Examining How Relationships with Animals Support Human Health

Kevin Morris, PhD
Our long relationship with dogs and cats

• Dogs 15,000 years ago (maybe 30,000)
• Cats 12,000 years ago
How could dogs and cats improve human physical health?

- Exercise
- Lower stress
- Social interaction
Example findings that support effects on physical health
How could dogs and cats improve psychological health?

- Companionship/Support system
- Relaxation
- Lower anxiety
- Increased social interaction
- Lower depression
Example findings that support effects on psychological health

Canine Connection Therapy: Finding Purpose and Healing Through the Training of Service Dogs

Meg Daley Olmert, Michelle Nordstrom, Marshall Peters, Matthew St Laurent and Rick Yount
Is there an effect on an individual level?

• Excelsior Canine Healers
• Girls in trauma therapy
• Randomized-controlled study  
  – Half get dog, half don’t
• Compare trauma symptoms and school attendance
Is there an effect on an individual level?

- Savio Study
- Parents in crisis
- Randomized-controlled study
  - Half get dog, half don’t
- Compare parenting skills and family outcomes
The Savio Study: Example NCFAS Data

NCFAS – Supervision of Children

Δ NCFAS-R Score

Control Families

Intervention Families
Is there an effect on a group level?

- Prison dog training programs
- WADOC Sustainability in Prisons Project
  - Dog training
  - Dog kenneling
  - Dog grooming
Is there an effect on a group level?

• Phase 1 = Data from 10 WA prisons (300 participants)
  – In-prison outcomes and psychosocial mechanisms

• Phase 2 = Multi-state study with post-release outcomes
Is there an effect on a group level?

• Green Chimneys

• Special education school for children with severe psychosocial issues

• Founded 1947
Nature-Based Therapy at Green Chimneys
Is there an effect on a community level?

- One Health ties us all together

One Health - It's all connected

One Health is the integrative effort of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals, and the environment. Together, the three make up the One Health triad, and the health of each is inextricably connected to the others in the triad. Understanding and addressing the health issues created at this intersection is the foundation for the concept of One Health.

- What is One Health?
- What can you do?
- What's the AVMA doing?
- How was the One Health Commission formed?
- Additional Resources
Is there an effect on a community level?

- HSUS Pets For Life
- 39 sites & ~100K pets served
- 3 phase study design
  - 1 = Analyze PFL data on pets
  - 2 = Overlay public health data
  - 3 = Measure impacts in a new community
A lot of great collaborators

- **IHAC colleagues**
  - Phil Tedeschi, Erica Elvove, Sarah Bexell, Nina Ekholm-Fry

- **PhD students**
  - Hagit Brandes, Jessica Sparks

- **MSW students**
  - Courtney Brown, Bridget Camacho, Rita Cotter, Katia Duncan, Erin Flynn, Gehrig Haberstock, Melissa Janiszewski, Andrea Jennings, Renee Lenth, L’Jean Moody, Catherine O’Neill, Lindsay Rojas, Christine Ungerer, Abbey Westphal

- **Collaborators and partner organizations**
  - Green Chimneys, WADOC, HSUS, Savio House, Excelsior Youth Center
Thanks to all of you!

- What are the opportunities and challenges for your communities?

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