

# ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS

*– Professionals Embrace the Power of the Dog*



Sara Karlberg & Helena Eriksson



## FOREWORD BY AUBREY H. FINE

Being involved in the field of AAI for close to 5 decades, I have witnessed the transformation of animal assisted interventions from being a very misunderstood approach into becoming a more respected form of complementary therapy. When I first became involved in working with children, alongside my menagerie of animals, my discovery was truly serendipitous. I never realized that my accidental discovery would change my professional and personal life. I quickly witnessed firsthand the tremendous value of incorporating animals in my work. The animals not only helped me connect to my clients, but also supported their involvement and engagement. Over the past twenty years the field has not only evolved but validated through scientific research what many of us have known for years: animals are good for our well-being.



My early engagement in the field encountered few resources that were available to help educate and train people to safely and effectively work alongside animals to help humans. In this sense this book is a true gem and filled with many practical suggestions based on years of clinical experiences. The book provides a comprehensive overview of canine-assisted interventions and offers readers with best practices and ideas that they can immediately put into place. The chapters follow a logical progression from the early chapters that provide information about the benefits of the human animal bond and to understanding canine behavior and their unique attributes that make them excellent therapy animals. These chapters are followed with chapters discussing best practices for training and what professionals need to know and practice to become more effective with their canine partners. The book is easy to follow and is beautifully illustrated with photos that capture the heart of the human animal bond.

Today we see so many more people attempting to incorporate animals therapeutically in diverse therapeutic settings. This book will provide its readers with a comprehensive source of recommendations and suggestions of how to apply animal assisted interventions. I strongly recommend this as a resource for all practitioners, new or old. The book will help transform their awareness of the capacity of animal assisted interventions and the healing benefits derived. Enjoy and learn from the read!

You won't regret it!

Aubrey H. Fine Ed.D.  
Professor Emeritus- Licensed Psychologist  
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

## FOREWORD BY M.J. ENDERS-SLEGERS

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Sara and Helena for this lovely, sympathetic book about dogs, vulnerable people, hope and unconditional love. It offers a testimony of wonderful events that have taken place in the lives of many people, with the help of great dogs and their devoted humans.



This book is very well written and addresses many topics comprehensively. The illustrations are charming. It gives insight into the knowledge and practice that dogs and 'handlers' need to acquire to carry out animal-assisted interventions in a safe way, thereby enhancing people's well-being and safeguarding animal's welfare. It will surely inspire readers to undertake training with their own dogs and experience the many benefits of doing so, as written about extensively in this book.

This book provides a wonderful introduction into our field of animal-assisted interventions. Sara and Helena have done a great job explaining terminology with the help of IAHAIO's White Paper (2018 version) and emphasizing the importance of dog-friendly, positive training. They focus on animal wellbeing which needs to be guaranteed in all cases. At the same time the importance of an excellent handler-dog bond is emphasized: the dog's wellbeing and the safety of dog, handler and client depend on the way the handler knows his/her dog's behavior and emotions. The handler is the advocate for the dog.

I hope you have a lot of fun reading and working with this book. Sara and Helena are trainers of dog-teams, of humans and dogs, and their many admirable qualities are evident in this book.

Enjoy!

Prof.dr. M.J.Enders-Slegers  
President IAHAIO



Dedicated to Cerberus and Alfonz.  
It all started with you.



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# 01

## **A BOOK ABOUT HOPE, UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, AND FURRY COATS FOR DRYING TEARS**

Imagine you're a little kid again. You're very sad. Maybe someone was mean to you. Maybe your parents were arguing or someone at school said some really horrible things. You can practically feel the hot tears running down your cheeks. But suddenly there's someone at your side. A wet nose pressing against your face. Eyes searching for contact. Soft fur between your fingers. A tail softly wagging, like a magic wand banishing the evil. Your tears dry up and you start to play together.

Now imagine you're a teenager. What were you like back then? How did you feel? Did you feel like you were on top of the world one moment and falling into the abyss the next? Maybe there wasn't a particular reason or maybe it was because of some difficult situation you were going through. Imagine lying in your teenage bedroom. Maybe you have posters on your walls. Maybe an old, well-loved teddy bear from your childhood. And you're very sad. You feel alone; like nobody understands you. When the feeling of anxiety almost paralyzes you, suddenly someone is there again. You feel that same wet nose on your cheek. The soft, furry coat has more than enough room to absorb all your tears and fears. Maybe your BDF, Best Dog Friend, snuggles up in your lap or just curls up at your feet; your trusty guardian angel. You are no longer alone.

The years go by, a graying muzzle and that final farewell as your guardian angel gets their wings. A new soft nose, maybe even two come into your life. The size, texture, and temperature of that nudging nose may vary. It may be accompanied by eyes with a look of puppyish playfulness or endless wisdom. A long tail or a tiny little stub. Long, short, or rough and curly hair. Your dog, in whatever shape and form, is always there by your side throughout your life.

And then one day, you are old. Now imagine being really, really old. You've lived a long life and you're starting to feel tired. Maybe you're finding it hard to walk. In your head, you still feel 20, but your body has become a hindrance, you can no longer take care of a dog. You reminisce about the dogs you've loved throughout the years and it makes you feel sad and a bit lonely. Maybe you're living in a senior citizens' home with many other elderly people. Maybe family or friends come to visit you once in a while. Maybe you don't recognize those visitors sometimes. But then, suddenly, one day you feel that nose again! That wet nose. Those shiny, sprightly eyes. That happy wagging tail. Maybe you haven't met this particular dog before, but oh, how the memories come flowing back! Windows that have seldom been opened suddenly let in the light, the memories come pouring in, so clear and bright, like it was yesterday. Maybe you laugh and smile for the first time in ages. And maybe you even get a good night's sleep, without any sleeping pills or painkillers.

Many of us have dogs at our sides throughout our lives. Some of us, for one reason or another, can't have a dog, and for others, life without a dog is something abstract and unimaginable. The joys of sharing life with a dog are simply



Kompis is a certified therapy dog and school resource dog. He works in Västerås with his handler, Sara Karlberg.

amazing. And when that dog is not just a family member but your work colleague as well; that is an absolute dream for many.

And that's how it was for us. Dogs have always been a major part of our lives. They've helped us when things were tough and guided us through both the good times and the bad. And that got us thinking. Just imagine if we could help other people feel that same hope, love, and happiness that our dogs helped us feel. What if there was a way to reach those who can't have a dog themselves, so they too can experience these feelings of joy. Imagine if our dogs could help others, not just ourselves, to grow, to feel better.

#### **And you know what? It's possible!**

This book is about what we in Sweden call "social working dogs", dogs who work together with their handlers with individuals or groups of people. Although other types of assistance dogs (e.g. guide-, service-, hearing dogs, etc.) also fall

under the umbrella term “social working dogs” in Sweden, we have not included them in this book. After discussing this with professionals in the field, we have decided to retain the umbrella term “social working dogs” in the English version of this book. We will explain more about this in a later chapter.

This book gives you examples of what to think about when selecting and training a dog for this field of work, how to integrate a dog in the workplace, and lots more useful information. You’ll also meet several dog teams featured throughout the book in “In the Spotlight”. But this is also a book about hope, unconditional love and complete trust between human and canine, and, of course, interpersonal relationships. And about the value of being seen and heard, and about furry coats for drying tears.

The social working dog sector is a young field that is growing rapidly worldwide. Writing a book in these exciting times when things are changing so quickly is quite a challenge. We have tried to focus on the current situation – 2019 – and have specifically chosen not to include too many details that we think may change in the near future. In general, our perspective is based on the situation in Sweden, but we hope that this book will inspire those of you living in other countries as well.

Maybe you’re interested in training your own dog or maybe you and your dog are already working as a team. Or maybe you work somewhere that is interested in introducing a dog in the workplace, or maybe you’re simply just a little bit curious. Whoever you are, we really hope you enjoy this book.

Sara Helena

Svea is a certified therapy dog and school resource dog. She works in Gothenburg with her handler, Annika Isoniemi Blom.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT - ANETTE AND MOLTAS

Dog's name: **Moltas**  
Dog's breed: **Labradoodle**  
Dog's age: **5 years**  
Trained as: **(Child) therapy dog, care dog**  
Handler's name: **Anette Jirbäck, pediatric nurse and dog handler**  
Workplace: **Astrid Lindgrens Barnsjukhus/SABH  
(advanced outpatient pediatric care) and play  
therapy, Lilla Erstagården (children's hospice)**  
Target group: **Severely ill children as outpatients**

**Job description:** Moltas's job is to be there for support and as a distraction, to motivate, encourage, activate, spread joy, increase self-confidence, well-being, and quality of life, as well as help decrease anxiety, fear, depression, etc. For a very sick child who has been in the hospital for a really long time and has to go through difficult treatments, the dog offers enormous support. The child can cuddle and play with the dog who doesn't make demands or judge. The child can play at their own pace, despite the tubes and devices they are often hooked up to.

Moltas's visits can take on very different forms. Sometimes we focus on food since some children stop eating due to the treatment they're going through. The child can feed Moltas different foods that they can eat too. Moltas usually gets fed with a spoon.

By giving Moltas "shots" and putting band-aids on him, we can go through events together, and Moltas can even come along as a distraction when tests have to be taken. We do fun things, like play games, hide things, throw a ball, and go for walks. Moltas makes the kids laugh, gets them excited, which in turn makes the family happy. It means so much to the family to see their child happy, even for just a short moment.

We often visit the terminally ill children and their parents for many months. The children have a friend who never disappoints and is with them until the very end. With Moltas's help, we're sometimes even able to have discussions about things that are otherwise too difficult to talk about.

It helps the children better understand and process the fact that they are going to die. For example, one girl wanted Moltas to play dead every time we visited her. Maybe that was her way of dealing with her fears? Moltas and I have also been to talks with the family of the deceased child, at their request, as support for the siblings.

**Favorite exercise:** None in particular. All of the visits are so worthwhile, it's difficult to pick just one.

**Fondest memory:** There are so many wonderful memories, it's really hard to choose. But when a child's parents ask if they're in pain and the child answers: "I can't hurt when I'm with Moltas," that really touches my heart. And when parents send me a text message telling me how happy they were to see their child smiling. What they're going through is horrible. It feels good to know that we can give them that little bit of happiness.





# 04

## CHOOSING A DOG

Finally, we come to the part about dogs. Our amazing four-legged colleagues, but also our best friends. We get a lot of questions about whether all dogs can be social working dogs, which breeds are most suitable, and what students should think about when selecting their next dog. Most of them already own a dog when they contact us, but some want our help in choosing a first, suitable individual.



### THE DOG'S SUITABILITY

If you're contemplating becoming a social working dog handler, you can register for an assessment test with one of several organizations that offer this type of training. They will then assess your dog's skills and how likely it is that your dog will succeed in the training and in a possible future job as a social working dog. If you, on the other hand, are thinking of buying a puppy or adopting an adult dog and would like to work in this amazing sector in the future, then there is a lot for you to think about. There are many things to consider when choosing a specific dog that will increase your chances of them enjoying the work and the two of you functioning well as a team.

*"The dogs at Stallyckan give unconditional love and happiness, increase self-confidence and motivate you to exercise. If needed, the dogs can provide distraction during social interactions with other people. When the focus is on the dog, the demand for immediate contact between people decreases, and our participants feel more at ease."*

**Jeanette Kobilsek, CEO, Stallyckan**

### Calm, social, and well-socialized

A suitable social working dog is calm, social, and well-socialized. Well-socialized means that the dog is used to many different environments and does not become stressed in new places and situations. They also need to be well-balanced when it comes to activity and passivity. A dog's potential future in this type of work seldom depends on the breed of the dog; it's the characteristics of each dog as an individual that matter. An assessment like this can't be made based on stories or over the phone. A trained professional must observe the dog and their behavior. What it comes down to is that the dog should enjoy approaching and engaging in social interaction with people they don't know. They should enjoy being petted and, preferably, even beg for more.



Isa.

### SELECTING A BREED AND TYPE OF DOG

Whether a dog is suited to work as a social working dog mainly depends on each dog's individual personality. The dog's personality, interests, and characteristics are determining factors. This being said, there are, of course, breeds that will in general have more suitable individuals than others. Dogs have been bred for various purposes and different breeds have retained varying amounts of their original traits. In our opinion, too many dogs are currently being bred with appearance as the main "characteristic". This can eventually lead to both physical and mental problems. When choosing a breed, it is extremely important that you take time to research the breed. And if you choose a mixed breed, then taking time to learn about each breed in the mix is just as important. A cross between a herding and a hunting breed does not automatically mean that the dog's hunting instincts will be less prominent, therefore making the dog more likely to stay close to the handler. It may turn out to be the exact opposite, or even that both characteristics develop in full force, leaving you with a herding-obsessed, hunting maniac...

#### Taking a look at dominant traits

Dog breeding is a jungle, but you don't need to be a geneticist to choose a breed that is suitable for the job of social working dog. Looking at the dominant traits of a breed is sufficient. Of course, every breed has advantages and disadvantages.

The retrieving breeds often like to work and they cooperate well with humans. They usually love to fetch, which is often one of the main tasks in this job. But some individuals can display such high intensity during the work that it becomes a problem. In general, a social working dog needs to have a rather low activity level. Many individuals from these breeds also need to have another type of occupation in addition to that of a social working dog. For example, tracking or some other activity that satisfies their, often strong, natural hunting instincts. Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, and Flat-Coated Retrievers are often great social working dogs if they can learn to find a balanced activity level.

#### The calm sighthounds

Sighthounds on the other hand are often easy-going dogs, easy to handle and with a polite demeanor. Many of them are, in fact, very social, especially certain breeds. But they can also be very reserved, need lots of physical exercise, and not



### DID YOU KNOW ...

! ... a study has shown that therapy dogs have both higher cortisol levels and higher arousal levels during their working session than before the session. Cortisol is an essential stress hormone but having a high level for a long period of time can be dangerous. The study also showed that cortisol levels are higher in dogs working relatively short sessions compared to those working longer sessions. Handlers found it difficult to take proper breaks with the dog during the shorter sessions which therefore made them more intensive. The cortisol levels were also higher when dogs had more work sessions per week. According to the researchers, this doesn't necessarily have anything to do with negative stress; it could very well be that the dogs are just so excited to be working. Additional and more in-depth research is needed to confirm the results. By giving the dog enough time to recuperate, relax, and play, you can prevent stress levels from becoming too high and, therefore, negative. Negative stress often leads to chronic stress.<sup>8</sup>



# 09

## **THE CERTIFIED SOCIAL WORKING DOG**

After you have completed your training and passed the exam, you can finally start working. Some students might already have a dog team job waiting for them when they graduate, while others will have to start looking for work. As you have understood by now, the training and planning doesn't stop here.

But as a dog handler, you also have another important job: to make sure that your dog is happy and healthy. They should love their job for their entire career. It is your responsibility to always put your dog first.

## THE DOG'S WELL-BEING

Even when you have completed your training, the dog's well-being should always come first. Sometimes the dog's and the client's wishes don't match up, and it's your responsibility to take care of the dog in these situations. This can be simple circumstances, such as the dog getting tired while it would be good for the client if you kept on working. It would be easy to be tempted to stay in this situation; after all, you see how happy the person is with your presence. For the dog's sake, you need to learn to stop a session in a nice, polite manner. Maybe the dog can take a break while you and the participant look at photos and reminisce about things you've done together.

### What about your dog?

As we mentioned before, it is very important to choose a workplace that your dog will thrive in. There are big differences between working with young children, people on the autism spectrum, psychotic individuals or elderly people with dementia. Things like the participant's or group's activity level, physical abilities, and the ability to talk all affect the dog's experience. It's important to practice these things with your dog during your training or before you start working with new target groups. If your dog is not used to working with calm, quiet participants, then they need to learn this. To prevent the dog from becoming stressed, you must give them clear instructions about where to be and how to behave. Your support will ensure that your dog feels safe.

If the dog doesn't seem to like performing a certain task or working with a particular target group, then it's your responsibility to not put your dog in these situations. All social working dogs are trained to work in a multitude of different circumstances, but different dogs like and are good at different things - just like us. Find out what your dog excels at; this way you and your participants are guaranteed to get the most out of your time together.

## BREAKS AND VACATION

I'm sure you are aware that you, as a handler, need breaks and a vacation once in a while. But remember that your dog needs them, too. Your dog must be able to rest and recuperate during the working day and go out for a walk without any expectations regarding their behavior. In some workplaces, the participants go along on walks as part of the schedule; if this is the case, make sure you also

take a little walk before or afterwards. This gives the dog a chance to really relax, without having the uniform on or having to take the participant into account. Hopefully, your dog loves their work, but they still need to have regular breaks to recuperate and rest during the workday.

You must also plan vacations for your dog. The more you work, the more vacation time the dog will need. Dog handlers who work a lot, such as full-time, often need more than one dog. You might have five weeks of vacation per year, but your dog might need more than that. Once again, it is your responsibility to make sure your dog gets a well-deserved break from work.

A bitch in heat will need to be off work during that period. And in case she develops a false pregnancy, she might need even more time to get back to her old self again.



Pajaz.

## HOBBIES AND SPARE TIME

Your dog also needs hobbies and leisure time, just like you. Social working dogs have the same basic needs as any other dog. They need time to just be dogs. Maybe they want to dig a hole under a bush in the yard, watch the neighbors, gnaw on a bone, go for long, relaxing walks or practice some type of dog sport.

How many hobbies your dog needs will depend on their workload and on what makes your dog feel good. Breed(s), age, and interests are determining factors. Since the job of a social working dog demands a lot in terms of calmness, balanced activity levels, and obedience, it might be nice for the two of you to do something completely different on your days off. Race around an agility course, for example, or take long, wonderful walks in the forest.

You know your dog best. Make sure they get enough leisure time filled with the things they need. And don't forget to take time to recuperate.

## THE DOG'S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITION

Your dog can enjoy a long working career if you help them stay in excellent physical and mental condition. Keeping your dog's skills in tip-top shape - in other words: continuing to train for both new and old assignments - is no different than you keeping up-to-date on the target group you're working with.

As we mentioned before, a bitch in heat should stay home, as should pregnant bitches. A false pregnancy can cause behavior changes and you must be attentive to this; give the dog more time off if needed. It goes without saying that if your dog is in any way out of balance, they should not work. You are responsible for giving the dog time off as soon as you notice they're not feeling well.

You can train the dog's stamina, their understanding of the exercises, and their physical condition. By maintaining the skills needed for different exercises, your dog will feel more secure at work. Working on exercises for concentration and steadiness will help your dog generalize their behavior. This will give them a larger toolbox and better understanding of how you want them to behave at work.

## Health care and physical exercise

Both people and dogs have bodies that are meant to be active and in motion. Keeping your dog in good physical condition also plays a key role in their mental

health. A dog who is both physically and mentally fit will have more stamina and be able to concentrate longer.

In general, a social working dog's job does not include a great deal of physical activity. Plus, our dogs often get rewarded with treats, so you'll have to keep a close eye on their weight and plan physical activities with them. Consult a physical therapist and let them check your dog to see what they need more of. Physical exercise also helps build deep core muscles and prevent potential injuries; just as it does for us humans.

## Training strength and stamina

Running, swimming, and using a water treadmill builds strength and stamina. Riding a bike with your dog enables them to run faster and longer and really improves their condition while at the same time satisfying their need for exercise. Other great exercises include walking through brushwood, tall grass or snow, balancing on objects, and walking over cavalettis.

## ”I REMEMBER”



*I remember when my Corgi, Rut, and I met an older woman who suffered from advanced dementia. She had tunnel vision and had lost the ability to speak. During one intervention, Rut was sitting on a chair beside her. Because the woman couldn't see Rut, I gently took her hand and helped her feel Rut. With her hand feeling the fur, she looked up at me and said loud and clear: 'Meeeoow' and laughed out loud. Everyone has a sense of humor.*

**Tarja Kohlin, dog handler**