Animal Assisted Therapy Interventions

Mini-course Syllabus

University of Michigan School of Social Work

SW 777: Spring/Summer, 2021 Animal Assisted Therapy Interventions
Remote/Hybrid Course

Instructor: Laura Sanders, LMSW, assisted by Ramiro Martinez, Farm Manager

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Course dates and times:

The synchronous time spent with the class will fall within these pre-arranged registration dates and times.

The class time will be held over Zoom and will be limited, providing opportunities for asynchronous learning expected during some of these hours with some flexibility.

6/25/2021 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

6/26/2021 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

6/26/2021: experiential activities from 2:00-5:00 on Lovingway Family Farm (address to be provided)

Added Experiential opportunity (possibly depending on the needs of students): 6/27/21 from 1:00-4:00 at Lovingway Family Farm

If you opt to come to the farm for your experiential component, you will be asked to print (if you can) and sign consent and health disclosure forms to participate. These forms are on the course canvas site. I have will have some hard copies if you don’t have printer access. Students who cannot come to the farm will be expected to accomplish two experiential exercises with animals within their home or community, asynchronously.

Requirements:

Full attendance to the class is a requirement for credit
**Course Assignment:** Due by Saturday, July 17. Please submit assignments though canvas

**Course Description:**

This course provides an opportunity for students to explore an array of animal assisted therapeutic activities specifically designed to further a wide range of therapeutic goals with children, adolescents, families, and adult clients. Like play therapy and art therapy, animal assisted interventions, when integrated with evidence-based methods including (but not limited to) CBT and mindfulness, trauma recovery, family systems, cultural-relational and psychodynamic approaches, offer opportunities for people to work through a variety of issues and insecurities related to attachment, trauma, self-esteem and identity concerns, dysregulation, behavioral difficulties, mental illness, developmental disabilities, and family and relational problems. With selected animals as therapy partners, the therapeutic team helps people of all ages and positions foster new alliances, understand existing problems more fully, and build practical life-skills to enhance confidence, effectiveness and joy. Presently, animal assisted therapy is gaining acclaim in the field of mental health intervention and there is a growing body of evidence supporting its efficacy to be explored. This course specifically teaches the theoretical foundations, standards, ethics, evidence, certifications, integration of methods, case examples, evaluation and practical skills involved in partnering with a variety of animals – dogs, cats, goats, pigs, horses and chickens (yes, chickens!) - to provide engaging and effective interventions.

**Biographical Sketch:**

**Laura Sanders,** LMSW, U of M SSW, LEO instructor since 1996, specializes in trauma- and attachment-informed interventions and provides therapy, consultation, training, supervision and expert witness testimony in the areas of sexual abuse and trauma, attachment and adoption, gender identity and sexuality and work with immigrants and refugees. She utilizes an array of creative interventions in therapy and has recently extended her practice to include animal assisted therapy interventions with clients at her farm-office near Ann Arbor. She is a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) Center Member, and a PATH- certified Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning, and the practice is an official PATH Center Member. She has engaged in therapy dog training and has practiced animal assisted interventions since 2014.

**Ramiro Martinez** is the Lovingway Family Farm manager and assistant to Laura in their animal assisted work on the farm. Mr. Martinez has received his PATH
certification as an Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning. Ramiro will be assisting with the experiential activities involving animals during the course and will reflect on his role as an animal handler in the therapeutic work.

**Course Objectives:**

Include but are not limited to the following with the competencies in parenthesis:

Students will:

1) learn the theoretical foundations, definitions, variety of interventions and standards and associated with animal assisted therapy (engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research)
2) explore the ethics and guidelines for safety, and for the selection and matching of animal partners with clients (informed practice and apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice, engage diversity and difference in practice)
3) integrate evidence-based methods with animal assisted activities to enhance and effectiveness (engaging in research-informed practice and practice-informed research)
4) practice clinical engagement and assessment skills of noticing, reflecting, questioning, commenting, deepening, and interpreting in the context of interactions with animal partners and observations of human-animal relationships (competencies of engagement and assessment and applying critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments)
5) develop and carry out structured animal-assisted activities to further specific treatment goals with clients presenting with a variety of issues (Intervention: implement interventions that enhance client capacities)
6) learn the use of single subject design to evaluate the effectiveness of animal assisted therapy with clients (critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions)

**ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION**

**Accommodations:**

If you need or desire an accommodation for a disability, please let me know soon. The earlier that you make me aware of your needs the more effectively we will be able to use the resources available to us, such as the services for Students with Disabilities, the Adaptive Technology Computing Site and the like. If you do decide to disclose your disability, I will treat that information as private and confidential. Also, please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance or due dates for assignments so we can make appropriate
arrangements. Also, all preferred name and gender pronoun uses will be honored.

**Trigger Warning:**

This course is trauma-informed and focused. For any student who has experienced difficulty in childhood, or trauma, it might bring up painful material. Also, the course may bring up painful memories in relation to animals. Students may experience a range of emotions throughout the course and may feel vulnerable, especially since the course encourages you to use some of your own issues and self-insight to understand the power of relationships with animals. All feelings are acceptable, but students will be expected to be able to manage them. There will not be sufficient follow up for processing painful memories or severe anxiety that might get triggered by the course content. In general, it is important that students who expect to struggle seek support or therapeutic assistance to work through their own recovery during their graduate education to be present and effective in working with hurt clients. Wounded healers who have worked toward resilience make some of the best therapists. See resources for this below.

**Health and Wellness:**

Health and wellness situations or circumstances may impede student success within the program. Students should feel free to contact the School’s Health and Wellness Advocates, Lauren Davis, or Nyshourn Price, at ssw.wellness@umich.edu. Students may also visit/call the University's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS offers a variety of clinical services, referrals, and workshops. CAPS, Hours: 8am-5pm, 530 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48109, caps.umich.edu

**Assignment:**

**AAT Mini-course remote reflection assignment:**

**Overall description:** (total length – 4-6 pages, double-spaced) Your assignment is a series of reflections that let me know you have viewed all the videos associated with the course, have done the two experiential activities, have thought about the reflection questions, and can integrate at least three of the required readings from the course throughout the assignment. Where you integrate those reading is up to you. I have broken the assignment down into three parts largely based on the competencies and skills associated with this course including engagement, observation, assessment, and intervention. These apply to both animal and human partners within the therapeutic team. You have a lot of freedom in this assignment, but I need to know that you have
viewed the videos and read, so be sure that is apparent to me from your reflection. A detailed description of this assignment can be found on canvas under assignments.

**Required Readings:** posted on Canvas


*Naste, et. al. (2017) Equine Facilitated Therapy for Complex Trauma (EFT-CT). Journal of Child Adolescent Trauma, DOI 10.1007/s40653-017-0187-3*


**Additional/optional readings: Posted on Canvas:**


The Course Agenda

**Friday, June 25 – 9:00-5:00**

The first day of the course will be devoted to introducing the key concepts and definitions of Animal Assisted Therapy and exploring the ethical and safety considerations associated with AAT. It will focus on establishing relationships with animals as therapy partners, increasing awareness and mindfulness in relating to animals and the natural world, and understanding the importance of animal selection in Animal Assisted Activities. We will focus on the skills of engagement, observation, noticing, questioning, and reflecting on relationships between people and animals and exploring the roles and recommended models of animal assisted interventions.

**Saturday, June 26, 9:00-1:00**

This day will be devoted to continued skill development in engagement, observation, questioning, and therapeutic interpretation and commenting on relationships between animals and people. Discussion of case examples and activities will highlight the Integration of Animal Assisted Therapy with evidence-based and best practices in mental health including trauma-informed principals, attachment theory and Cognitive/Behavioral methods. Cultural considerations, limitations and contraindications for Animal Assisted Activities will be explored through case example and discussion.

**Saturday, June 26, 2:00-5:00 – Experiential activities on the farm**

Students who visit the farm will engage in at least two experiential exercises with animal partners, including structured time for group processing of these experiences. If you are fully remote and cannot come to the farm, there are experiential exercises that you are expected to accomplish at home or in your community asynchronously before your assignment is due.