

Creatively Leveraging Non-Human Therapists: Therapy Dogs in a Court Preparation Programme for Abused Children

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Abstract

There is a growing body of research that describes the therapeutic benefits of interaction with non-human 'therapists': domestic dogs, rabbits, birds etc. TOP Dogs have worked in partnership with the Teddy Bear Foundation (Gauteng) since 2016 in the Court Preparation Programme. This Programme is used by hundreds of abused children (3-18 years) each year to prepare them to be credible and confident witnesses in Court, when they are called to testify against their alleged abuser. At the same time, the activities within the Court Preparation Programme should in themselves contribute to the emotional and psychological healing of the young participants.

This presentation describes the multi-year process of design for the radical enhancement of the Teddy Bear Foundation's Court Preparation Programme using Therapy Dogs in various ways.

The presentation aims to transform the audience's understanding of Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities in order to inspire more creative animal-based interventions beyond petting friendly animals.

The presentation further briefly outlines the scientific underpinnings of the intervention, and reflects on its potential for expansion into other urban areas of South Africa.

Keywords

Animal-assisted therapy / AAT
Animal-Assisted Activities / AAA
Social work practice