An Animal Assisted Therapy Program For Children With Mental Health Disorders: A Grant Proposal

BY: DAISY ARRIAZA
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH
MAY 2015
Introduction

Problem:

• Kedren Community Health Center (KCHC) is located in Los Angeles County, in SPA 6, which has been found to have more people in serious psychological distress (14.8%) when compared to LA County as a whole (7.3%; LACDPH, 2013).

• Mental health hospitalization rates per 100,000 youth are highest in SPA 6 (490.6) when compared to the whole state of California (256.4) (LACDPH, 2013).

• The rate for individuals who needed mental health services, but did not receive treatment was highest in SPA 6 (56.4%) compared to Los Angeles County (47.3%), which indicates the great need for additional mental health services in this area (LACDPH, 2013).

• Traditional clinical protocols medications and psychosocial treatment approaches are not effective for all children since no one treatment works for all client’s situations (Thyer & Myers, 2011).

• **Goal:** The overall goal of this program is to increase children’s engagement with therapy in order to promote resilience and enhance the well-being of children and youth served by KCHC.
Social workers provide an array of varying therapeutic services and continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills in order to help emotionally disturbed children.

Companion animals and pets are common among all cultures. More than half (62%) of households in the United States reported having a pet, and have reported that their pets provide them with emotional support, unconditional love, and companionship and that they considered their animals to be family members (Risley-Curtis, Holley, & Wolf, 2006).

The person-in environment perspective is a core concept for social workers and there is no doubt that animals play important symbolic roles in children’s lives. For these reasons, AAT should become an integral component of practice for social workers.
Cross-cultural Relevance

- Mental health disorders affect all children, regardless of gender, age and ethnic groups (Holt & Adams, 2013).
- However, the disparity in accessing treatment varied dramatically across race and ethnicities. White and African American children whose parents rated their mental health problems as severe were 2 times more likely than Latino and Asian children to have received care (Holt & Adams, 2013).
- Many of these families turn to social workers for help because social workers make up more than 50% of the mental health workforce in California (Holt & Adams, 2013).
- Social workers as part of their mission continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills in order to help people in need (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008).
Methodology

- **Target population:** The proposed program will specifically focus on children and adolescents, ages 5 to 17 years old. These children and adolescents must be seeking mental health services at KCHC and reside in Service Area 6 (SPA 6) of Los Angeles County.

- **Strategies used to identify Funding Source:** The writer found the grant by searching online for open grants that fit closely with the proposed program by considering the category of the population, mission of the foundation as well as the funding priorities.

- **Identify and Selecting Funding:** The writer chose The Weingart Foundation because it supports organizations like KCHC that provide services to underserved communities and people such as low-income children and youth (Weingart Foundation, 2014).
Sources used for the needs assessment

- It was through extensive research, that the writer discovered the many studies and research that supports the benefits of integrating Animal Assisted Therapy as an adjunctive intervention in the mental health field.

- The writer searched online web and journal articles that assisted in finding information on the history of AAT, theoretical perspective, research on the benefits of AAT in people’s wellbeing and information on past successful AAT implemented programs.

Projected budget range and categories

- The projected budget for the first year of the program is $112,997, which includes the cost of training for two LCSWs in certified Animal Assisted Therapy interventions and practices as well as cost to care for both dogs, office supplies and miscellaneous.
Program Summary and Description: The proposed program will implement AAT as an adjunctive tool in the Children and Youth Outpatient Program at KCHC. This program will provide services to children and youth experiencing behavioral problems, family conflicts, and school-related difficulties. Therapists will set specific treatment goals and objectives for each child and incorporate AAT as an adjunctive tool to enhance existing treatment strategies being used with this population, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, person-centered therapy, and solution-focused therapy.

Population Served: The proposed program will specifically focus on children and adolescents, ages 5 to 17 years old. These children and adolescents must be seeking mental health services at KCHC and reside in Service Area 6 of Los Angeles County.
Program Objectives

- Objective 1: Ensure KCHC and LCSWs have adequate liability protection.
- Objective 2: Select and train two licensed clinical social workers and their dogs staffed at KCHC in AAT.
- Objective 3: LCSWs will integrate AAT in children’s therapeutic process including initial assessment, individual and family therapy sessions.

Program evaluation

- A pre and post-test will be administered before and after the use of AAT. The Therapeutic Alliance Scale for Children (TASC) will be utilized as a tool to measure the therapeutic alliance and The Youth Outcome Questionnaire will also be utilized to obtain parent’s report measure of treatment progress for their children.
Discussion

Lessons learned
- The writer learned about the process and important steps in grant writing.
- The author now understands the importance of assessing the problem in order to determine the need for the proposed program.
- The author also learned the value in searching for scholarly articles providing information about the history and prevalence of the problem in order to justify the need for the proposed program.
- The author learned that at times identifying the funder’s mission and goal was more helpful than searching for certain key words and phrases in narrowing down grants since there were not any grants offered for specifically AAT.

Implications for Social Work
- This grant hopes to promote the immediate need for Social Workers to began incorporating AAT as an adjunctive tool to enhance existing treatment strategies being used with children struggling with various mental health disorders.
- The grant writer hopes to advocate for additional evidence-based research to be conducted to support its benefits with children struggling with various mental health disorders.
References