



Zorgbeest

Guidelines for farm animal visits in an AAI-context with a focus on animal welfare (chicken, rabbit, goat and pig)

“The field of Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) lacks formal universal guidelines on the ethics of human-animal relationships (Antonites & Odendaal, 2004). It is presumed that most HAI organizations emphasize that animal welfare be protected and enhanced where possible (Preziosi, 1997; Santori, 2011). However, it is understood that specific guidelines are difficult to formulate because research has not identified the precise criteria necessary to guarantee welfare. Consequently, AAA (Animal Assisted Activities) and AAT (Animal Assisted Therapy) organizations each set their own guidelines and regulations, making standardization of the field difficult.”

Applying guidelines for Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) in practice is not always easy. Various factors, such as the financial aspect, internal regulations, support from management, staff motivation, the existing infrastructure, the type of patients, the animals' health, etc. can make following the guidelines difficult. With these guidelines, we hope to create a basis for starting a project that comes as close to the ideal situation as possible. Once the project is up and running, the guidelines can be used as a support for ongoing evaluation and determining where, if necessary, modifications must be made. Each project is unique and “the perfect AAI project” does not yet exist. The goal is to strive for the best possible circumstances in your specific care environment.

Starting up an AAI project on your own is impossible. Various actors must be invited to a meeting to review these guidelines. According to experience, education, interest and the role each would like to play, the guidelines will be progressively allocated (as far as possible). For this reason, the guidelines have been categorised per subject:

1. Selection of the farm animals
2. Medical screening and behaviour monitoring of the farm animals
3. Competences of the involved actors
4. Training the farm animals
5. Human-animal interaction
6. Hygiene
7. Animal housing and therapy room
8. Insurance & responsibilities
9. Information distribution
10. AAI & AAT visitor sessions
11. Stress
12. Safety
13. Contraindications for the implementation of an AAI programme
14. Protocols



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The guidelines are partially based on the contents of the book “From chicken to AAI-chicken: the successful introduction of farm animals in a welfare and care context” of Annelies Flamang (2015).

Contrary to the guidelines for dogs that visit various care settings with their handler, the guidelines for farm animals have been drawn up for farm animals who permanently remain in their natural setting (both in- as outside) and who - without moving them – are called upon regularly in AAI sessions in the presence of a therapist (AAT) or a patient counsellor (AAA).

Farm animals, with a few exceptions aside, experience transportation and new environments as stressful. It is therefore appropriate to have patients visiting the animals (e.g. a trip to the farm) instead of the other way around. One can also opt to house farm animals in the garden of the care facility.

In order to ensure the wellbeing of the farm animals and people involved in the farm animal project, it is strongly recommended to assign one person who largely takes over responsibility of the animals.

The more all of those involved are taken into account, the better the chance that both the people and the animals will benefit, and the more sustainable the project will be.

GOOD LUCK!