

Israel is among the leaders in the world in the area of psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy, both in terms of its academic training and its prevalence in clinical settings. Israeli academicians and clinicians are also making significant contributions to the area through their publication of both theory and research in highly respected journals, both local and international. We have now established IAAAP (The Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy), a professional association in the field that demands high standards for acceptance for membership – 1100 hours of academic coursework (beyond a B.A.) in a recognized clinical training program, 750 hours of field work that includes 400 hours of direct therapy, and weekly clinical supervision. Along with our stated goals (see the opening page of this site for our goals) we hope that the activities of IAAAP will lead to governmental recognition of the field, the establishment of Masters level programs, and contact with psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapists, programs and associations around the world.

We encourage you to read the following brief description of the current approach and status of psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy in Israel today. We would be interested in hearing from academicians, clinicians and professional organizations from around the world in order to grow from and contribute to the development of the field. Only such cooperation can lead to the development of the field and to its recognition around the world as a truly effective therapy technique, often reaching the client in ways that no other technique is able to do.

## **THE BIRTH OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY AS KNOWN TODAY**

The presence of animals as a serious therapy tool was first brought to the attention of the world of psychotherapy by Boris Levinson in a series of articles in the 1960's, culminating in his book PET-ORIENTED PSYCHOTHERAPY. Levinson's main goal was to use the animal as a motivator for children who were otherwise resistant to therapy. It is a tool that has spread in use with a number of populations, e.g. children, adolescents, the elderly, prison inmates, psychiatric patients, those suffering from autism or from chronic and terminal illnesses. Therapy may take place in a traditional therapy setting or in any environment in which animals are present, such as a petting zoo, stable, or farm.

As in many approaches to psychotherapy, the goal of psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy is to reach the client in order to understand him/her, lead to emotional expression and insight, bring about change, and improve the client's quality of life. Psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy, however, has unique qualities that prove to be a catalyst within the therapy process and aid in the obtaining of various goals of therapy.

## **PSYCHOTHERAPY-BASED AAT AND HOW IT IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER TYPES OF ANIMAL-ASSISTED PROFESSIONS**

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a general term for any type of therapy in which the presence of an animal is used to reach the therapy goals. AAT has been used in mental health, occupational therapy, recreation therapy, nursing, speech therapy, and physical therapy, among others. Our association focuses on psychotherapy-based AAT, for we are involved in the use of the presence of animals in the psychotherapy setting.

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is differentiated from Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal-Assisted Education (AAE). AAT is practiced by professionals, who have been academically trained in therapy-oriented fields, with specific individualized therapy goals in mind for the client. AAE is practiced by educators with educational goals. AAA is practiced by volunteers or briefly trained layman with general therapeutic, educational or recreational goals in mind. AAA may be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. AAA and AAE may have a therapeutic effect on the participant, but should not be confused with therapy, in which the therapist explores the client's inner world with the influence of the presence of an animal as a therapy tool. Such a therapist is not an animal-handler, and is not an assistant to other therapists. Psychotherapy-based AAT is not an adjunct to another therapy, but rather therapy in and of itself.

### **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY-BASED AAT**

Psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy is based on emotional connection and relationships – between therapist and client, between therapist and animal, between client and animal, between animal and animal. The client is at the same time both an active participant and an observer of the interactions between others (therapist, animals) in the therapy setting. This allows the client to experience behaviorally, cognitively and emotionally the connection and relationship with others and work through the issues brought up through these interactions. Interaction with the animal is only part of the therapy process in AAT. The main component is the accompaniment and guidance of the client by the therapist, with mediation by the therapist between the client and the animal, between the client and his/her own inner processes, leading to reflection, awareness and insight. In short, through psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy, the therapist works with the client on cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional issues in order to bring about change and healthy emotional development.

## **ACADEMIC TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOTHERAPY-BASED AAT IN ISRAEL**

Here in Israel we have worked hard to create a number of high-quality certificate programs, each established in a recognized academic institution, in the field of psychotherapy-based AAT. Through their studies, graduates have a special understanding of the human-animal connection and the potential roles that animals fulfill within the therapy setting that provide unique opportunities for the therapy process not found in other types of psychotherapy.

Academic programs in the area that are recognized by the Association include up to 1500 hours of coursework, 400 hours of field work, and both individual and group supervision.

The study in the field of psychology includes courses in the areas of psychology, psychopathology, psychotherapy, psycho-diagnostics, psychiatry, neurobiology, special-needs populations, professional ethics in AAT, and more. These courses are given in the form of lectures, discussions and experiential group learning. Courses in the field of animals include veterinary science, animal behavior, biology, zoology, practical zoo science. The connection between the two general areas is taught in courses in the area of the human-animal connection and in the area of theory, implications and applications of psychotherapy-based Animal-Assisted Therapy.

Each student has a field placement in a therapy setting. This setting may be a traditional clinical setting or any environment in which animals are present, such as a petting zoo. There is a strong emphasis on supervision, each student receiving both individual and group supervision each week on his/her experience related to the field placement.

## **THE STATUS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY-BASED AAT IN ISRAEL AT THE PRESENT**

Animal-assisted therapists are today practicing psychotherapy, as equal members of psychotherapy teams (including clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, art therapists, drama therapists, etc.) in clinics and institutions throughout the country: mental health clinics, hospitals (psychiatric and general), schools, group homes, emergency shelters, special-needs clinic, and more.

At this point, there is no official recognition for the field by official government offices, however there is a grass-roots recognition in the field, especially in educational institutions and welfare institutions. In addition, there has recently been introduced into the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) a proposal for a law that will define and recognize the practice of psychotherapy-based AAT, including academic criteria, licensure procedures and standards of professional ethics. We hope that the establishment of IAAAP (The Israeli Association of Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy) will be a significant step along the way towards this parliamentary recognition, together with other paramedical professions in the field of mental health.