Purpose*

(available from the Chimo Project)



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## Chimo Project Manual



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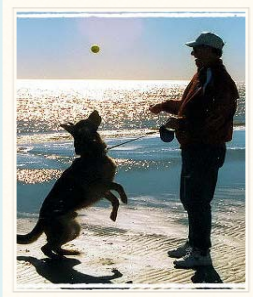
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## How Can You Get Involved?



If you are interested in:

- The 'In-A-Box' program
- Applying for career transition
- Service dogs as therapy dogs

please contact:  
The Chimo Project  
780-452-2452



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**How Can You Get Involved?**

If you are interested in learning more about animal assisted therapy or starting your own program, please contact:

The Chimo Project  
780-452-2452



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**Contact Information**

**Kristine Aanderson**  
The Chimo Project  
780-452-2452



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**For Information on Upcoming Sessions in the Series:  
[www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca](http://www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca)**

**Please Take the Time to Fill Out the On-Line Evaluation**

**Thank You!**



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