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# Animals and social work: An emerging field of practice for Aotearoa New Zealand

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## **Abstract**

Social work is traditionally human-centered in practice, even though for many the bond between humans and animals is the most fundamental of daily-lived experiences. The intent of this paper is to reflect on the predominant humanistic basis of social work and to consider the growing evidence for developing a wider perspective to incorporate the human-animal connection into social work practice.

Joanne Emmens (2007:9) observes that the human-animal bond is considered by some as ‘...too mainstream (in the sense of being lightweight, cliché or sentimental), or as not mainstream enough...as substantial material worthy of study.’

In this article we argue that the human-animal bond is neither sentimental nor fringe and that our attitudes toward this relationship is based on a construction of western thought. To support this we offer a review of literature that provides evidence of good practice that can move social work beyond a purely humanistic approach to a more holistic view resulting in a more comprehensive toolkit for practice.

We explore the literature and practice surrounding the place of animals in social work, both in New Zealand and internationally. In addition, we identify some of the ways the human-animal bond is currently utilised in rehabilitation, therapy, as animal assistants and as an indicator of domestic violence within New Zealand. We argue that this area of research and practice is highly relevant for social work as evidence-based practice. The paper concludes by offering some suggestions for discussion within the social work profession, and considerations for social work educators, researchers and theorists.

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## **Introduction**

To give context to this discussion we begin with an overview of the literature relating to the relationship between social work and humanistic theory and its relationship to the origins of western societal attitudes towards animals. In order to provide an overall context for New Zealand we then outline the New Zealand legal and practice context of animal rights and welfare and the formative collaborations concerned with companion animals.

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We introduce recent work that links the human-animal connection to welfare outcomes both as indicators of crisis and as therapeutic models. We include some New Zealand-based initiatives regarding the human-animal connection in family violence and the protocols that have arisen from this work. We also present some New Zealand examples of the existing use of the human-animal connection in therapeutic ways. We complete our literature review with a brief introduction to international developments in a new modality for social workers in the form of animal-assisted social work, mainly from the USA. This is offered in various forms, including veterinary social work.

Our discussion of the literature looks at how the social work profession can include consideration of the human-animal bond into their practice. We discuss how the human-animal connection could be incorporated into the ecological model of practice and assessment. This would support the existing, emerging and potential role of animals in social work – as therapeutic helpers, as members of the family and as indicators for intervention.

## **Animals and social work**

In his seminal work *Animals and Social Work: A moral introduction*, American theorist Thomas Ryan (2011) argues that social work is blinkered to focus solely on humans. Ryan observes that our human-centred approach to social work always constructs the client as human and that human welfare is paramount above all else. As stated earlier, being human-centred allows us, as social workers, to rationalise our secondary consideration for animal welfare and consider any overly animal-centred approach as one of sentimentality.

Ironically, the origins of child protection legislation in England is intertwined with a dual concern to protect animals and children originating from links made between the British RSPCA and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Ryan, 2011). Early English legislation had focused on the working classes and their treatment of animals, with the state intervening on behalf of animals. This was decades prior to doing the same for women and children suffering abuse and cruelty. In 1824 the RSPCA was founded (originally as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) by Richard Martin, Thomas Buxton and William Wilberforce who were prominent advocates for the abolition of slavery, workplace and social reform, as well as child protection (RNZSPCA, 2014). This dual focus changed with the influence of sociology and psychiatry on social work post-World War One to focus solely on human society and individuals and evict animals from social work (Ryan, 2011).

As a result, modern codes for social work reflect a strong humanist focus – even perhaps an exclusive humanism that positions humankind as the measure of all things eliciting a pervasive anthropocentrism (Ryan, 2013).

Ryan (2011) argues for a morally inclusive social work. He notes that social work invariably views the notion of respect as relating exclusively to humans so that social workers then have difficulties in grappling with how it is that we are able to speak of our responsibilities for other creatures. He states:

When social workers make the moral judgment (for that is what they invariably do) that they will not speak out about animal abuse or neglect, they routinely minimise this reality, and by inference deny that animals have any meaningful moral value....Given that social work has a long and proud history of speaking out on behalf of, and of giving moral priority to the weak

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and vulnerable in human society, it is incumbent that social workers speak out and accord moral priority to animals, the most weak and vulnerable members in our communities (Ryan, 2011, p. 164).

## The origins of the human/animal context in western thought

Humanistic principles are at the heart of social work (Payne 2011). Humanism arises from humanistic psychological theory and psychotherapy practice. These theories include the notion of the client as a human being and the social issue as a human issue. Intervention strategies and social work values such as self-actualisation, human rights, self-determination, positive thinking, empowerment and client-centred approaches all have their origins in humanistic psychology (Humanistische Akademie, 1998).

The humanistic approach is linked to a mixture of phenomenological and existentialist thought, eastern philosophy and psychology, the Judeo-Christian philosophies of personalism, Socrates and the Renaissance. What draws these disparate belief systems together is a shared concern for the nature of human existence and consciousness (Benjafield 2010).

While Greek and Roman concepts spoke of *jus naturae* (natural law) and *jus animalium* (animal rights) where animals possessed inherent or natural rights, it is within the Judeo-Christian traditions that the cause of indifference towards the non-human world in western thought is located (Ryan, 2011; Ryan, 2013). Passages in the Bible, for example, seem to justify the differential treatment of animals and humans: for example, Genesis (9:2-3) 'The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth...air...sea... into your hand they are delivered'. Early Christian thinkers such as Aquinas and Augustine interpreted these biblical references to mean that humans had absolute dominion over the natural world and justified this with a view that animals were irrational and therefore underserving of charity. They believed that human rationality mirrors the divine and, as animals apparently lack reason, we therefore need not concern ourselves with their suffering, for their purpose is for solely human ends (Ryan, 2011).

Many western philosophers viewed animals within a hierarchy of importance; varyingly they were viewed as servants of humans, inferior by virtue of their lack of rationality, but generally thought of as sentient and therefore worthy of our paternalistic care (Ryan, 2011). What is clear within western thought is that moral status and subjectivity is equated with rationality, sentience and a divine hierarchy that places humans at the apex.

Ryan argues that within social work an:

... innate suspicion of biological considerations and explanations and its consequential dismissal of any moral consideration of animals, is in large part due to the deleterious moral and ethical implications of Social Darwinism, and contemporary ultra-Darwinism (Ryan 2011, p. 13).

A hugely influential humanist, Darwin (1936) proposes on one hand that we are all connected to the natural world through evolutionary processes, on another he proposes 'survival of the fittest' or Social Darwinism. This theory suggests that we as humans have dominion and therefore any action towards animals is allowed. According to Ryan, 'Darwin insists that humans and animals share a common ancestry with differences in mental and emotional capacities being one of degree, not kind' (Ryan 2011, p. 13).

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## The place of animals in New Zealand society

The recognition of animal rights and the treatment of animals within New Zealand legislation is worthy of some examination. The basis of this country's animal legislation comes from the adoption and application of English laws. In the period from 1840 to 1878, English laws applied to New Zealand regarding animal welfare. These laws, such as Martin's Law (1822), stipulated penalties for injury to animals as property violation, not about cruelty to animals inflicted by their 'owners'.

New Zealand's first national legislation regarding animal welfare was the 1878 Cruelty to Animals Act that outlawed cruel treatment of any species, wild or domestic, imported or indigenous. The Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RNZSPCA) was established in various locations across New Zealand from 1882 onwards. In 1884 the Cruelty to Animals Act was incorporated into the Police Offences Act and included penalties for not supplying animals with food, shelter and water. In addition, RNZSPCA inspectors were given the power to take animals into protection, enter sale-yards and arrest offenders (RNZSPCA, 2014).

The 1960 Animals Protection Act widened these powers to include the outlawing of various forms of neglect, restricted some farming practices and increased penalties. This led to the current legislation – the 1999 Animal Welfare Act. This act outlines the obligation of owners to care for animals adequately, controls the export of live animals, the performance of surgery and the use of traps. The 1999 Act allows animals to be used in research testing and teaching. In addition, the 1999 Act includes codes of welfare of how animals are to be treated (RNZSPCA, 2014).

With the establishment of organisations to foster the protection of animals, some have developed further to promote and/or research the human-animal bond. In 1972, the New Zealand Veterinary Association founded the Companion Animal Society (CAS) to promote the value and importance of companion animals in society facilitated through the work of veterinarians. The New Zealand Companion Animal Council (NZAC) was established in 1996 to facilitate the achievement of a harmonious relationship between companion animals, people and the environment. The NZAC also runs a New Zealand Companion Animal Annual Conference to promote research, position papers and collaboration in this area. In academia, the University of Canterbury has established The New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies (NZCHAS) that brings together scholars whose research is concerned with the conceptual and material treatment of non-human animals in culture, society and history. This New Zealand focus has resulted in a number of publications including the recent publication, *A New Zealand Book of Beasts* (Potts, Armstrong and Brown, 2013) – an examination of interactions between humans and non-human animals.

## Animal abuse as an indicator of violence against people

In 2002, Otago-based Child Youth and Family Supervisor Briar Humphrey (2002) published an article entitled, *Child welfare, animal welfare – strengthening the links for social work today*. Humphrey's article explored the issue of animal welfare and how researchers overseas linked animal welfare to child welfare. The previous year, a visit from Dr Randall Lockwood from the US-based First Strike project stimulated discussions between animal welfare and child

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and family welfare agencies with the view to creating new alliances amongst these organisations. In her conclusion, Humphrey hinted at new protocols being developed including frontline training for social workers and animal welfare inspectors, and the development of an MOU between child welfare and animal welfare organisations in New Zealand.

In many international studies there is evidence that those involved in animal cruelty or neglect have a predisposition to inflict the same on people (Humphrey, 2002; Randou, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Hanrahan, 2011). While a survey of New Zealand veterinarians in 2007 found that 63% of respondents had seen evidence of deliberate animal abuse over the previous five-year period (Williams, Dale, Clarke and Garrett, 2008), this link was not evident in the New Zealand social work literature until Roguski's 2012 report *Pets as pawns*. Roguski (2012) found that the mistreatment of animals was evident as a precursor and tool for inflicting violence or exerting power in a domestic situation. Qualitative and quantitative research revealed a number of situations in which cruelty or threat to animals manifests in family violence situations. Roguski (2012) also found that there is a need to view the co-existence of animal cruelty as complex and multifaceted, not just restricted to threats or actual harm. Roguski (2012) found that when pets were abused or threatened, a number of responses/ results were observed including:

- Normalised violence/ psychological/emotional abuse
- Cruelty to animals as a punishment for unsatisfactory behavior or in response to jealousy and as a threat to maintain 'good behaviour'
- Hurting animals to avoid police attention
- Using pets as sexual objects
- Threatening violence to pets as a way of isolating the women and children from third-party support systems or keep women from leaving a relationship.

While under a quarter of those surveyed in the *Pets as pawns* research noted that they had remained in an abusive relationship because of a threat to their pets, over half felt, through a process of psychological abuse that involved abuse or threats to animals, they had lost self-confidence and developed a fear of leaving. Some stated that, by the time they were ready to leave the relationship, they had ceased caring about the welfare of their pet and were solely focused on their own and/or their children's safety. However, women without children reported a greater propensity to remain in a violent relationship because of concern for the welfare of their pets (Roguski, 2012).

The release of *Pets as pawns*<sup>1</sup> was timed to coincide with the 2012 New Zealand Companion Animal Conference. Speaking at that conference Minister of Police Judith Collins noted:

While animal abuse is not specifically included in the Domestic Violence Act, if a perpetrator is abusing or threatening an animal as part of a pattern of controlling behaviour it may well fit within the definition of domestic violence. But, of course, we need to know about it first.

In tandem, a number of collaborative initiatives were developed to address issues, such as protocols for reciprocal reporting for animal and human abuse, amongst the RNZSPCA

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<sup>1</sup> *Pets as pawns* is a report from a collaboration between the RNZSPCA and Women's Refuge that interviewed 203 refuge clients as well as RNZSPCA managers and community stakeholders to produce a detailed picture of how animal harm is linked to domestic violence in New Zealand (Roguski, 2012).

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and Women's Refuges. The first Women's Refuge with accommodation for animals was established in Wellington. In addition, in 2008, an agreement was established between the RNZSPCA and Child, Youth and Family acknowledging the link between child abuse and animal abuse. This agreement sets in place a formal working relationship to inform each agency if they suspect child or animal abuse in the course of their work (CYF, 2014b).

International literature (Strand, et al., 2012; Randou, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Hanrahan, 2011; Humphrey, 2002) draws links between animal abuse and family violence. This includes childhood animal cruelty, the correlation between child abuse and animal abuse in the home; elder abuse and the co-occurrence of violence towards animals. As Strand et al. (2012, p. 251) state:

Throughout each of the areas of the link between human and animal violence, it is clear that the circumstances people are experiencing influence the treatment of their animals. Social workers need to be knowledgeable about the link between human and animal violence and to be able to use that knowledge in order to better serve their client populations...

In New Zealand, the veterinary community and animal welfare organisations have taken a strong position and have been proactive in responding to the growing evidence for the connection between animal abuse and family violence. Dr Ian Robertson (2010), a qualified veterinarian, barrister and Director of International Animal Law, raised the issue of the New Zealand veterinarian's legal responsibilities with regard to reporting suspected domestic violence as a result of evidence of animal abuse in 2010. Since then, the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (2013) has produced guidelines for its members about how to recognise indicators of family or elder abuse in families where animals have been injured and how to report these. Animal-based charity the RNZSPCA takes an educative approach, annually touring their One of the Family programme to years 7 and 8 in intermediate schools. These talks are designed to touch on the issue of domestic violence in the family and to remind the participants that pets are also family members. It encourages children to treat pets as equals and that they have the power to stop the cycle of domestic violence should it be present in their family.

These are significant steps for New Zealand, but small when compared with some international initiatives such as Dr Randall Lockwood's First Strike<sup>2</sup> programme run by the American Humane Society. Following a visit to New Zealand in 2001, Dr Lockwood's work has been a strong influence on the New Zealand initiatives to date (Humphrey, 2002).

### **Animals in family life and their place in the social work 'ecological model'**

Around 68% of households in New Zealand have a pet; many consider their pets to be family members. A companion animal can be the most significant source of social support for a person (Walsh, 2009). It is from the human desire to have a companionable relationship with animals that the need to extend our understanding of the ecological model to include non-human family members arises.

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<sup>2</sup> The First Strike Campaign began in the United States in 1997 to make the connection between animal cruelty and human violence. Its two main goals were to encourage public and professional awareness of the links between cruelty to animals and to humans, and to encourage professionals involved in anti-violence efforts to work together.

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Domestic and companion animals constitute a significant part of the contextual system people are embedded in, and often form significant relationships in human's lives. However, due to the traditional humanist bias of social work, anything other than humans in the human social environment tends to be ignored. As Ryan (2013) notes, '...the fact that domestic animals are part and parcel of the social environment – the world within which social workers practise – should, of necessity, serve to widen the scope of social work's moral compass'. Animals who are considered members of the household can impact substantially on the dynamics of the family system, yet animals are usually absent from social work literature and codes of ethics. To not acknowledge the deep and abiding human relationships with domestic and companion animals seems a failure in the assessment process and makes invisible such significant human-animal bonds. We note that CYF does make mention of animals in the home environment as part of their assessment process, stating 'If there are family pets or animals, are they obedient, trained and well cared for, what are they like around children?' (CYF, 2014a). However, while this is a good start it still does not acknowledge the full extent of the relationship between humans and animals. Social workers who live in households with animals present know that they are an integral part of their family yet may be conditioned or constrained to ignore these non-human members in any family or individual assessment.

A number of researchers argue that the role of animals in family life is significant enough for it to be included as part of the ecological model (Evans & Gray, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Hanrahan, 2011). New Zealand researchers Nikki Evans and Claire Gray argue that an ecological perspective is a useful framework for understanding the reciprocal transactions between animals and humans. Empirical evidence from reports such as *Pets as pawns* (Roguski, 2012) provide a compelling argument that any social work assessment that does not include acknowledgement of all members of a household, including domestic pets and other animals, is incomplete.

## **Animal-assisted activities, interventions and therapy**

Animal-assisted work is generally defined as either an Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) where the intervention intentionally includes an animal as part of the intervention process; or Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) where the animal is deliberately included in a therapeutic treatment plan. There are also what are termed service animals (also sometimes defined as Animal-Assisted Activities – AAA) that are trained to be medical assistants to the disabled (such as guide dogs) (Kruger and Serpell, 2006; Chandler, 2005).

AAI and AAT have been used in New Zealand for at least 50 years. One of the oldest organisations offering AAT is New Zealand Riding for the Disabled (RDA), a non-profit organisation that offers a range of equine related therapies. There are currently 56 RDA groups operating across New Zealand with 3,200 riders experiencing recreational riding, therapeutic riding, equine-assisted<sup>3</sup> psychotherapy and hippotherapy.<sup>4</sup> RDA has its own unit standards for its leaders to ensure consistency across New Zealand in partnership with the Agricultural Industry Training Organisation (AgITO).

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<sup>3</sup> Therapeutic horseback riding utilises equine assisted techniques to enhance physical, emotional, social, cognitive, behavioral and educational skills for people who have disabilities. (All, Loving & Crane, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Hippotherapy is a physical, occupational or speech and language therapy treatment that utilises equine movement (American Hippotherapy Association).

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Training dogs for service purposes in order to support people with disabilities is also well established in New Zealand. The Blind Foundation of New Zealand has been supporting members to live independently with the assistance of guide dogs since the early 1980s. Currently, there are 240 working guide dogs in New Zealand.

Similar to the Guide Dog programme, NZ Epilepsy Assist Dogs Trust (NZEADT) was formed in 2000 to train dogs to support people who have severe epilepsy. Epilepsy Assist dogs are trained to do a variety of tasks including getting phones, activating medic alert buttons, opening and closing doors and in some cases they can also detect seizures. A more recent provider, Assistance Dogs New Zealand Trust, was established in 2008 to train and place dogs with people with a wide range of disabilities. While this type of work is referred to as 'service', in New Zealand these are defined as 'therapy dogs' certified under the Dog Control Act 1996 as dogs, which are trained to assist a person with a disability and may legally enter any public place or premises registered under regulations within s.120 of the Health Act 1956.

AAI, operating primarily in rest homes or hospitals, are also well established in New Zealand, these include:

- Outreach Therapy Pets, which is a joint initiative between St John and RNZSPCA Auckland. The programme involves volunteers and their pets visiting rest homes, hospitals and other health services. Two kinds of therapy are offered through the programme: AAA and AAT. A variety of animals are involved – cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, hens, donkeys and miniature horses. RNZSPCA Auckland helps by providing animal expertise and training.
- Canine Friends Pet Therapy is a New Zealand-wide network of people who share their friendly well behaved dogs with other people and patients in hospitals and residents in rest homes and hospices.

Although there are no requirements in New Zealand to register as a practitioner of AAT there has been a steady growth in the number of independent therapists and charitable trusts offering various forms of AAT to individuals or groups in New Zealand. The following is a range of examples of the type of activity that already exists:<sup>5</sup>

- RNZSPCA working with prisoners at Spring Hill prison in the Waikato, aimed at helping dogs and inmates rehabilitate each other by forming a caring and nurturing bond. Follows similar programmes in the UK.
- The Nelson ARK is a Charitable Trust founded in 2002. They run the Animals, People and Rehabilitative Training (APART) programme that combines dog training and the Healing Species Violence Education/Character Education Programme.
- PAWS Therapy is offered in the Hawke's Bay, where people can interact with animals as part of a mental health recovery (or wellness) programme.
- NZ HALO™ New Zealand's Horse Assisted Learning Organisation based at Dune Lakes Retreat and Equine Centre on the South Kaipara Peninsula. Utilises Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy certified by the Equine Assisted Growth

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<sup>5</sup> This is not intended to be an extensive list and the authors have made no attempt to evaluate the efficacy of any of these programmes or the ethics under which they operate.



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and Learning Association (EAGALA) that involves setting up activities involving horses which will require the individual or group to apply certain skills such as: non-verbal communication, assertiveness, creative thinking and problem-solving, leadership, work, taking responsibility, teamwork and relationships, confidence and positive attitude.

- Also using the EAGALA Model of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Learning is Horse Sense in Otaki, Totara Park in Manukau, HorsePower Aotearoa in Auckland and North River Horse & Humanship Centre in Northland.
- Equine Assisted Emotion Focused Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is also offered at Willow Therapy Farm, 610 Monument Rd, Clevedon, Auckland.
- DayZ-V Animal Assisted Therapy in New Plymouth offers therapy at their Petting Zoo.

As AAT is currently an unregulated field in New Zealand, Evans & Gray (2012) note a word of caution around the need to be sure of the efficacy of the programme and that it operates from an ethical basis. They argue that more research needs to be undertaken to ensure such efficacy and that ethical guidelines are developed to ensure these programmes do not harm the client or exploit the animals themselves. There are, however, some existing codes of practice that have been established overseas, for example in the UK the Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) Code of Practice has been developed in co-operation with a host of agencies (SCAS, 2015).

### **Animal-assisted and veterinary social work**

In addition to the previously mentioned New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies (NZCHAS) there are internationally a growing number of social workers who are incorporating animal-assisted techniques in their work. This is leading to a move to legitimise and support this work with evidence-based practice and education. For example, the Institute for Human-Animal Connection at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work established an animal-assisted social work certificate programme for MSW students in 2004, and also runs a Human-Animal Health Online Professional Development certificate programme (Jackson 2013).

Jackson (2013) explains that animal-assisted social work provides a method of developing trust with clients; she quotes Philip Tedeschi, executive director and cofounder of the Institute for Human-Animal Connection, who maintains that AAI can be used for a range of therapeutic purposes from teaching, socialisation skills, reducing isolation and combating bullying to enhancing physical health. He notes that:

Animal-assisted social work skills might be part of the toolbox of social workers in almost any practice setting. That's not to say each intervention should include an animal, but trained individuals can recognize situations in which animal-assisted interactions might be useful where it's never been used before and can help train other social workers to do so (Jackson, 2013, p. 6).

While we do not advocate a particular approach to developing education programmes in animal-assisted social work there are some existing programmes worthy of further study including:

- The University of Tennessee MSSW Certificate in Veterinary Social Work. Elizabeth Strand, the founder of this programme, has highlighted the four topic areas; 1) the link between human and animal violence, 2) animal-assisted interactions, 3) grief and bereavement,

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and 4) compassion fatigue management (Strand et al 2012). This programme's aim is to integrate animals into social work practice in ethical and sound ways that reflect social work values in order to equip social workers '...to help people through human animals relationships in a variety of settings and through a variety of micro and macro practice methods.' (University of Tennessee 2014, no page number)

- The Arizona State University School of Social Work offers a Treating Animal Abuse Professional Development Certificate in collaboration with the Animals and Society Institute. The certificate focuses on training advanced-level health and human service practitioners to treat children and adults who have abused animals.
- While not offering a specific course, other US-based universities have provided resources for social work students and supported graduate student groups to develop skills through group learning. See for instance the University of New England and NYU's Silver School of Social Work student group promoting AAT in social work.
- In addition, there is also an organisation based in the US, Social Workers Advancing the Human-Animal Bond (SWAHAB), that, as well as offering animal assisted therapy, also lectures and conducts research on the subject and provides social work students with field placements.

## A way forward

Humphrey (2002) advocated the following initiatives: The inclusion of information about animals present in all social work risk assessments, frontline training for social workers and animal welfare inspectors and the development of an MOU between child welfare and animal welfare organisations in New Zealand. While some steps have been made, notably the previously mentioned agreement between the RNZSPCA and CYF, more work is still needed to extend such agreements to all child protection and social service agencies.

To Humphrey's (2002) proposals we would also suggest the incorporation of the following overriding practice principle. That social work practice, education, theory, ethics and values move from being exclusively human centred to include animal rights and welfare and the role of animals as family members within a holistic and comprehensive viewing of the ecological model. We support Evans & Gray's (2012) call for more research on the ethics and efficacy of AAT. We challenge social work educators to research content to include in undergraduate social work programmes the multiple roles of animals in the social work debate – animals as members of the social environment, the relationship between animal abuse and family and domestic violence and the use of AAA, AAI and AAT. This could lead to offering dedicated papers at postgraduate level in social work programmes to encourage more New Zealand-based research and further our understanding of the complex human-animal relationship.

The other area where social work needs to pay attention to animals is in terms of the role of the companion animal as a family member and monitoring animal welfare as an important part of family and individual assessment. Ironically, it has been the animal-based organisations such as the Veterinary Council and RNZSPCA that have led the way in these areas, however, the tide seems to be turning. The recent *Pets as pawns* report clearly established the link between animal abuse and family violence within this country, providing an important marker for family workers to assess the relative safety and wellbeing of the human family members that has led the Women's Refuge and the Department of Child Youth and Family to action.

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We need to develop new social work theory that gives consideration to animals as family members, companions and therapy co-workers, and as indicators of risk within families and society. We urge the Social Work Registration Board (SWRB) and the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) to initiate and support a collaborative project with animal welfare organisations and other professional groups with an interest in AAT to develop a cross-sectorial New Zealand Code of Ethics and Conduct, with the ultimate aim of including AAA, AAI and AAT within their competencies. Further, we could as a profession lobby for the extension of the codes of welfare under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 to include minimum guidelines for the use of animals within AAA, AAI and AAT.

## Conclusion

With its humanistic emphasis, social work is blinkered to focus solely on humans even if animal abuse and neglect is present in real life cases. We are human-centered in our activities and we do not talk about our location within the natural world. This seems at odds with the ecological model focus of social work and the respect for individuals and their subjectivity within the families, communities and social environment within which they are embedded. As Ryan (2013, p. 165) notes, '...animals are routinely regarded as family members by many of those people with whom social workers work, and by social workers themselves in their private lives.' As such, animals are part of the social environment and therefore should be a part of social work's concern.

Despite the current humanistic bias of social work practice in New Zealand, AAT, particularly in the areas of therapy dogs and hippotherapy are well established and have been used in the health and disability areas for some time. Newer modalities, such as equine assisted psychotherapy are also growing in popularity within the areas of mental health and personal growth. This would suggest that social work is ignoring this growing area of therapeutic work. Social work educators and researchers should be introducing students to these new practice possibilities and researching their efficacy in the social work context to extend and deepen the social work moral compass, and enhance and develop the social work toolbox so it is more applicable to the full extent of the lived lives of our clients.

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