

U of S leads therapy dog research project

SASKATOON – Research led by a University of Saskatchewan (U of S) team confirms the healing effects of therapy dog treatment.

In recognition of National Addictions Awareness Week from November 15-21, Colleen Dell of the U of S and her colleagues, Darlene Chalmers from the University of Regina and James Gillett from McMaster University, are releasing three fact sheets detailing research that they undertook at addictions and mental health treatment sites in the Saskatoon Health Region.

Although the programs differ at each of the three test sites, and cannot be easily compared, the data collected clearly showed that the clients experienced therapeutic benefits in their healing from the therapy dogs at all sites.

“Researching this area is not easy,” said Dell. “There are so many factors that need to be accounted for. That said, we are confident in sharing that the dogs can have an impact on an individual’s healing journey in a multitude of ways, from providing comfort through to increasing therapeutic alliances with service providers.”

The research project was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and is a partnership with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program, Saskatoon Health Region’s Calder Centre Residential Addictions Treatment Program, Child and Youth Mental Health & Addictions Pet Therapy Program, and the Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan.

“Better understanding about how the dogs impact clients is important information for us to have,” said Crystal Petryk, clinical social worker in Children’s Mental Health Services, Saskatoon Health Region. “From the systematic understanding we gained by being involved in this research, we can now start to explore additional ways to incorporate animals into our programs and evaluate such interventions.”

“There is so much to be learned, and from other species too, such as horses,” added Chalmers. “The theme of Addictions Awareness Week this year is ‘Addictions Matters.’ And it is precisely for this reason that our team has stepped outside the box, so to speak, to research an intervention that can potentially support long-term recovery.”

These three facts sheets are the first in a series to be released by the team, including at equine-specific sites. The fact sheets are now available at:

Calder Centre Residential Addictions Treatment Program – <http://tinyurl.com/AAICalder>

Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan – <http://tinyurl.com/AAAMACSI>

Child and Youth Mental Health & Addictions Pet Therapy Program – <http://tinyurl.com/AATSHR>

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