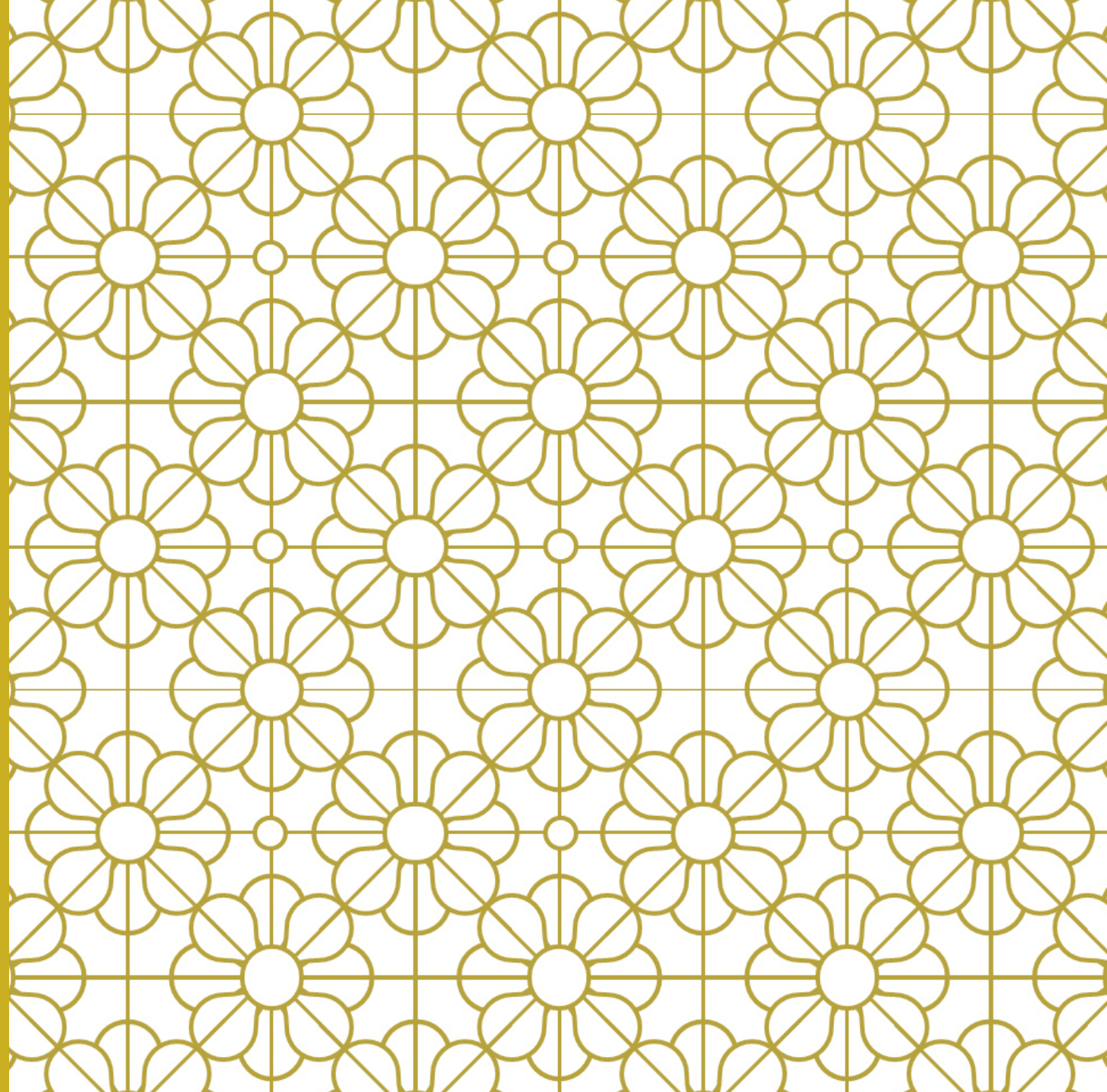


Pawsitive Connections: A Self-Guided Woofbook for Animal-Assisted Therapy in Social Service Agencies

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May 2025



INTRODUCTION

Purpose: provide a workbook that social service agency staff can use to incorporate animal-assisted therapy (AAT) into their practice with middle and high school-age youth.

Pawsitive Connections “Woofbook” reflects the focus on dogs, hence “Pawsitive” instead of positive, & “Woofbook” instead of workbook.

Objectives:

- ❖ Define AAT.
- ❖ Explain how AAT can benefit youth.
- ❖ Offer activities for ages 12 through 17.
- ❖ Emphasize safety & well-being of youth and staff using AAAIP competencies.
- ❖ Protect the safety & well-being of participating dogs.

Note: This Woofbook is not for service dogs or emotional support dogs.



SOCIAL WORK RELEVANCE

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) features only one article on AAT- focusing on equines, not canines.

The Code of Ethics can be applied as follows:

- ❖ *Importance of relationships* - among staff, youth, & dogs.
- ❖ *Competency* - having skills to know when/when not to involve the therapy dog.
- ❖ *Service, dignity, & worth of a person* - knowing who is best suited for AAT & how.
- ❖ *Social justice* - being an advocate for resources & skilled social workers.

METHODS: LITERATURE REVIEW

Pawsitive Connections reflects a robust literature review covering:

- ❖ History & rationale of AAT.
- ❖ Populations who benefit from AAT.
- ❖ Challenges associated with AAT.
- ❖ Current AAT curriculums & programs.
- ❖ Cultural considerations.
- ❖ Public policy.

METHODS: DESIGN

The self-guided *Woofbook* was selected instead of a facilitated curriculum for staff flexibility.

The format includes:

- ❖ Title page with the name of this publication & author.
- ❖ Contents page.
- ❖ Introduction (dedication, objectives, & purpose).
- ❖ Rationale for self-guided format.
- ❖ Vignette (application example).
- ❖ Interactive activities & guidelines.
- ❖ Additional online resources.

WOOFBOOK ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

Paws-On Activities

The following chart provides activities that can be mixed and matched depending on your clients' goals. These activities are designed to:

- ❖ Cultivate empathy and nurturing behavior
- ❖ Encourage the expression of emotions
- ❖ Enhance perspective-taking
- ❖ Foster trusting relationships
- ❖ Increase self-esteem
- ❖ Promote mindfulness and reduce stress
- ❖ Strengthen communication skills
- ❖ Support emotional regulation

Emotional



- **Kind Words, Kind Hearts**- Encourages client to pick out positive adjectives that describe themselves and the therapy dog.
- **Fetch Your Feelings**- Client will identify a big feeling they are experiencing and the therapy dog will retrieve a ball that matches that feeling. Clinician will explore that feeling with client. Repeat as needed.
- **Yoga/Mindful Petting**- Client will pet the dog for 1-2 minutes and have them focus on the dogs' breathing, texture, warmth, and presence. Alternatively, encourage movement by having the client and dog do yoga poses together.

Physical



- **Follow the Leader**- Have the client lead the animal through a small obstacle course (e.g., tunnels, cones, ramps).
- **Same Dog, New Tricks**- Have the client teach the dog various tricks.
- **Walk and Talk**- The clinician and client go on a walk with the therapy dog while discussing thoughts, feelings, or challenges.

Social



- **Kindness and Care**- The client is guided through grooming, feeding, or caring for the therapy animal.
- **Journal/Storytelling**- Client will write about their relationship with the therapy dog as well as the importance of this relationship. Reflect and discuss.
- **Threads of Friendship**- Client chooses beads that represent strength, love, safety, hopefulness, and happiness. Encourage the client to make a bracelet that represents their relationship with the dog.

Therapy Tails

Read each vignette and consider how AAT may benefit the client. Identify and write down at least three benefits your client may experience after working with your therapy dog.

Example: Nadine is 14 years old and recently started experiencing strong feelings of anxiety after learning that her best friend is moving to a new school. She is constantly worrying about the possibility of making new friends and has expressed feelings of sadness and isolation.

Benefits:

1. Building coping skills
2. Encouraging emotional expression
3. Improving social interaction skills

Vignette 1: Josiah is 12 years old and has been living with a new resource family for the past three months. His resource parents have reached out to you with some concerns about Josiah having a hard time connecting with the family. They explain how Josiah keeps to himself and has difficulty expressing his emotions.

Potential benefits:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Vignette 2: Devin is 16 years old and struggles with social interactions, regulating her emotions, and becomes easily overstimulated in loud environments. Her teachers worry that the specialized support she receives at school is not enough as she continues to struggle with socializing and communicating her feelings.

Potential benefits:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

EVALUATION OPTIONS FOR SELF-GUIDED WOOFBOOK

Option 1:

Group discussions by agency staff re: benefits & challenges.

Option 2:

Self-reflective questions re: value & application.

Option 3:

Assessment scale of 1 & 2, with 1 being “not helpful,” & 2 being “yes helpful,”

- ❖ The *Woofbook* met my expectations.
- ❖ The materials were clear, engaging, & helpful.
- ❖ I am confident I can use the activities.

IMPLICATIONS & COMMITMENT

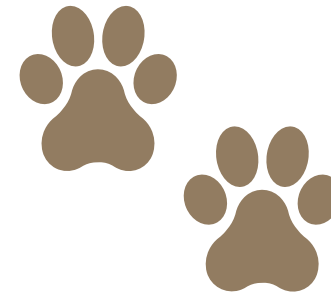
Implications:

- ❖ NASW should reassess how AAT & the human-animal bond align to the major principles of the Code of Ethics.
- ❖ Social workers must consider & respect clients' cultural beliefs related to AAT as well as prioritize & advocate for ethical & safe practices as they relate to animals.

Lessons Learned:

The *Woofbook* required a strong purpose & persistence to:

- ❖ Transform an idea into an outcome.
- ❖ Set goals & navigate challenges.
- ❖ Believe in the value of Pawsitive Connections.



DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This *Woofbook* is dedicated to the memory of my beloved dog, Lovey, who crossed the rainbow bridge too soon.

Thank you to my family, friends, & thesis committee who helped me achieve this milestone.



THESIS STUDENT

REFERENCES

Six pages of citations provided the foundation & validation for

***Pawsitive Connections: A Self-Guided Woofbook
for Animal-assisted Therapy
in Social Service Agencies***

Cite As: *Pawsitive Connections: A Self-guided Woofbook For Social Service Agencies Providing Animal-assisted Therapy To Children And Youth* By Sydney Dozier; California State University, Long Beach School Of Social Work; Distance Education Cohort- Ventura.