

Executive Meeting of the AAT (Animal Assisted Therapists) Chapter

Re: Meeting the Communications Members

1.30 PM MST on May 6, 2021

By way of Zoom

Executive Members present through Zoom:

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| • President: | Eileen Bona (from Ardrossan, Alberta) |
| • Communications Specialist | Kerri Gaskin (from New Brunswick) |
| • Secretary: | Wendy Tredger (from Rocky Mountain House, AB) |
| • Member at Large | Lisa Wade (from Newfoundland) |
| • Member at Large | Sue McIntosh (from Cremona, AB) |
| • Member at Large | Sue MacDonald (BC) |
| • Student Representative | Kim Neuman |
| • Member at Large | Julia Wassef (NS) |
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PREAMBLE: Kerri introduced herself as the new communications representative on the executive and discussed her vision for the process. The status of AAT Internationally and in Canada was briefly discussed. The upcoming conference and AAT portal was discussed. The status of AAT Internationally and in Canada was briefly discussed.

REGRETS: Charmaine (other communications member) could not attend the chosen date and time, there was no word from Kayla Shore (treasurer).

The Purpose of the meeting was to introduce the new communications members and discuss their role and process moving forward. A short discussion was also held regarding the status of AAT Internationally and in Canada and the upcoming conference and the virtual portal of the AAT Chapter of the CCPA was discussed.

Discussion went as follows:

From Communications Specialist Kerri:

- There is a need for consistent messaging and concise language within our National AAT Chapter. Kerri referred to this as 'branding.'
- Some plans for a). assisting the chapter to communicate with its existing members, b). provide them with information on AAT c). attain more members and d). enhance the visibility of the AAT Chapter include:
 - Creating and publishing a newsletter for AAT Chapter members only (for now – eventually will include a broader scope). It will become a benefit for being a member of the chapter. This newsletter will include:
 - Profiles of the Executive and Chapter members
 - Information on AAT, tips, certification info, ethics, etc.

- Learning opportunities
 - Networking opportunities
- Publishing the biographies of the executive members on the AAT Chapter website.
 - Keeping our FB page updated with vetted articles, training programs, regular postings, including the newsletter

The key purpose of this branding and communications work is to assist members to understand the distinction between AAT versus bringing an animal to work with no training or understanding of the field as a therapy medium.

There are currently 221 members of the AAT Chapter. Kerri asked for the group to send information to her and she will begin to compile it.

Discussion about Status of AAT Internationally and in Canada:

- Eileen has been working with Joanne Moss of the CFAS to brainstorm where to start with gathering information to present to a standards organization. Eileen connected Joanne to King's University and a survey was designed and distributed nationwide. The survey is still circulating and so far has had 33 respondents. King's compared it to a recent similar survey done in the US and informed that so far the Canadian survey results are on par with the US survey results and that the survey has merit. It was decided to keep running the survey until August of 2021 in an attempt to get more results for analysis. Eileen will send the survey through the FB page and to committee members again for redistribution and encourages everyone to spend the 30 minutes to fill it out please.
- In the meantime, Joanne Moss has gotten the attention of the HRSO (Human Research Standards Organization) and they are approved for beginning the process of hearing evidence to support Standards Development for Animal Assisted Services in our country. This is the first step and next steps will involve calling stakeholders for task forces to gather this evidence.

As the AAT Chapter is the only national organized chapter of its kind in our country, we have the structure and formal backing to add credibility to this process.

- The IAHAIO is an international organization compiled of world experts in the field of AAI. They are calling stakeholders to discuss standards for AAI's. Eileen is meeting with them Monday May 10, 2021 and will disclose the contents of that meeting to the executive in an email after the meeting.
- Eileen has started a group through the Psychologists Association called "working with Animals in Practice" where she writes about the need for training and certification in

AAT to practice, conducts webinars and advocates for its members to be educated in the proper understanding of AAT. She encourages anyone on the committee who is enrolled with a professional organization in mental health to approach them to determine whether more groups like this can be established in our provinces and across our professions (i.e., social work, etc).

- Eileen has approached her MLA to advocate for having a National Therapy Animal Day allocated in our country. The MLA has asked for a letter evidencing the merit of therapy animals historically and specifically during the pandemic. Eileen has had much support in gathering evidence and the letter is in 2nd very rough draft. Eileen encourages more members to approach their MLA's for this same support and so far, Lisa Wade of Newfoundland has gotten the support of her MP. We will work on the letter together and once we have it finalized, we will send it to the group for sending to their representatives if anyone is interested.

The CCPA Conference Virtual Portal:

- Due to Covid, the conference is virtual this year. The executive created a virtual portal for each chapter of the org and asked for its members to display info for the conference attendees to learn more about each chapter. Eileen added many resources and other members were encouraged to do the same.
- Sue Mac has a recent podcast (Wild About Animals video) and indicated that she would send links for it
- There was mention of a letter from Leif Hallburg (I don't recall the details of this)
- Wendy has Global TV interview and indicated that she would send the link
- Kim indicated that she could upload some files to the portal and offered to help others to get their websites / social media and anything else in there. Thank you Kim!

NEXT STEPS:

- Kerri Gaskin will email us to come up with a branding statement for who the AAT Chapter is and to help build our identity:
 ~*this is what it means to be a credible professional*
 ~*here's how the animal is our partner, not a tool*

Meeting Adjourned at 2.35pm MST