Animal Assisted Therapy Interventions

Mini-course Syllabus

University of Michigan School of Social Work

SW 777, sec 2, fall term, 2022: Animal Assisted Therapy Interventions

In-person/Hybrid Course

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

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Course dates and times:

The class time will be held over Zoom from 9:00-11:45 am both days and then, at the Lovingway Farm from 1:00-5:00, both days.

9/17/2022 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

9/18/2022 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

For participation on the farm please print (if you can) and sign consent and health disclosure forms to participate, or you can send me a signed e-copy of them to lsanders@umich.edu. These forms are on the course canvas site. I will have some hard copies if you don’t have printer access.

Requirements:

Full attendance to the class and completion of the assignment are requirements for credit

Course Assignment: Due by Saturday, Oct. 1. Please submit assignments through 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 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.

Trauma Reminder 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, 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:

Several options or possibilities for assignments are:

1) In a four- or five-page, reflective essay highlight your learnings from the course and integrate three of the course readings through substantially quoting the sources in your paper. What were your greatest “take-aways” from the course? What have you learned about the important ethical, safety and logistical issues involved in AAT and how animal activities can be integrated with evidence-based methods to enhance client’s learning and growth? What surprised you the most? How have you grown as a social worker? How does this course affect your future goals as a social worker if at all?

2) In a four- to five-page narrative essay explore a specific area of animal assisted therapy that you would like to learn more about: for example, equine assisted mental health approaches – EGALA, EPONA, animal interventions with elderly clients, therapeutic riding with people who have physical disabilities – PATH, canine-specific interventions with PTSD veterans, farm and animal rescue interventions with challenging youth. This assignment allows you to go further and expand on your learning. Incorporate at least two readings from the course and at least one current readings (preferably from peer reviewed journals) specific to the specific area of exploration.
Required Readings: posted on Canvas


Additional/optional readings: Posted on Canvas:


The Course Agenda

Saturday, Sept 17 – 9:00-11:45 over zoom, 1:00-5:00 on the farm.

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.

Sunday, Sept 18 = 9:00-11:45 over zoom. 1:00-5:00 on the farm.

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. On the farm we will engage in an Animal Assisted Therapy demonstration session.