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the human-animal

A badly injured child regains strength and self-confidence while riding horseback. A prisoner learns patience and responsibility as he cares for a rescue dog. An elderly woman is arrested for hoarding more than 100 sick and malnourished cats in her home. An abusive husband terrorizes his wife by killing her beloved pet.

Human-animal relationships, both positive and negative, are every bit as complex as those we share with our fellow humans. Yet, until recently, not a single human services academic institution housed a center specifically devoted to human-animal research and education.

That changed with the founding of GSSW's Institute for Human-Animal Connection (IHAC) in 2006. Funded by generous gifts from the American Humane Association and the Animal Assistance Foundation, IHAC had its roots in a single animal-assisted social work course that was added to the MSW curriculum in the late 1990s. That course led to the 2004 creation of the MSW Certificate in Animal-Assisted Social Work, then to development of a highly successful continuing education online certificate called "Animals and Human Health," and finally to the founding of IHAC itself.

Today, with newly appointed American Humane Endowed Chair Frank R. Ascione as its Executive Director, IHAC is poised to become a national and international leader in this cutting-edge field. On these pages Ascione, IHAC Clinical Director Philip Tedeschi, current students and recent graduates share their thoughts on the Institute's impact and its vision for the future.

EXPLORING OUR COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANIMALS

by American Humane
Endowed Chair
Frank R. Ascione, PhD

My more recent research, published in 2007, shows that animal abuse is ten times more likely to occur in homes with domestic violence than in non-violent homes. This work was replicated in a 2008 Australian study that used the assessment methods developed in my research.

Those of us studying this phenomenon also found that victims of domestic violence delayed seeking shelter at battered women's programs out of concern for their pets' welfare. This knowledge has helped to increase the number of shelters willing to admit the pets of the domestic violence victims they house. Additionally, a number of states now include pets in orders of protection or restraining orders. At this writing, similar legislation is pending in Colorado.

My current research progresses on two paths. In collaboration with the Colorado Coalition against Domestic Violence, I recently submitted an application for research funding to the National Institute of Child Health and

I have long been fascinated by the myriad, intricate and sometimes challenging ways the lives of animals and people intersect. Now, as Executive Director of the Institute for Human-Animal Connection, I look forward not only to continuing the excellent training in evidenced-based, animal-facilitated social work practice provided by my colleague, Phil Tedeschi, but also to expanding student and faculty research.

My own research journey began when I participated in a large-scale evaluation of programs designed to teach school-aged children caring and compassion for animals, especially those we call pets or companion animals. Our study demonstrated that empathy toward animals could be enhanced and, even though this was not specifically targeted in our training program, generalized to empathy toward people.

I then turned my attention to the darker side of human-animal relations, cases of animal abuse perpetrated by young people and by adults. Our research found that children who were maltreated or exposed to domestic violence were more likely to abuse animals than were children from non-violent homes. We also found that other children, in spite of their own victimization, were strongly attached to their pets who often served as a buffer or safe haven in the midst of family distress.

Human Development (one of the National Institutes of Health) to better understand the effects of exposure to both domestic violence and animal abuse on children's mental health. I am also working with my GSSW colleagues and the National Adult Protective Services Association to continue examining animal welfare and abuse issues among elder adults.

Meanwhile, I see almost unlimited possibilities for our Institute for Human-Animal Connection in both teaching and research. Our vision for the future includes:

- expanding the integration of animal-assisted curriculum content into each of the five MSW practice tracks (child welfare, high-risk youth, families, adulthood and late life challenges, and community practice)
- enhancing our reputation as a center for the study and dissemination of information about evidence-based practices and scholarly research; this includes developing funding resources for research and community-based programs, developing community collaborations, enhancing doctoral student mentoring and training, hosting conferences and symposia, establishing IHAC as an information clearing-house and facilitating development of an advisory council, our Scholars-in-Residence program and IHAC Fellows
- continuing development of a research focus on problems in human-animal relations, as well as prevention and intervention programs directed at human and animal welfare
- exploring emerging opportunities for research, training and applications in conservation social work, *i.e.*, expanding the social work ecological model to include respectful appreciation of natural environments and resources, nonhuman animals, and environmental health and sustainability
- serving as a model for the ethical treatment of animals in research and practice

We have set an ambitious agenda for IHAC, one that we cannot begin to achieve in isolation. We invite interested alumni and friends of GSSW to learn more about our efforts and to consider supporting our work.

Learn how you can support the Institute for Human-Animal Connection on page 18. Visit IHAC online at www.humananimalconnection.org.

GATHERING CELEBRATES ENDOWED CHAIR INSTALLATION



American Humane Endowed Chair Frank R. Ascione (center) is flanked by (L-R) Provost Gregg Kvistad, Chancellor Robert Coombe, former American Humane Association President and CEO Marie Belew Wheatley, and Dean James Herbert Williams.

Faculty, staff and students joined University administrators and other honored guests in October, 2009, to celebrate the installation of Professor Frank R. Ascione, PhD, as GSSW's American Humane Endowed Chair. The \$2 million Endowed Chair, established in 2008 by the American Humane Association, is the first for GSSW and one of the first in the nation created to explore the expanding field of animal-assisted social work and research the bond between humans and animals. Ascione also serves as Executive Director of GSSW's Institute for Human-Animal Connection, another recipient of substantial financial support from American Humane.

"Joining the GSSW faculty as the first American Humane Endowed Chair is a distinct honor and an unparalleled opportunity," says Ascione, whose family was on hand for the event. The installation, which included a lecture by Ascione on his recent research, was followed by a gala reception.

Before coming to GSSW, Ascione was a professor in the Psychology Department at Utah State University in Logan, as well as an adjunct professor in Family and Human Development. He is an internationally acclaimed researcher, lecturer and author.

"Dr. Ascione is the perfect scholar to lead the kind of rigorous research this endowment will allow," says Dean James Herbert Williams. "American Humane and DU have forged a dynamic partnership to advance research nationally into the human-animal bond."

Ascione also serves on the Child and Animal Abuse Prevention Advisory Council of the Latham Foundation, is past president of the Southwestern Society for Research in Human Development, and is a member of the cadre of experts for The American Psychological Association's Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family. He has been a visiting professor at GSSW since December, 2008.

Why should social workers study human-animal interactions? And why are an increasing number of people in all helping professions choosing to add animal-assisted interventions to their clinical skills?

Consider that more American children currently live in a home with a companion animal than with a father. Early proper care of animals has been found to be supportive of healthy child social-emotional learning and a protective factor in healthy child development. Conversely, cruelty to animals has been correlated with the development of anti-social attitudes and increased risk for violent behavior.



Across the lifespan, the quality of people's relationships with animals appears to be an important measure of their quality of life.

In therapeutic settings, animals can enhance and expedite rapport-building and trust. The presence of animals stimulates communication with individuals who are socially marginalized, isolated or no longer trust human relationships. Animals provide a socially normative source for touch and physical contact while reducing blood pressure, anxiety, loneliness and

depression. They have been shown to decrease the debilitating impacts of trauma and stress-related conditions, as exemplified by the psychiatric service dogs that assist combat veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Animal-assisted therapy can address cognitive and perceptual deficits and assist clients to self-regulate, develop empathy, provide inspiration and motivation, socialize, help maintain focus and attention, reduce aggressive behaviors and increase self-esteem. Caring for an animal can reduce neediness and learned helplessness and encourage optimism, a sense of mastery and control in life. Animal-assisted activities are a stimulus for exercise and provide social support as companions, social facilitators and adjunct therapists.

In short, animal-assisted social work is a relational empowerment and experientially based approach that is applicable across multiple settings and populations.

Since 2004, GSSW's Certificate in Animal-Assisted Social Work (AASW) has offered concentration year MSW students

the opportunity to integrate animals into diverse social work environments and populations. The certificate includes two sequential courses, along with a specialized field internship where students apply their developing animal-assisted skills.

Some AASW students train certified therapy dogs, graduating together as professional human-canine therapy teams. Other students choose training toward national certification as an equine therapist, humane educator or conservation social work specialist. Partnerships with the American Humane Association, animal control and humane care specialists, leading assistance dog organizations and the Denver Zoo expand the experiential and service-learning opportunities open to our students.

A fundamental goal of our AASW Certificate is that our students understand the interrelationship between themselves, their families and their communities, including the natural environment and its non-human inhabitants. For the first time this academic year, our students had the opportunity to enroll in a course that included two weeks of experiential service learning in Kenya. This innovative course explored the relationship between poverty, displaced persons and the unsustainable activities of poaching, the bushmeat trade and their detrimental impact on wildlife and local communities.

Another key element of the AASW Certificate is the tremendous responsibility we bear to ensure proper care for the animals we include in social work practice. If an intervention is not beneficial to an animal, it is by definition ethically problematic and non-therapeutic for people. The Institute for Human-Animal Connection therefore adheres to national and international peer-reviewed standards and best practices set forth by the Delta Society and the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations.

In recent years, the Institute for Human-Animal Connection has also reached out to a national and international audience with its continuing education certificate, "Animals and Human Health." The certificate, which includes three online courses, followed by a capstone session taught on the DU campus, is offered to professionals in a wide variety of fields. Students completing this certificate can earn a total of 35 CEUs.

This spring, for a second time, I am teaching an enrichment course on the human-animal bond through DU's University College. When this course was offered for the first time in Fall Quarter, it quickly filled to capacity, once again demonstrating what fascination these powerful relationships hold for us.

As the Institute's Clinical Director, I take pride in the outstanding clinical education we are providing both on-campus and online. Like my colleagues, I am committed to ensuring that GSSW remains at the forefront of this rapidly evolving, ground-breaking field.

For information about our MSW Certificate in Animal-Assisted Social Work and our continuing education certificate, "Animals and Human Health," please visit GSSW online at www.du.edu/socialwork and click on "Programs of Study."

TRAINING & ETHICAL COMPETENCIES

by Clinical Associate Professor Philip Tedeschi, MSSW, LCSW-CO

HUMAN-ANIMAL PARTNERSHIPS

Working as a Team



At Colorado's Arapahoe County Department of Human Services, **Amber Garrison-Ahmed (MSW '08)** and Banjo are a team, so much so that the dog's name appears alongside Amber's in the signature line of her e-mails. The two have been together since Amber's concentration year, when she trained Banjo as her therapy dog while earning her Certificate in Animal-Assisted Social Work.

Although Banjo's behavior kept him from becoming a companion for people with disabilities, the non-profit Freedom Service Dogs matched him with Amber because he showed potential as a therapy dog. Sure enough, Banjo quickly became an integral part of Amber's internship, facilitating her work with children experiencing adoption-related problems. Learning to trust and bond with Banjo helped them develop skills they could take with them to their future adoptive homes.

Shortly before Amber's graduation, Arapahoe County offered her (and Banjo) a job. Today, as an intake caseworker investigating child abuse and neglect, Amber finds Banjo's help invaluable in interviewing children. "They open up a lot more when he's there," she explains, adding that he's at his best with autistic children and those with other special needs.



As if their day jobs weren't enough, Amber and Banjo recently won an award for volunteering at Kidz Night Out, where they provide evening supervision for foster children while their foster parents enjoy a night off. This spring, Banjo adds a third project to his busy work schedule, appearing with children in videos that Arapahoe County will show to prospective adoptive parents.

Creatures Great and (Very) Small

Carri King-Bussard, MA, LPC, lifts two skittish guinea pigs from their carrier. "I wonder what it would be like to feel this small and scared," she says to the child she's counseling. Hyper-vigilant by nature, the animals race inside the dark recesses of their "pigloo" enclosure. "Where is *your* safe space?" King-Bussard asks the little girl. As therapist and client discuss how to calm Orville and Wilbur, the child's own traumatic story slowly begins to unfold.

King-Bussard, whose private psychotherapy practice is called Animal-Assisted Counseling of Colorado, enrolled in GSSW's online continuing education certificate, "Animals and Human Health," when it was offered for the first time in 2006-07. Today, she incorporates a variety of animals into therapy sessions, depending upon the needs and behaviors of her clients. Besides the guinea pigs, King-Bussard owns three trained therapy dogs. She's also a licensed provider of equine-assisted therapy for Larimer County Social Services, working with horses from the Fort Collins non-profit, Wings to Change.

"Horses are great mirrors for kids to interpret their own behaviors," she explains. "And the power of a horse can be humbling for the big, tough kid who needs to put aside his bravado before he can work on his problems."



Not Just Another Pretty Horse

Yoda, a beautiful seven-year-old Norwegian Fjord Horse, is hard to resist. "His presence alone starts the process of breaking down a youth's resistance as they ask questions about him," says PhD candidate **Maureen Fredrickson MacNamara, MSW**. But, she adds, Yoda provides "much more than a point of interest" in the equine-assisted therapy sessions she conducts.

Sensing that the young person attempting to ride or drive him is a beginner, Yoda can be quite resistant in his own right. That gives MacNamara a chance to address the youth's reactions as they occur. As her client tries out new behaviors to get Yoda to cooperate, the horse's responses provide valuable feedback.

In addition to her clinical work with at-risk youth, MacNamara has incorporated animals into programs targeting such diverse populations as adults with developmental disabilities, trauma survivors, and professionals studying leadership development and organizational management.

Widely respected in the field of animal-assisted interactions, MacNamara is Past Vice President of Programs for the Delta Society and created its internationally recognized Pet Partners Program. She's a founding member of the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association and a member of the Certification Board for Equine Interaction Professionals.

"It has been my pleasure to be one of the people who helped to advance the field by developing resources, creating collaborations between multidisciplinary organizations and professionals, and bringing credibility to a new and unique form of intervention," says MacNamara.

An Activist for Animals and People

Foundation year MSW student **Shelby McDonald** first saw the horrific effects of animal abuse as a middle school Humane Society volunteer. It hit her even harder when, years later, she adopted Kozmo Kramer from a shelter and realized the border collie/greyhound mix had cigarette burns on his back. Still, it took a while before McDonald knew she was destined for a career that would help not only abused and neglected animals, but people as well.

"I started off wanting to be a vet," she recalls, "but then I realized you can't change anything for animals until you change people." That led McDonald to an undergraduate psychology major, and eventually to a doctoral program in the same field. Seven months into the doctorate, she realized something was missing.

"Being an activist for vulnerable populations is what drives me as a person," she says. McDonald took a two-year break from academia, then discovered GSSW and its Institute for Human-Animal Connection. Now she's completing her first-year internship at IHAC and couldn't be happier. "GSSW is the only place I could go and do exactly what I wanted to do," says McDonald. "This has been an amazing experience for me!"

McDonald's internship centers on IHAC's Colorado LINK Project, an effort funded by the Animal Assistance Foundation to examine how animal abuse may be related to interpersonal violence and other crimes. The project's goal is to enhance prevention and treatment methods used by law enforcement, human services, animal-control and other professions, establishing Colorado as a national model for handling abuse cases.

Since pet-owners tend to think of their pets as family members, McDonald explains, "violence against pets is an act of family violence." Social workers who don't make that connection may miss crucial information about child abuse and other interpersonal violence within the families they serve.

The key, says McDonald, is education—something she sees herself providing in the future as a professor and scholar in the field.

Bridge Kids Making a Difference

If you were in Denver's public housing neighborhoods last summer, you might have noticed something unusual: teams of elementary school kids wearing official-looking orange vests and using enormous glue guns to attach labels to storm drains. Their efforts, aimed at keeping residents from dumping toxic substances into the drains, were part of an environmentally focused humane education program implemented at GSSW's Bridge Project in affiliation with the international organization, Roots & Shoots.

A program of the Jane Goodall Institute, Roots & Shoots is a youth-driven global network whose service learning projects promote care and concern for animals, the environment and the human community. **Mandy Jeffries (MSW '05)**, Health Case Manager at the Bridge Project, first heard about the program from Professor Philip Tedeschi. Jeffries registered as a Roots & Shoots group leader, then worked with "ecoteams" at three Bridge sites to identify and remedy a neighborhood problem. "I wanted the kids to take ownership," says Jeffries, "so I let them come up with the plan."

The children first mapped the storm drains in their communities and tested water using kits donated by Denver-based non-profit, FrontRange Earth Force. When they researched where water from the storm drains ended up, the kids were surprised to discover it flowed straight into the city's rivers and creeks without ever passing through a water treatment facility. The group sought the help of Denver's Public Works Department, which provided the glue guns, tools and even the snazzy orange vests. On a hot July day, the children split up into teams and glued warning labels on as many drains as they could.

Bridge undertook three other Roots & Shoots projects during the past year, led by GSSW student interns earning GSSW's Certificate in Animal-Assisted Social Work. **Kelsey Hopson** helped a group of children raise money to support a Kenyan girls' soccer team. **Devon McClurken** led a contest to create a design for reusable shopping bags and a neighborhood trash and recycling inventory they hope will convince the City of Denver to provide recycling services in the city's public housing neighborhoods. Both Hopson and McClurken plan to graduate from GSSW in June.

"The children who participate in these projects really take pride in what they accomplish," says Jeffries. "They know they're making a difference in their own neighborhoods and in other communities as well."

GSSW's Bridge Project has served children and their families in Denver's public housing neighborhoods since 1991. Learn more at www.du.edu/bridgeproject.



DOCTORAL STUDENTS HONORED

The second annual doctoral program reception, held on January 8 at Craig Hall, provided an opportunity for faculty, staff and administrators to get better acquainted with GSSW doctoral students and learn more about their research. The reception also honored **PhD candidate Kate Trujillo**, who received the JFK Partners CoLEND (Colorado Leadership Education in Neurodevelopment and Related Disabilities) Fellowship Award from the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado (CU) School of Medicine. CU

Assistant Professor M. Kay Teel, PhD '05, Trujillo's mentor and herself a former recipient of the Fellowship, presented the award.

The JFK Partners CoLEND Fellowship was established in the 1960s to support research and training in the field of developmental disabilities. Calling the fellowship a "great opportunity" to explore animal-assisted interventions with children with autism, Trujillo works as part of an interdisciplinary team that includes a pediatrician and a clinical psychologist, as well as physical, occupational and speech therapists.

Other PhD candidates honored at the reception included **Jessica Haxton, MSW, LCSW**, recipient of the 2009 GSSW Dissertation Support Award for her research on interactions among chronically ill older adults and their caregivers.

Speakers at January's doctoral program reception included (L-R) Associate Provost for Graduate Studies Barbara Wilcots, PhD; JFK Partners CoLEND Fellowship recipient Kate Trujillo, MSW '01; University of Colorado Assistant Professor M. Kay Teel, MSW '80, PhD '05; Walter LaMendola, PhD, Director of the PhD Program; and Dean James Herbert Williams, PhD.

PhD candidate Susan Roll (far right) received the 2009 Feminist Scholarship Award from the Council on Social Work Education at their Annual Program Meeting in November. The award recognizes innovative scholars who contribute to the advancement of feminist knowledge as it pertains to social work theory, research, practice and education. Roll's paper was entitled "The Coping Strategies of Low Income Women Using Work Support Benefits from a Socialist Feminist Perspective." Pictured with Roll is her dissertation advisor, Associate Professor Jean East.



PhD Candidate Ziblim Abukari received the Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation/New York Community Trust Dissertation Fellowship for 2009-10 in support of his dissertation entitled "Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Academic Achievement among Ghanaian Youth." He's pictured here during his recent return home to Ghana to begin his dissertation data collection.