

**Voluntary project “For Others” provides recreation and social interaction by implementing the activity assisted by animals****Projeto voluntário “Pelos Outros” proporciona recreação e interação social mediante implantação da atividade assistida por animais**

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**Fernanda Gosuen Gonçalves Dias**

Docente do Curso de Graduação em Medicina Veterinária da Universidade de Franca  
Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Animal da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: fernanda.dias@unifran.edu.br

**Daniel Kan Honsho**

Docente do Curso de Graduação em Medicina Veterinária da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: daniel.honsho@unifran.edu.br

**Adoniram Thomaz**

Discente do Curso de Graduação em Psicologia da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: dinoadestramento@bol.com.br

**Lucas de Freitas Pereira**

Docente do Curso de Graduação em Medicina Veterinária da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: lucas.pereira@unifran.edu.br

**Messias Gonçalves Pessinato**

Discente do Curso de Graduação em Medicina Veterinária da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: messias.pessinato@gmail.com

**Alex Roberto de Oliveira**

Discente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Animal da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: alexr\_medvet@hotmail.com

**Gabriela Baldini Ganaqui**

Discente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Animal da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: gabrielaganaqui@gmail.com

**Cristiane dos Santos Honsho**

Docente do Curso de Graduação em Medicina Veterinária da Universidade de Franca  
Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Animal da Universidade de Franca  
Universidade de Franca (UNIFRAN), Av. Dr. Armando Salles Oliveira, 201, Parque Universitário,  
CEP: 14404-600, Franca (SP), Brasil  
E-mail: cristiane.honsho@unifran.edu.br

**ABSTRACT**

Animal-assisted activity is characterized by informal visits to schools, daycare centers, nursing homes and hospitals with the presence of animals, trained or not, for recreation with educational, social and motivational purposes. This activity can be applied in isolation or in association with other complementary ones such as therapy and animal-assisted education. In this context, in the activity assisted by animals several species are used, but the one of choice is the canine, due to indole and dressage facility. It is essential that the participating animals have an updated health certificate so that they do not transmit infectious diseases, in addition to the importance for their own health. Scientifically, it has been proven that human-animal interaction provides social reintegration, reduction of anxiety, loneliness, depression and psychological disorders, in addition to improving self-esteem, reasoning and concentration. Thus, the association of these adjuvant factors with conventional therapies favors the quality of life and longevity of the participating individuals. In view of the promising results attributed to the activity assisted by animals, the objective of the present work is to describe the performance of the social project "For Others" in the implementation of this modality with the help of trained dogs, helping the elderly, children, disabled, sick and homeless people in the city of Franca (SP) and region. The results of this voluntary category demonstrate satisfaction not only from participants in the activity assisted by animals, but also from their families and caregivers.

**Keywords:** Co-therapist. Quality of life. Trained dogs. Voluntary. Welfare.

**RESUMO**

A atividade assistida por animais é caracterizada por visitas informais em escolas, creches, lares de idosos e hospitais com a presença de animais, adestrados ou não, para a realização de recreação com propósitos educacionais, sociais e motivacionais. Esta atividade pode ser aplicada de forma isolada ou em associação com outras complementares como a terapia e a educação assistida por animais. Neste contexto, na atividade assistida por animais utilizam-se diversas espécies, mas a de eleição é a canina, em decorrência da índole e facilidade de adestramento. É imprescindível que os animais participantes estejam com o atestado de sanidade atualizado para que não transmitam doenças infectocontagiosas, além da importância para a própria saúde. Cientificamente, já foi comprovado que a interação homem-animal proporciona reintegração social, redução da ansiedade, solidão, depressão e distúrbios psicológicos, além de melhorar a autoestima, raciocínio e concentração. Assim, a associação desses fatores adjuvantes às terapias convencionais favorece a qualidade de vida e longevidade dos indivíduos participantes. Diante dos resultados promissores atribuídos à atividade assistida por animais, o objetivo do presente trabalho é descrever a atuação do projeto social "Pelos Outros" na implantação desta modalidade com o auxílio de cães adestrados, auxiliando idosos, crianças, deficientes físicos, enfermos e moradores de rua da cidade de Franca (SP) e região. Os

resultados desta categoria voluntária demonstram satisfação não só dos participantes da atividade assistida por animais, mas também de seus familiares e cuidadores.

**Palavras-chave:** Co-terapeuta. Qualidade de vida. Cães adestrados, Voluntário. Bem-estar.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Animal Assisted Activity (AAA) is a complementary activity that aims to promote recreation and entertainment for children, adults and the elderly with or without physical and mental problems, using animals of various species, especially trained dogs (NORDGREN; ENGSTROM, 2012; CHERNIACK; CHERNIACK, 2014).

Thus, AAA is characterized by promoting direct contact between the animal and the individual, aiming for entertainment and distractions, which directly provides better quality of life through proximity, being an activity that encourages countless positive factors such as joy, enthusiasm, self-esteem, responsibility, patience, reliability and motivation. It also improves well-being, emotional and psychological state, social relationship, physical and cognitive aspects, good mood and survival, besides stimulating the execution of physical exercises. Furthermore, it reduces loneliness and depression, reducing anxiety and increasing mood (OLIVA et al., 2010).

In this context, science has proven that conviviality and contact with animals help in the systemic release of hormones, increasing the production of endorphins and serotonin and decreasing cortisol rates, predisposing a reduction in blood pressure and heart rate, in the same way that it reduces aggression, encourages memory, learning, diction and reasoning (DOTTI, 2005; CESJCD, 2007; CHAGAS, 2009; HOLT et al., 2015).

In sick individuals, the AAA is able to deflect the focus of the disease, so that the use of medications can be reduced, improving vital signs and the patient's quality of life, in addition to reducing treatment costs (MARCUS, 2012; CHERNIACK; CHERNIACK, 2014).

The AAA sessions are spontaneous and can be carried out periodically by volunteers, of short duration, in nursing homes, nursing homes, rehabilitation and physiotherapy clinics, schools, universities, daycare centers, dental offices, penitentiaries, hospitals and homeless people (EVANS; GRAY, 2012; REED; FERRER; VILEGAS, 2012).

Usually the AAA can be associated with music, dance, art, games, and other entertainment (EVANS; GRAY, 2012). In this sense, music therapy and other recreational activities promote relaxation of the body and mind for older adults with depression and anxiety, as well as social involvement and communication between people with Alzheimer's disease, self-esteem, decreased depression and loneliness and reduced forgetfulness. In addition, involvement in these activities can be useful, especially for the elderly who face challenges associated with aging, how to transition to collective residential installation (HOLT et al., 2015).

In AAA there are no therapeutic actions involved; therefore, it does not require medical assistance in person and no concern with analyzing the final results of patients (MATUSZEK, 2010; EVANS; GRAY, 2012; FERREIRA et al., 2016; HOAGWOOD et al., 2017; MARINHO; ZAMOS, 2017) as performed during animal-assisted therapy sessions (DOTTI, 2005). However, AAA and animal-assisted therapy can be applied alone or in combination and both are beneficial to both patients and employees working in healthcare facilities (BARKER et al., 2005; FILAN; LLEWELLYN-JONES, 2006; HOLT et al., 2015).

The AAA should be avoided for individuals allergic to hair, with animals phobia (PEREIRA; PEREIRA; FERREIRA, 2007; EDWARDS; BECK, 2010; MATUSZEK, 2010) and those who show aggressive behaviors which can hurt the animals (MARINHO; ZAMOS, 2017).

The animals that promote AAA are referred to as co-therapists (KOBAYASHI et al., 2009; FERREIRA et al., 2016; HOAGWOOD et al., 2017) and among them, dogs, horses, rabbits, turtles, hamsters; however, dogs are the most commonly used (HOAGWOOD et al., 2017) for showing natural affection and gratitude for humans, for being easily trained and for allowing direct contact (BECKER, 2003; ANDERLINI, 2009; MATUSZEK, 2010; CALCATERRA et al., 2015). The Individuals undergoing AAA can use their own pets during the proposed activities (MATUSZEK, 2010).

All animals used in AAA, regardless of species and size, must be submitted to periodic sanitary management (updated vaccination and desvermifugation schemes, control of fleas, ticks and lice, regular dental treatment and periodic complementary examinations to rule out the suspicion or presence of infectious diseases), plus cut and sanded nails (VACCARI; ALMEIDA, 2007; MATUSZEK, 2010; HOLT et al., 2015; MARINHO; ZAMOS, 2017). In this context, the veterinarian is the only professional capable of guaranteeing the health of the participating animals, of perceiving behavioral changes in them, of selecting the best species, breed and individual to develop recreational activities (GIUMELI; SANTOS, 2016; SILVA et al., 2017).

In addition to the health of co-therapists, it is also extremely important to value their behavioral health, selecting loving, sociable, calm and submissive animals that do not show fear, aggressiveness and those who know how to deal with unexpected attitudes of patients, especially those aggressive. The selected animals must also have the characteristic of not being frightened and exalted by tactile stimuli (kisses and squeezes), auditory (intense sounds and screams), olfactory (strong smells) and visual (walking sticks, walkers and wheelchairs) (MARINHO; ZAMOS, 2017).

The age of co-therapists is not a limiting factor in their selection, but their physical and behavioral characteristics, however, puppies and seniors should be spared from intense and stressful work (MARINHO; ZAMOS, 2017).

Before each therapeutic session, co-therapists must undergo baths. In longhaired animals, periodic grooming is ideal, followed by daily brushing to remove devitalized hair. The food offered to co-therapists must be of good quality and offered at least two hours before the visit and therapy, thus reducing the chances of emesis and defecation at the site. Small amount of snacks can be used during therapies, to facilitate and stimulate activities proposed to animals (SILVA et al., 2011).

The co-therapists should receive periodic training by trained professionals, especially veterinarians and trainers (EVANS; GRAY, 2012).

In view of the various promising factors related to AAA, the objective of the present work is to describe the performance of the social project “For Others” implementing this recreational activity in Franca city (SP) and region, with the help of trained dogs.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

For Others Project (Figure 1) is a voluntary project, created in 2017, supported by University of Franca (UNIFRAN - Franca, SP) and coordinated by professors from the Undergraduate Course in Veterinary Medicine, from the Postgraduate Program in Animal Science and a Psychology student at this same institution. Still, it is assisted by several academics and graduate students of these courses.

The objective For Others Project is to provide, on a voluntary basis, recreation and social inclusion for the elderly, children, disabled, sick and homeless people in the city of Franca-SP and region, with the help of trained co-therapist dogs, as described by Nordgren and Engstrom (2012) e Cherniack e Cherniack (2014).



**Figure 1:** Logo For Others Project (Franca-SP).

Currently, the For Others Project assists several schools, daycare centers, nursing homes, homeless people and participates in social events in Franca, and the meetings for the implementation of the AAA are previously authorized and scheduled by the managers of these locations.

The five dogs, among them male and female Golden Retriever, mixed breed and Blue Heeler, are trained by a specialist and have health certified by a veterinarian. Periodically undergo routine examinations, vaccination, de-worming and dental treatment, following the recommendations of Marinho and Zamos (2017).

All dogs participating in the project have a calm temperament and are submissive to the handler's commands, providing total confidence in human-animal interaction. Co-therapists, during AAA sessions, are always accompanied by a veterinarian and trainer so that the proposed activities can be safe and promising both for the participants and for the volunteer animals themselves. In addition, before each meeting they rest, bathe, cut their nails, brush their teeth and wear their uniforms and personalized collars and, between meetings and training sessions, they are subjected to a period of rest.

Each AAA session lasts an average of an hour and a half and, in most cases, is enriched with live music and dance, thus involving the participation of students from different courses at University of Franca, encouraging not only support and respect for others, but also the importance of teamwork and multidisciplinary between professional areas.

The proposed recreational activities involve direct contact with animals (Figures 2 and 3), in addition games that stimulate physical exercise (Figure 4), reasoning (Figure 5), self-esteem and socialization such as taking the animal for a walk on a leash and overcoming obstacles (Figure 6), throw objects for co-therapists to seek, offer snacks to animals, hold rope for animals to jump, among others. Project participants also chat and dance with stakeholders. In this way, during the activities, individuals demonstrate gradual tranquility and confidence to approach and interact with dogs and show motivation, discipline, respect and group work (Figure 7), as well as other favorable points described in the scientific literature (OLIVA et al., 2010; CHERNIACK; CHERNIACK, 2014; HOLT et al., 2015).





**Figure 2:** Direct contact of elderly woman with trained dog during activity session assisted by animals, promoted by the Social Project for Others in a nursing home in the city of Franca (SP).



**Figure 3:** Direct contact of physically disabled child with a trained dog during a session assisted by animals, promoted by the Social Project For Others at a school in the city of Franca (SP).



**Figure 4:** Activity session assisted by animals with children to stimulate physical exercises, promoted by the Social Project For Others at a school in the city of Franca (SP).



**Figure 5:** Activity session assisted by animals to stimulate children's reasoning at a school in the city of Franca (SP), promoted by the Social Project For Others.



**Figure 6:** Elderly man taking trained dog for a walk during a session assisted by animals, promoted by the Social Project For Others in a nursing home in the city of Franca (SP).



**Figure 7:** Activity session assisted by animals to encourage discipline and group work by children at a school in the city of Franca (SP), promoted by the Social Project For Others.

The activities promoted by the For Others Project in schools and day care centers are carried out both in classrooms and in courtyards, with the purpose of changing the daily routine of children and demonstrating that in all environments it is possible to learn something new. Thus, in line with the scientific literature (DOTTI, 2005; SILVA et al., 2017), it is possible to detect that human interaction with animals stimulates interest in carrying out activities that previously seemed monotonous, since the animal becomes a reference at the time of AAA.

According to reports by educators, caregivers and family members, the majority of individuals who participate in AAA with For Others Project, show an increase in self-esteem and socialization, which consequently reduces situations of loneliness, depression, anxiety and fear, as described by Oliva (2010). In addition, they show interest in participating in these sessions again.

The AAA also positively benefits employees of schools, daycare centers and nursing homes, who demonstrate complete relaxation during recreational activities, similar to that described in the scientific literature by several researchers (STUMM et al., 2012; FLEISHMAN et al., 2015).

In addition the AAA implementation, the For Others project participants give educational lectures at schools and universities, they collect food and various products for donation, distribute blankets in winter and assist in social events involving children with autism and Down syndrome. In this sense, the project constantly contributes to the 2nd (Zero Hunger), 3rd (Good Health and Well-Being) and 10th (Reduction of Inequalities) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) advocated by the United Nations (UN) in the 2030 Agenda (<http://www.agenda2030.org.br/>).



**3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Given the methodology implemented and the results obtained by the Social Project For Others with AAA, it is accepted that this modality of human-animal interaction, when applied in accordance with ethical guidelines and principles, shows promising results in restoring and maintaining physical health, mental and behavioral aspects of those involved, as well as employees and family members around them.

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