



**ANIMAL LEGAL
DEFENSE FUND**

HUMANE EDUCATION POSITION STATEMENT¹

Animal Legal Defense Fund Position Statement



¹ Please note, attorneys prepared this position statement. Neither humane educators nor researchers have authored or reviewed its content. This position statement broadly summarizes complex areas of research in order to explain the basis for ALDF's policy position on humane education. This statement should not be relied upon as a substitute for empirical research. Furthermore, many of these research areas are still in their infancy; ALDF's policies will evolve as new information regarding humane education programs and practices becomes available.

INTRODUCTION

Humane education has the potential to inspire compassion and positive socioemotional development in individuals who have not committed animal cruelty, as well as individuals who have committed crimes against animals (IWCCs)—whether those individuals are children or adults. Based on research discussed in the following paragraphs, the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) supports the development of humane education programs for the general population and for individuals who have committed offenses against animals, to prevent animal cruelty from occurring, and to assist future animal cruelty cases and their outcomes. Little research has been conducted to determine the efficacy of exposure to humane education as a method to improve perspectives and increase compassion to animals by individuals who have harmed them. However, research has shown that exposure to humane education programs can improve young people’s perspectives toward animals; therefore, these results may be extrapolative to other populations. For this reason, ALDF calls for research to verify the effectiveness of humane education programs for IWCCs. ALDF also calls for research into the discovery of other preventative and intervention-based measures to improve IWCCs’ perspectives toward, and their relationship with, animals. In the meantime, ALDF supports IWCCs’ exposure to humane education programs and related intervention and preventative measures, until more conclusive data on such programs for IWCCs is available.

This statement will define the scope of humane education and briefly outline its history. This statement will then explore the laws that govern humane education’s utilization and different types of humane education programs that are available in the United States (US). This statement will also address research that assesses the efficacy of humane education programs and any shortcomings in existing data.

DEFINING HUMANE EDUCATION

Humane education generally refers to education programs that are designed to cultivate compassion for humans, animals, and/or the environment.² Humane education exists to foster creative and critical thinking skills within people, which enable them to make benevolent choices and enhance respect for the natural world and its inhabitants.³ The material it covers and the methodologies it utilizes vary depending on context, with some programs focusing specifically on cultivating empathy for animals.⁴ The setting and demographics of program participants vary, and range from primary and secondary classroom students to individuals whom courts have sentenced to such programs as a result of an animal cruelty-related criminal conviction.⁵

² Kimberly Spanjol, *Teaching Process Over Content: Addressing Underlying Psychological Processes and Biases in Learners When Including Non-Human Animals in Education and Social Justice Discourse*, 1 INT’L J. HUMANE EDUC. 67, 68 (2020).

³ What is “Humane Education” and How Can it Save the World?, ANIMALS ASIA (Sept. 1, 2015), <https://www.animalsasia.org/us/media/news/news-archive/what-is-%E2%80%9Chumane-education%E2%80%9D-and-how-can-it-save-the-world.html>.

⁴ See Melanie Wagner, *Humane Education: Perspectives of Practitioners on Program Evaluation Efforts and Analysis of Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Empathy in Two Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs* (May 2014) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Antioch University) (on file with Antioch University).

⁵ See Zoe Weil, *Bringing Humane Education to Classrooms: An Interview With Meena Alagappan, Esq.*, INST. HUMANE EDUC. (Dec. 3, 2020), <https://www.humaneeducation.org/bringing-humane-education-to-classrooms-an-interview-with-meena-alagappan-esq/>; D.C. CODE § 22-1001(a)(2)(A), (a)(3) (2008); OR. REV. STAT. § 167.350(4) (2010).

In spite of their differences, ‘humane education’ and ‘animal care education’ are often inappropriately conflated. ‘Animal care education’ refers to teaching programs designed to impart technical knowledge about the level and type of care animals need to maintain their health and wellbeing, as well as appropriate and responsible ways of interacting with animals. Animal care courses may include information on understanding animal communication, (particularly expressions of fear, discomfort, or pain), best practices for training animals, and species-specific maintenance needs. If the animal cruelty in question stemmed from an ignorance of the way to properly care for or interact with animals, animal care education may be the more suitable solution rather than humane education.

HISTORY OF HUMANE EDUCATION

The humane education field originated in the late nineteenth century, with twenty states mandating humane education in schools early in the twentieth century.⁶ In 1909, Illinois became the first state to enact a compulsory humane education law, which included sanctions for noncompliance.⁷ However, with weak enforcement and shifting education ideals, states slowly repealed their humane education mandates.⁸ The Great Depression encumbered the Humane Education Movement, which resulted in few available resources to fund humane education programs as well as a renewed focus on animal control to manage the rise in stray animals.⁹ The onset of World War II exacerbated these circumstances, as the culture around education changed from holistic character development to mentally preparing young boys for war.¹⁰ Though humane education continued to lose popularity during World War II, momentum resurged after the War, and humane societies and animal shelters began paving a new era for the movement.¹¹ As a result of these organizations’ efforts, approximately 2,000 humane education programs currently exist in the US.¹² Animal care and control agencies—i.e., SPCAs, humane societies, and animal rescues—and organizations created for humane education purposes predominantly coordinate these programs at municipal and county levels.¹³

CURRENT HUMANE EDUCATION LAWS

Ten states have laws that either mandate or strongly encourage public schools to incorporate humane education curriculum or values into their instruction.¹⁴ Each of these statutes is unique in form and function. Oregon and Washington, for example, highlight a special

⁶ Sarah M. Bexell et al., *State of Humane Education in the United States: 2018-2019*, 1 INT’L J. HUMANE EDUC. 120, 123 (2020).

⁷ Lydia S. Antoncic, *A New Era in Humane Education: How Troubling Youth Trends and a Call for Character Education are Breathing New Life into Efforts to Educate Our Youth About the Value of All Life*, 9 ANIMAL L. 183, 201 (2003).

⁸ See generally Wagner, *supra* note 4. Humane education laws have been repealed in Alabama: ALA. CODE § 16-60-4 (repealed 1991); Illinois: 105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/27-13 (repealed 1967); Michigan: MICH. COMP. LAWS §§ 380.1170, 380.1171a (repealed 1996); South Dakota: S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 13-33-8 (repealed 1995); Wisconsin: WIS. STAT. § 40.46 (repealed 1968); and Wyoming: WYO. STAT. ANN. § 21-266 (repealed 1969).

⁹ See generally Wagner, *supra* note 4.

¹⁰ See *id.*; Bexell et al., *supra* note 6, at 123.

¹¹ *Id.* at 123–24.

¹² Tania Signal et al., *Teaching Kindness: The Promise of Humane Education*, 17 SOC’Y & ANIMALS 136, 139 (2009).

¹³ See generally Wagner, *supra* note 4; *Humane Education Resources*, ANIMALS & SOC’Y INST. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://www.animalsandsociety.org/for-humane-educators/humane-education-resources/>; Bernard Unti & Bill DeRosa, *Humane Education Past, Present, and Future*, in *THE STATE OF THE ANIMALS II: 2003 42* (Deborah J. Salem & Andrew N. Rowan eds., 2003).

¹⁴ 105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/27-15, 5/27-13.1 (2010); N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 809(1) (McKinney 2011); OR. REV. STAT. § 336.067 (2001); 24 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 15-1514 (2002).

emphasis on humane treatment of animals,¹⁵ whereas New York and Pennsylvania¹⁶ outline specific parameters regarding the appropriate age groups and amount of time schools should designate to such curriculum.¹⁷

Seven states and Washington DC have laws that empower judges and courts with the discretion to require some form of humane education as part of sentences for animal cruelty crimes. Individuals who commit animal crimes in New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Washington DC may have to participate in animal cruelty prevention and/or humane education programs.¹⁸ In Massachusetts, only individuals responsible for the devocalization of a dog or cat may have to complete a humane education course, alongside other penalties.¹⁹ In Rhode Island, humane education requirements only apply to property managers or property owners who encourage or require tenants to declaw or devocalize their companion animals.²⁰ The humane education courses set forth in these eight statutes²¹ cover foundational information, including basic animal needs, responsible animal care, and adherence to state and federal animal protection laws.²²

MODALITIES OF HUMANE EDUCATION AND EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

A widespread assumption exists that developing empathy for animals inevitably leads to empathy for humans, and nurtures more resilient, sociable, and emotionally intelligent children.²³ Indeed, some studies show that compassion for animals is a learnable trait; such studies' results indicate teenage children are more compassionate and conscientious of animals than their younger counterparts.²⁴ Though researchers have shown the efficacy of improving treatment toward animals through teaching, many researchers argue that studies

15 See, e.g., OR. REV. STAT. § 336.067(1)(d) ("In public schools special emphasis shall be given to instruction in: . . . Humane treatment of animals.").

16 See, e.g., N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 809(1) ("The officer, board or commission authorized or required to prescribe courses of instruction shall cause instruction to be given in every elementary school under state control or supported wholly or partly by public money of the state, in the humane treatment and protection of animals and the importance of the part they play in the economy of nature as well as the necessity of controlling the proliferation of animals which are subsequently abandoned and caused to suffer extreme cruelty. Such instruction shall be for such period of time during each school year as the board of regents may prescribe and may be joined with work in literature, reading, language, nature study or ethnology. Such weekly instruction may be divided into two or more periods. A school district shall not be entitled to participate in the public school money on account of any school or the attendance at any school subject to the provisions of this section, if the instruction required hereby is not given therein.").

17 N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 809(1) (McKinney 2011); OR. REV. STAT. § 336.067 (2021); 24 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 15-1514 (2002); WASH. REV. CODE § 28A.230.020 (2013); CAL. EDUC. CODE § 233.5(a) (2003); FLA. STAT. § 1006.31 (2017); ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 20 § 1221 (2013); N.J. STAT. ANN. § 18A:35-4.1 (2002); WASH. REV. CODE § 28A.230.020 (2013); WIS. STAT. § 14.16 (2010).

18 N.M. STAT. ANN. § 30-18-1 (2007); OR. REV. STAT. § 167.350(4) (2010); 2019 TEX. CRIM. STAT. art. 42A.511(a)–(b); VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 13, § 353(b)(4) (2018); WASH. REV. CODE § 16.52.200(9) (2020); D.C. CODE § 22-1001(a)(2)(A),(a)(3) (2008).

19 MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 272, § 801/2(b) (2010).

20 4 R.I. GEN. LAWS § 4-1-41(3)(b) (2013).

21 Humane education programs almost always include teaching on compassion and good animal care practices. However, statutes that mandate or strongly encourage humane education do not usually define the concept. For this reason, humane education programs may include compassion and creative thinking elements as methods to interact with animals, as well as methods on appropriate animal-specific care (food, water, shelter, mental and environmental stimulation) education. But, animal care education programs that provide appropriate animal-specific care information will not necessarily teach compassion and creative thinking elements that humane education programs impart.

22 See, e.g., *About the Online Animal Cruelty Prevention Class*, N. AM. LEARNING INST. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://courseforanimalcruelty.com/about-the-course>; Curriculum Requirements, TEX. DEP'T LICENSING & REG. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/court-ordered/pet/curriculum-requirements.htm#materials>.

23 See, e.g., Weil, *supra* note 5; HANDBOOK ON ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE 464 (Aubrey H. Fine ed., 2010).

24 JOHN MOALLEM, *WILD ONES: A SOMETIMES DISMAYING WEIRDLY REASSURING STORY ABOUT LOOKING AT PEOPLE LOOKING AT ANIMALS IN AMERICA* 172-73 (2013) (citing *generally* STEPHEN KELLERT, *CHILDREN AND NATURE* (2002); STEPHEN KELLERT, *VALUE OF LIFE: BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND HUMAN SOCIETY* 44-47 (1997) (describing study conclusions from Stephen Kellert & Miriam Westervelt, *Children's attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors towards animals*, 1 CHILD. & ANIMALS 8, 8-11 (1984)).

have not sufficiently substantiated the efficacy of humane education as a field.²⁵ Researchers present these arguments because, in spite of the ubiquitous nature of humane education, the breadth of research on the topic is limited.²⁶ Though limited research is available, its results regarding the learnability of compassion and empathy through humane education strategies—including compassionate classroom programs, violence prevention programs, and intervention programs—strongly suggests that such forms of education offer more benefits than harms for humans and animals, and consequently for society as a whole.²⁷

Today, humane education typically manifests in either (1) compassionate classroom programs for youth or (2) violence prevention and intervention programs for IWCCs.

COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM PROGRAMS

Most humane education programs occur inside classrooms and educate students about animal care subjects.²⁸ Outside the classroom, humane education programs exist within extracurricular settings, summer camp activities, and community center events.²⁹ Single or multi-session workshops may include presentations, printed materials, and games, and address topics such as safe interactions with animals, responsible companion animal care, and developing empathy toward animals.³⁰

Some humane educators have successfully incorporated humane education into everyday subject matter instead of holding intensive educational sessions.³¹ For example, in a language arts lesson, teachers may utilize literature, such as *Charlotte's Web* or *Black Beauty* to highlight the emotional experiences of animals. Math problems may incorporate animal issues into calculations, such as determining companion animal or wild animal population growth.³² Furthermore, science experiments may move away from animal dissection and instead, present computer-based animal models or incorporate education on climate change and its impact on all living beings.³³ These subtle integrations of animals in classroom topics equip students with foundational skills while empowering them to understand their relationship to animals, ecosystems, and strategies to advocate for a humane and healthy world.³⁴

Though empirical research from the past thirty years on humane education programs is sparse, results show that in-person humane education programs can impart knowledge

25 See, e.g., Kate Nicoll et al., *An In-Class, Humane Education Program Can Improve Young Students' Attitudes Toward Animals*, 16 Soc'y & ANIMALS 45, 46 (2008); Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 464; Unti & DeRosa, *supra* note 13, at 37.

26 Nicoll et al., *supra* note 25, at 46.

27 See Roshni Trehan Ladny & Laura Meyer, *Traumatized Witnesses: Review of Childhood Exposure to Animal Cruelty*, 13 J. CHILD ADOLESCENT TRAUMA 527, 535 (2020) (citing five studies on different populations of children whose results were significant in showing that humane education programs improved participants' empathy and humane treatment toward animals, and that in some studies, the empathy and humane treatment and perspectives had a years-long effect).

28 Wagner, *supra* note 4.

29 William Ellery Samuels et al., *Improving Upper Elementary Students' Humane Attitudes and Prosocial Behaviors Through an In-Class Humane Education Program*, 29 ANTHROZOÖS 597, 598 (2016).

30 See Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 464; Wagner, *supra* note 4; Jeannie Russell, *Now More Than Ever: Humane Education Remote Learning Resources for Parents and Teachers*, HEART (Apr. 6, 2020); <https://teachheart.org/2020/04/06/now-more-than-ever-humane-education-remote-learning-resources-for-parents-and-teachers/>.

31 See Stephanie Itle-Clark, *Humane Literacy and Formal Educators*, 2 EDUC. COLLECTION 1, 21 (2012); Unti & DeRosa, *supra* note 13, at 42.

32 Julie Bolkin O'Connor, *Humane Education: A Way to Motivate and Engage Students*, N.J. EDUC. ASS'N (Apr. 1, 2018), <https://www.njea.org/humane-education-way-motivate-engage-students/>.

33 *What is Humane Education?*, HEART (last visited July 8, 2021), <https://teachheart.org/what-is-humane-education/>.

34 O'Connor, *supra* note 32.

about animal welfare issues and improve humane attitudes toward animals.³⁵ Single presentations or workshops in school settings seem to be less effective than multi-session programs. For instance, studies indicate that multi-session workshops and integration of humane values directly into classroom curriculums create more compelling results.³⁶ Moreover, existing research suggests humane education affects older elementary school students (fourth grade and onwards) more than it affects younger students (kindergarten to second grade).³⁷

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The American Psychiatric Association has recognized animal cruelty as a cause for psychological concern since the late 1980s, and lists animal cruelty as a symptom of Conduct Disorder,³⁸ which occurs when children exhibit antisocial behaviors.³⁹ Psychology professionals have found that children who commit animal cruelty are more likely to have experienced violence by others in their home and may be more likely to engage in fire setting, bullying, and physical/sexual abuse than children who do not commit animal cruelty.⁴⁰ They are also more likely to engage in interpersonal violence and other adverse psychosocial conduct in adulthood.⁴¹ In efforts to curb the elevated risk of violence to humans and animals, youth who have these experiences can attend violence prevention and intervention programs.⁴² Such programs may be effective for individuals who have reached adulthood without previous adolescent exposure to violence prevention and intervention programs as well.

In violence prevention and intervention programs, humane educators rely on tenets of social learning theory to target and extinguish the root causes of violent tendencies.⁴³ According to social learning theory, children who inflict harm on animals are likely modeling the violent or aggressive behaviors they witness at home, at school, or in their communities.⁴⁴ This theory could be extrapolated to adults who exhibit such behaviors as well, but who did not have earlier opportunities to understand the reason for, and choose to stop, their behaviors.⁴⁵

35 Signal et al., *supra* note 12, at 136; Justine Tweyman-Erez, The Effects of Humane Education Curriculum, Involving The Great Ape Project, on the Attitudes of Fourth Grade Students (1997) (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto) (on file with author).

36 See, e.g., Edward L. Vockell & Frank E. Hodal, *Developing Humane Attitudes: What Does Research Tell Us?*, 4 HUMANE EDUC. 19, 19–21 (1980); Vanessa Malcarne, *Evaluating Humane Education: The Boston Study*, 7 HUMANE EDUC. 3, 12–13 (1983); Tweyman-Erez, *supra* note 35.

37 See Antoncic, *supra* note 7, at 196; Kelly L. Thompson & Eleonora Gullone, *Promotion of Empathy and Prosocial Behaviour in Children Through Humane Education*, 38 AUSTRAL. PSYCHOLOGIST 1, 16 (2003); Malcarne, *supra* note 36, at 12–13; Unti & DeRosa, *supra* note 13, at 40; Tweyman-Erez, *supra* note 35.

38 Brinda Jegatheesan et al., *Understanding the Link between Animal Cruelty and Family Violence: The Bioecological Systems Model*, 17 INT'L J. ENVTL. RES. & PUB. HEALTH 1, 3 (2020); ALLIE PHILLIPS, UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN VIOLENCE TO ANIMALS AND PEOPLE 7 (June 2014).

39 *Conduct Disorder*, JOHNS HOPKINS MED. (last visited Nov. 29, 2022), <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/conduct-disorder#:~:text=Conduct%20disorder%20is%20a%20type,Be%20irresponsible>. Symptoms of Conduct Disorder include irresponsibility, skipping school or running away, stealing or taking action that violates others' rights, and physically harming animals or people. *Id.*

40 Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 467.

41 See, e.g., Cynthia Hodges, *The Link: Cruelty to Animals and Violence Towards People*, ANIMAL LEGAL & HIST. CTR. (2008), <https://www.animallaw.info/article/link-cruelty-animals-and-violence-towards-people>; Thomas M. Olino et al., *Conduct Disorder and Psychosocial Outcomes at age 30: Early Adult Psychopathology as a Potential Mediator*, 38 J. ABNORMAL CHILD PSYCHOL. 1139, 1140 (2020).

42 Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 467.

43 See Julie E. Sprinkle, *Animals, Empathy, and Violence: Can Animals Be Used to Convey Principles of Prosocial Behavior to Children?*, 6 YOUTH VIOLENCE & JUV. JUST. 47, 49 (2008).

44 Ladny & Meyer, *supra* note 27, at 527.

45 However, one study showed that individuals who identified as male, who witnessed animal cruelty before age thirteen had a higher propensity to commit animal cruelty than those who witnessed animal cruelty after that age. Ladny & Meyer, *supra* note 27, at 532 (citing generally Bill C. Henry, *Exposure to animal abuse and group context: two factors affecting participation in animal abuse*, 17 ANTHROZOÖS 290–305 (2004)).

Potentially, when children, and arguably adults, repeat these behaviors and observers condone their actions, children may receive positive reinforcement—i.e., fear, respect, sense of control, etc.—and may continue to enact such behaviors until external forces change their internalized proclivity for violence. Violence prevention and intervention programs use evidence-based strategies to disrupt this pattern of violence through different training and skill building practices that may include, but are not limited to, anger management, conflict resolution, and peer mediation.⁴⁶ Violence prevention and intervention programs may also focus on strengthening prosocial skills, such as sharing, helping, listening, apologizing, and empathizing with other beings, including animals.⁴⁷

One of the more popular forms of violence prevention and intervention programs is Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI).⁴⁸ AAI programs are goal-oriented interventions that center direct contact between historically underserved youth populations and animals.⁴⁹ Dogs, cats, and horses—many of whom experienced traumatic or victimized backgrounds—are brought to schools and detention facilities across the country for AAI.⁵⁰ In a way that does not exploit or harm the participating animals, AAI not only teaches about animal behaviorism and the interconnections between animal cruelty and human-based violence, but it also provides opportunities for emotional and psychological rehabilitation for both human and animal participants.⁵¹

Various decades-old programs exist that utilize AAI, including Project POOCH (Positive Opportunities, Obvious Change with Hounds).⁵² Through Project POOCH, incarcerated youth at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn, Oregon are paired with adoptable shelter dogs who live at Project Pooch's kennel—located at the correctional facility—for the duration of their training and rehabilitation. With the guidance of professionals, program participants foster the dogs seven days a week and learn to train them using positive reinforcement techniques. More than one hundred dogs leave Project POOCH each year who are ready for adoption, while their trainers gain new vocational and interpersonal skills, increased compassion, and emotional stability.⁵³

Alternative AAI formats are also common, such as the diverse curriculum offered by Healing Species. Healing Species is a private nonprofit that provides school-based violence prevention programs in six US states and New Zealand.⁵⁴ Rather than targeting specific children who exhibit antisocial behaviors, Healing Species brings shelter dogs to interact with entire primary school classes.⁵⁵ Healing Species also differs from programs like Project POOCH in that its goal is not to foster a long-term human-animal bond. Instead, Healing

46 See generally Jennifer L. Matjasko et al., *A systematic meta-review of evaluations of youth violence prevention programs: Common and divergent findings from 25 years of meta-analyses and systematic reviews*, 17 *AGGRESSION VIOLENT BEHAV.* 540-52 (2012), for an in-depth, meta-analysis on violence prevention and intervention programs.

47 Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 49.

48 ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTION INT'L, <https://aai-int.org/> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023) (the managing organization for AAI practitioners).

49 KATHERINE A. KRUGER ET AL., CAN ANIMALS HELP HUMANS HEAL? *ANIMAL-ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH* 4 (2004).

50 See Dawna Komorosky & Keri K. O'Neal, *The Development of Empathy and Prosocial Behavior Through Humane Education, Restorative Justice, and Animal-Assisted Programs*, 18 *CONTEMP. JUST. REV.* 395, 401 (2015).

51 Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 469.

52 PROJECT POOCH, <https://www.pooch.org/> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023).

53 *Id.*; Claire Colby, *At One Oregon Jail, Young Men and Unwanted Dogs Help Each Other*, PORTLAND MONTHLY (July 12, 2016, 1:55 PM), <https://www.pdxmonthly.com/news-and-city-life/2016/07/at-one-oregon-youth-jail-young-men-and-unwanted-dogs-help-each-other>.

54 *Who We Are*, HEALING SPECIES TEX. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://www.healingspeciastexas.org/who-we-are> [hereinafter *Who We Are*, HEALING SPECIES TEX.]; Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 48.

55 Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 48.

Species brings rescue dogs to a series of in-person or virtual classroom lessons and/or individualized forty-five minute assembly presentations.⁵⁶ The rescue dogs serve as powerful models to share stories of empathy and promote antiviolence.⁵⁷ The dogs' physical presence also provides the participants with the opportunity to apply these learned behaviors and values to their interactions with the dogs and other participants in real time.⁵⁸

Lastly, some violence intervention programs do not incorporate AAI, but are still specifically designed to educate and rehabilitate individuals who have harmed animals. A key example of this program is the Benchmark Animal Rehabilitative Curriculum (BARC).⁵⁹ BARC is a nonprofit organization that offers an online course to teenagers and adults whom members of the criminal justice system, animal control professionals, social service agencies, or mental health professionals have referred. BARC can fulfill some states' statutorily enacted programs that empower courts with the discretion to require individuals convicted of animal cruelty violations to complete animal cruelty prevention and education programs.⁶⁰ Intervention programs like BARC—that satisfy post-conviction statutory requirements—tend to educate such individuals on animal sentience, basic animal care, the scope of animal cruelty, issues surrounding hoarding, and animals' relinquishment, similarly to compassionate classroom programs.

Inconclusive evidence exists regarding the way short-term interactions with animals via AAI impact children's behaviors toward animals or their socio-emotional growth.⁶¹ Some experts conclude that mere animal presence is insufficient to encourage a child's long-term positive development.⁶² But, when children form bonds or attachments to individual animals, greater potential exists for those children to develop increased empathy and compassion.⁶³ Multiple studies of Project POOCH uphold this conclusion, as participants exhibited fewer aggressive behaviors, improved leadership skills, and greater affability after completing the program.⁶⁴ Similarly, a study conducted on Healing Species's program found that fourth, fifth, and sixth grade participants experienced fewer out-of-school suspensions, increased levels of empathy, and diminished aggressive behaviors.⁶⁵ While AAI research is not abundant, the research does suggest that interactions with animals in humane education programs can teach compassion, responsibility, and emotional regulation.⁶⁶

56 *Teaching Empathy with Rescue Dogs*, HEALING SPECIES TEX. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://www.healingspeciextexas.org/>; *Dogs of Character: The Assembly*, HEALING SPECIES TEX. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://www.healingspeciextexas.org/assembly>.

57 *Who We Are*, HEALING SPECIES TEX., *supra* note 54; Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 47–58.

58 *Who We Are*, HEALING SPECIES TEX., *supra* note 54; Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 47–58.

59 BENCHMARK ANIMAL REHABILITATIVE CURRICULUM, barceducation.org (last visited Jan. 5, 2023).

60 *About B.A.R.C.*, BENCHMARK ANIMAL REHAB. CURRICULUM (last visited July 7, 2021), <http://barceducation.org/about-barc>. Other examples include: *Responsible Pet Owner Course*, PAWEDU (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://pawedu.com/responsible-pet-ownership-course/>; *Oregon Animal Cruelty Prevention Education Program*, N. AM. LEARNING INST. (last visited July 7, 2021), <https://courseforanimalcruelty.com/states/OR>.

61 See Victoria L. Brelsford et al., *Animal-Assisted Interventions in the Classroom—A Systematic Review*, 14 INT'L J. ENV'T RESOURCE PUB. HEALTH 669, 669 (2017).

62 Joe Ngai et al., *The Implementation Process of an Animal-Assisted Humane Education Programme in Hong Kong*, 4 J. VETERINARY MED. & ANIMAL SCIS. 1, 2 (2021); Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 463.

63 Allie Phillips & Diana McQuarrie, *Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK) Program: Program Manual*, AM. HUMANE ASS'N 1, 5 (2009); Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 463.

64 Kate Davis, *Perspectives of Youth in an Animal-Centered Correctional Vocational Program: A Qualitative Evaluation of Project POOCH* (2008) (unpublished M.S.W. thesis, Portland State University) (on file with author); Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 469.

65 Sprinkle, *supra* note 43, at 55.

66 See Linda Lloyd Nebbe, *The Human-Animal Bond and the Elementary School Counselor*, 38 SCH. COUNSELOR 362, 362–71 (1991); Catherine A. Faver, *School-Based Humane Education as a Strategy to Prevent Violence*, 32 CHILD. & YOUTH SERVS. REV. 365, 365–69 (2010).

Comparatively, research on humane education courses that are specifically designed to instruct individuals in response to their animal cruelty convictions are virtually non-existent. For this reason, existing studies, which do not focus on IWCCs, cannot explicitly show whether humane education courses reduce recidivism rates or adjust IWCCs' skewed perspectives toward animal victims. Until studies evaluate intervention programs, like BARC, ALDF cannot make conclusions regarding such programs' effectiveness. However, the lack of study-based evidence at this time does not disprove that humane education courses positively change the actions and perspectives of this population. Since humane education and intervention programs have shown to be successful for children who exhibit adverse behavior toward animals, and those children become adults, it is reasonable to extrapolate that humane education and intervention programs improve relationships of adults who have harmed animals. Therefore, ALDF generally supports the inclusion of humane education programs and violence prevention and intervention programs for individuals who have committed crimes against animals, as long as those programs ensure close supervision of interactions between participants and animals, to ensure the animals' safety.

LIMITATIONS TO EXISTING HUMANE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Verifying humane education's impact on participants' anticipated behaviors is difficult, since most studies on humane education rely solely on self-reporting.⁶⁷ Humane education researchers may not follow up with participants in the long-term, which results in little empirical evidence existing on whether program participants carry their newfound attitudes and knowledge into adulthood.⁶⁸ Additionally, some humane education methodologies lack a pretest measure, which measures participants' change in perspectives since their first exposure to humane education.⁶⁹ Without a comparison to pretest data, results of humane education studies carry less authority in claimed efficacy; studies' results are unclear as to whether participants' improved attitudes toward animals occurred because of exposure to a humane education program, or exposure to external, unknown influences.⁷⁰

Furthermore, humane education research has not yet adequately accounted for the variety of objectives, content, strategies, and demographics that exist within humane education programs.⁷¹ Therefore, high quality studies of different humane education programs are difficult to generalize because humane education goals and methodologies are inconsistent.⁷² Researchers will need to parse out these variables within each unique humane education model they study in order to resolve this concern.

⁶⁷ Samuels et al., *supra* note 29, at 599.

⁶⁸ Unti & DeRosa, *supra* note 13, at 37.

⁶⁹ *pretest-posttest design*, AM. PSYCHOL. ASS'N (last visited Dec. 3, 2021), <https://dictionary.apa.org/pretest-posttest-design>.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 38; Bexell et al., *supra* note 6, at 125.

⁷¹ See Wagner, *supra* note 4; KRUGER ET AL., *supra* note 49, at 2–3.

⁷² *Id.*; Aubrey H. Fine ed., *supra* note 23, at 34.

SUPPORTING HUMANE EDUCATION FOR MULTIPLE POPULATIONS

As mentioned throughout this position statement, little research exists regarding the short and long-term effectiveness of humane education and intervention programs for individuals who have committed crimes against animals. ALDF recognizes that studies conducted with adolescent participants likely produce different results than studies conducted with adult participants because of differences in mental development between those age-specific populations. Furthermore, ALDF recognizes that studies conducted with participants who have not committed animal cruelty may produce different results than studies conducted with participants who have committed animal cruelty. Until such time when studies occur that involve adult participants, and involve adolescent and adult participants who have committed animal cruelty, professionals in mental health, social work, and the law will need to use study-based data that is available. Through this data, and perhaps through anecdotal evidence, professionals in these fields can determine whether humane education and intervention programs are appropriate for individuals involved in their cases.

ALDF recognizes that a case-by-case approach to using humane education and intervention programs is vital to fully addressing the unique scenarios and backgrounds each IWCC experiences. However, and as previously mentioned, empathy and compassion are learned skills.⁷³ For this reason, adults may experience greater success through humane education and intervention programs than children, since humans increase their ability to empathize as they age. Because studies have shown improved perspectives by adolescents who committed cruelty toward animals after they participated in humane education programs, and because other studies have shown that compassion toward animals is a trait that can be taught,⁷⁴ ALDF supports the use of humane education and intervention programs for IWCCs who belong to all age groups. These programs may include compassionate classroom programs as well as violence-prevention and intervention programs, with both approaches being available for IWCCs, regardless of their incarceration status. Also, pursuant to each court's discretion and each case's unique facts and the circumstances of each case's involved parties, ALDF supports the incorporation of humane education and intervention programs into diversion programs.⁷⁵

Lastly, ALDF supports the interdisciplinary collaboration amongst professionals in law, mental health, and social work to integrate humane education and intervention programs—and such programs' values—into their work with IWCCs. Professionals in these fields work with individuals involved in animal cruelty at different stages of each case. For this reason, each professional has distinct opportunities to determine whether humane education may be appropriate for the growth of their client and the prevention of future animal cruelty.

73 MOOALLEM, *supra* note 24, at 172-73 (citing *generally* STEPHEN KELLERT, CHILDREN AND NATURE (2002); STEPHEN KELLERT, VALUE OF LIFE: BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND HUMAN SOCIETY 44-47 (1997) (describing study conclusions from Kellert & Westervelt, *supra* note 24, at 8-11).

74 For instance, one study conducted with primary school participants showed a “dramatic increase in emotional concern and general affection for animals” by fifth grade students, compared to second, third, and fourth-grade students. In fact, the study showed that younger children “were the most exploitative, harsh, and unfeeling of all children in their attitudes toward animals.” STEPHEN R. KELLERT & MIRIAM O. WESTERVELT, CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIORS TOWARD ANIMALS. PHASE V. 188 (1983). Furthermore, the study found that eighth-grade students experience a dramatic expansion of their “cognitive and intellectual understandings of animals” compared to fifth-grade students. *Id.* at 189. And, finally, a third developmental growth occurred by students in eighth to eleventh grade, during which time the students’ “ethical concern for the welfare and kind treatment of animals increased.” *Id.* at 173.

75 For information on ALDF's stance on diversion programs, see ALDF's diversion program position statement.

Furthermore, professionals in these fields are increasing their collaboration during animal cruelty cases to resolve harms caused to animal victims and to alleviate underlying causes that inspire individuals to commit animal cruelty. Through this collaboration, they have the ability to integrate cross-disciplinary strategies to help individuals heal and develop a compassionate and empathetic relationship with animals and the world in which they live. Humane education and intervention programs can be one of many tools these professionals use to protect animal victims and to help someone choose to stop committing harmful behavior and instead, become a compassionate, mentally healthy individual.

CONCLUSION

Humane education and intervention programs show promise in their ability to cultivate empathy and healthy interpersonal practices in IWCC populations. Due to the dearth of research on IWCCs who participate in humane education programs, ALDF strongly encourages the creation of future research to concretely determine the efficacy of humane education and intervention programs for such groups. These results will shed more light on the impact of humane education, and the best practices for standardized, successful intervention. Until such research occurs and its results are available, ALDF still supports humane education programs, including compassionate classroom curriculums and violence prevention and intervention programs. Furthermore, ALDF supports courts and their collaborative efforts with mental health and social work professionals to establish pre-sentencing and sentencing options that provide participation in humane education courses for individuals who have committed animal cruelty. Humane education programs can be a rehabilitative method professionals use to address underlying reasons individuals commit animal cruelty, to help such individuals choose to abstain from committing future cruelty, and to support their development of a positive and compassionate relationship with their world and the beings who live alongside them.