



Great Grants and Initiatives

Grantor: Animal Assistance Foundation

Grantee or Initiative: University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work

Amount: \$150,000 Period of Grant Award: Fall 2005 to Fall 2008

The University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work was awarded seed money to establish the Institute for Human-Animal Interaction, and Animals and Human Health: A Certificate in Animal-Assisted Therapy Activities and Learning. This program provides students in the Graduate School of Social Work with the skills to incorporate animals in their therapy sessions, for the benefit of both the client and the animal.

The Institute, the first of its kind to be housed in a school of Social Work in the U.S. incorporates “research, training and education, technical assistance, and advocacy projects from a human-service and animal-welfare perspective”. The program also addresses the link between human violence and animal cruelty. The dogs used in the program come to the students through animal shelters or Freedom Service Dogs, thus providing homes for unwanted pets. According to Professor Christian Molidor, “Animal-assisted interventions offer social workers and other professionals a unique and powerful way to connect with some of society’s most vulnerable members” and GSSW is leading the way in this field. This program is extremely popular with the GSSW students and a new online session was added in spring 2007.

The Bridge Project-Pawsitive Connections at DU is currently collaborating with the Institute and with Freedom Service Dogs on a program to help at risk children work with dogs that are in need of training before being placed in an adoptive home. The program teaches the children empathy and patience as well as the self confidence that comes from learning a skill well.. The dogs learn manners and become more adoptable. The Bridge Project also incorporates Animal Assisted Therapy into their program by using therapy dogs to encourage children to read. The creation of the Institute for Human-Animal Interaction was the genesis for establishing an Endowed Chair and a \$1,000,000 grant from the American Humane Association.