



Prince George's “RCMP AAI Victims Services Program”

A Discussion Paper to Explore Building a Local Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI) Hub

Credits

This Project was supported by The Canadian Foundation for Animal-Assisted Support Services (CFAS) so as to acknowledge the value of Prince George's Canine-Assisted Intervention Youth Program. By cross-pollinating local programs we were able to foster a interdisciplinary collaborative culture. The participants shared commitment toward their clients and zeal for building synergistic relationships glistened like a diamond in the rough. Meeting in person made it even more evident that this is much more than a program; it is a community of caring citizens going above and beyond the call of duty in order to make Prince George a healthier and safer place to live, work and play.

On behalf of the Foundation I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants for contributing to this rich dialogue and for expressing your shared aspirations of forming a local cohort and hub. In the words of Henry Ford; “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

With appreciation, Joanne Moss, National Director, CFAS

Canine-Assisted Community Transformation (CACT)

Prince George has a population of approximately 71,973 (Statistics Canada census 2011). It is the largest city in northern British Columbia, Canada contributing to the province's economy and culture as a service and supply hub. Prince George (PG), like other major cities, is plagued by high crime rates and recidivism.

Canine-Assisted Intervention (CAI) programs are growing in popularity throughout Canada due to the versatility of and the impact they are making to address crime and recidivism.

Roadblocks to reintegrating offenders and reducing recidivism may very well become a thing of the past if CAI programs like the 'RCMP AAI Program' make their way into Prince George's justice, corrections, healthcare, and social services sectors.

Consequently; a pilot project was undertaken to explore the feasibility of building and growing a local *CAI Emergency Preparedness Hub* to address crime and recidivism issues.

Paws with Purpose



CAI Hubs could eventually be expanded to include other local Animal-Assisted Activities.

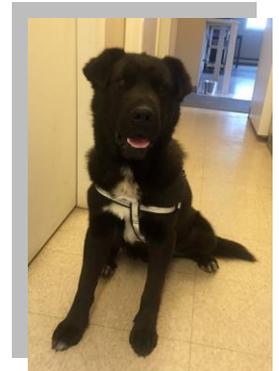
Animals don't impose subjective expectations, therefore interacting with the dogs tends to ground people in the present. Dogs don't label, pressure, or make assumptions about people. Instead, their

mere presence fosters a safe space.

As caring community partners we believe that positive change is not only possible, but probable based on the successful outcomes witnessed and experienced with this program. Not only does the program benefit the target population, it helps to ease emotional stressors of the support workers.

Who We Reach

The RCMP Animal-Assisted Intervention Program (AAI) extends its hand and paws out to victims of crime and witnesses of all ages and walks of life.



Goals

The goals of the program are to:

- Increase the integrity of witness testimonials by redirecting nervous behavior. Shift fear-based thinking to improve witnesses' mental and emotional wellbeing.
- Provide an effective alternative to existing supports for witnesses.
- Achieve the objectives of the RCMP Victim Services Program

External Factors

Generally speaking, a number of external factors must be taken into consideration when developing a CAI Program such as:

- Concurrent services such as psychiatric interventions
- Legal proceedings
- Ancestry, cultural, relational patterns and hereditary influences
- Custody environment and cross cultural peer motivations
- Economic elements within their respective communities
- Lack of education and limited opportunities
- Department of Justice and Corrections policies, legislation and regulations
- The personal beliefs and lived experience of program participants
- The emotional state, physical health, diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities of individuals

Assumptions

Assumptions about the participants and potential outcomes must be managed so as not to impose expectations, or try to produce certain results. CAI is a natural process whereby those facilitating the program allow things to unfold naturally rather than trying to force solutions. The dogs foster positive outcomes simply by being themselves – an important lesson for all to embrace.

What We Invest

Staff from the RCMP and Pawsitive Horizons invest their knowledge and expertise along with victim and court services and case management. Volunteers give of their time and talents to help care for the dogs. Pawsitive Horizons purchases pet health insurance for their dogs from Trupanion at a 10% discount. The Hart Family Vet Clinic provides discounts for veterinary care and dog food.

Behind the scenes; judges, crown attorneys, defense staff, sheriffs, and administrative staff pitch in where possible.

Activities

Canines are being utilized to achieve the objectives of the RCMP Victim Services Program by:

- Lessening the impact of crime and trauma on victims and their families and to assist them in their recovery;
- Enhancing victim safety and helping to reduce the risk of further victimization;
- Increasing victims' level of participation in the criminal justice system;
- Preparing victims acting as witnesses for court proceedings.

Short-Term Outcomes (Three to Six Months)

CAI facilitates accurate testimonials, increases the likelihood of a testimonial, and improves court conditions for people experiencing anxiety, fear, and/or stress. Overall; CAI minimizes stress and affects of trauma before, during and after court proceedings and interviews. Conversations flow more naturally. Silence is indeed golden because of the



allowances made for trauma victims and witnesses to take whatever time needed to hug and pet the dogs

Mid-Term Outcomes (Six Months - One Year)

Over time those that are involved for a prolonged period are better able to cope with testifying. As such, the canine's presence provides stability and familiarity which contributes to their wellbeing.

Long-Term Outcomes (One Year and Beyond)

Moving beyond the pilot stage warrants the development of policies and procedures to access a therapy dog before and during testimonies and other processes. A consistent protocol would alleviate unnecessary roadblocks. Industry gaps such as the absence of national standards for therapy dogs, handler qualifications and security clearances, accreditation of training facilities, and public access also need to be addressed. These gaps present countless opportunities to work together as justice partners to better serve this population.

Impact

The current impact is very encouraging and promising. Incorporating the dogs into victim services settings has proved very beneficial with respect to building a rapport with clients. Canines in the workplace also boost the morale of employees and volunteers.

In order to continue to meet the needs of those we serve and to expand our reach sustainability must be addressed. Moreover, financial strategies need to factor in how to transition canines into retirement.

Other Recommendations



Development dollars are needed to monitor, evaluate and report the long-term outcomes and corresponding impact so as to create best practices.

Research is also in order to track how

CAI programs reduce the burden on the justice system, corrections, social services and healthcare.

Factoring in the cost benefit of programs would help to provide benchmarks for planning, delivering, evaluating and improving this emerging sector.

One things for certain; the short and mid-term outcomes are good indicators that CAI programs build healthier communities and bridges in social justice environments.

Research and Development

In order to build a credibility chain to augment recognition within other sectors it is critical that CAI organizations and practitioners collaborate.



Coordinated efforts could grow a knowledge network across our nation increasing our collective ability to develop a framework for best practices and bench marks to increase confidence in both clinical and non-clinical CAI applications. With these mechanisms in place there could also be a revenue stream and referral based system in place serving everyone's best interest. Additionally, working together could pave the way to job creation.

Filling Gaps and Connecting the Dots



In order to address these gaps and to connect the dots *The Canadian Foundation for Animal-Assisted Support Services (CFAS)* has been working with Prince George stakeholders and the surrounding area to explore developing a local hub model that could eventually be replicated in other communities. Over time the hub model could expand to include

equine programs, Animal-Assisted Activities and barnyard animal programs.

This endeavor is part of a national initiative known as the Victors Program. The program includes a nationwide Victims Services CAI environmental scan funded by Justice Canada.

As the study unfolds this dialogue has proven helpful in testing the theory regarding the potential benefits and feasibility of developing local hubs that could be supported on a national level. [Read more...](#)

Working Together for Mutual Success

RCMP

Victim services, provided in a timely manner, play an essential role in reducing the harmful effects of victimization and re-victimization.



[Pawsitive Horizons](#) strives to promote responsible pet ownership and caring. The majority of our therapy dogs are rescued. While responsible ownership does not solely involve rescues, Pawsitive Horizons strongly supports giving canines a second chance and providing them with the opportunity to realize their full potential.



[The Canadian Foundation for Animal-Assisted Support Services \(CFAS\)](#) invests in the human-animal bond to build healthier and safer communities for both people and animals.

PG CAI Emergency Preparedness Hub

There are many advantages to building local hubs with partnering organizations and service providers. To name a few; local hubs could create nuances that resonate within and meet the unique needs of their respective communities and



stakeholders. Hub cohorts could share knowledge, lived experience, and dialogue around best practices that shape meaningful programs to suit and meet the needs of residents.

Moreover, hubs typically provide the opportunity to share resources and opportunities to build mutual capacity. Rather than competing with one another they could redirect their energy to focus on service excellence.

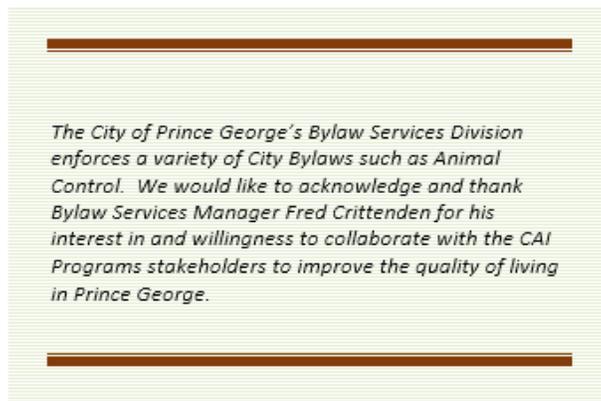
A local hub also makes it easier for donors and volunteers to get involved to support a number of organizations and activities through one engagement channel.

Ask What's Possible not What's Wrong



Among other things, CFAS has worked diligently over the last 18 years to create a single-entry point for the general public, governmental and non-governmental organizations to access and share information and resources. In doing so, this space has contributed toward greater recognition of the human-animal bond within Canada's social fabric as one of its most precious natural resources.

The founder's definition for the bond is that it produces love just for being. *Why is this important? Because love changes everything.*



Rather than dwelling on problematic issues and gaps, the Foundation's approach from the onset has been to ask the stakeholders to consider what's possible. Answering this question is empowering people by enabling them to address weaknesses, fears, gaps, and threats through a pro-active capacity-based lens.

Sharing Capacity – The One Health for People, Pets, and Partners Initiative



CFAS launched its One Health for People, Pets and Partners Initiative trail events in November 2015. Trail events are being introduced to unite and engage stakeholders to build awareness and much needed resources to sustain and develop Animal-Assisted

Support Services across Canada. There is also the potential of connecting people, pets, and partners on trails across Canada by July 1st - Canada's 150th birthday.

The One Health worldwide movement promotes the advancement of healthcare in the 21st century and a strategy for expanding interdisciplinary collaborations and communications in all aspects of healthcare for humans, animals and the environment. This national initiative is CFAS's strategic response.

In addition to the trail events, the envisioned highlights of the One Health for People Pets and Partners Initiative is the development of a national One Health Fund and Annual Grants Program, a One Health Magazine, and a national One Health Mascot. To learn more about this opportunity please click the enclosed [One Health for People, Pets and Partners Initiative](#) link.

In summation, what this would mean for the Prince George CAI community is that building a local hub would not only be possible, but a hub would link organizations and service providers to a national initiative and growing network along with countless emerging opportunities that would make Prince George a safer and healthier place to live, work and play.

Dialogue Disclaimer

This program overview is the culmination of a dialogue that emerged as the contributors developed a program logic model. The logic model was a tool that was used to flesh out the program and to explore the feasibility of program development and becoming part of a local CAI community hub. As such, the content is not a comprehensive review of all aspects of the program. Rather, this paper is a byproduct of conversations among key stakeholders.

Research References

The following set of assumptions form the theoretical platform for Animal-Assisted Interventions with canines.

Literature suggests the human-canine relationship has a greater chance of successful establishment (Geist, 2011; Hines, 2003; Turner, 2011) and provides qualitatively different features (non-evaluative, reduces anxiety, reduces barriers to intervention; Banks & Banks, 2002; Cirulli et al., 2011; Dimitrijević, 2009; Geist, 2011; Sockalingham et al., 2008) compared to human-human relationships.

Strong Research

These differences may be more facilitative to effective intervention, particularly with populations that are resistant to intervention, such as youth populations who have experienced trauma (Cirulli et al., 2011; Dimitrijević, 2009; Parish-Plass, 2008).

Developing Research

The human-canine relationship is anecdotally reported to be 'simpler,' less 'judgemental,' and 'unconditional' relative to human human relationships (Allen, Blascovich, Tomaka, & Kelsey, 1991; Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997; Jorgenson, 2007; Turner, 2011) and therefore may be a more effective therapeutic relationship amongst populations who commonly experience difficulty establishing healthy relationships (Lange et al., 2006). Developing research.

Clients will experience positive cognitive, behavioural, and emotional changes (promotes prosocial behaviour, reduces stress and anxiety, facilitates communication, betters emotional wellbeing, improves self-efficacy, increases motivation; Banks & Banks, 2002; Dimitrijević, 2009; Sockalingham et al., 2008; strong research) as a result of the therapeutic human-dog relationship in addition to achieving intervention goals (Banks & Banks, 2002; Bardill & Hutchinson, 1997; Cirulli et al., 2011; Fournier, Geller, & Fortney, 2007; developing research).

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