

Addressing Implicit Bias: Healing Centered Animal Assisted Psychotherapy (HC-AAP) with Rats

Using Animal Assisted Therapy concepts and techniques, specifically rats, to aid access to therapy, facilitate healing, create safety, and dismantle negative implicit bias.

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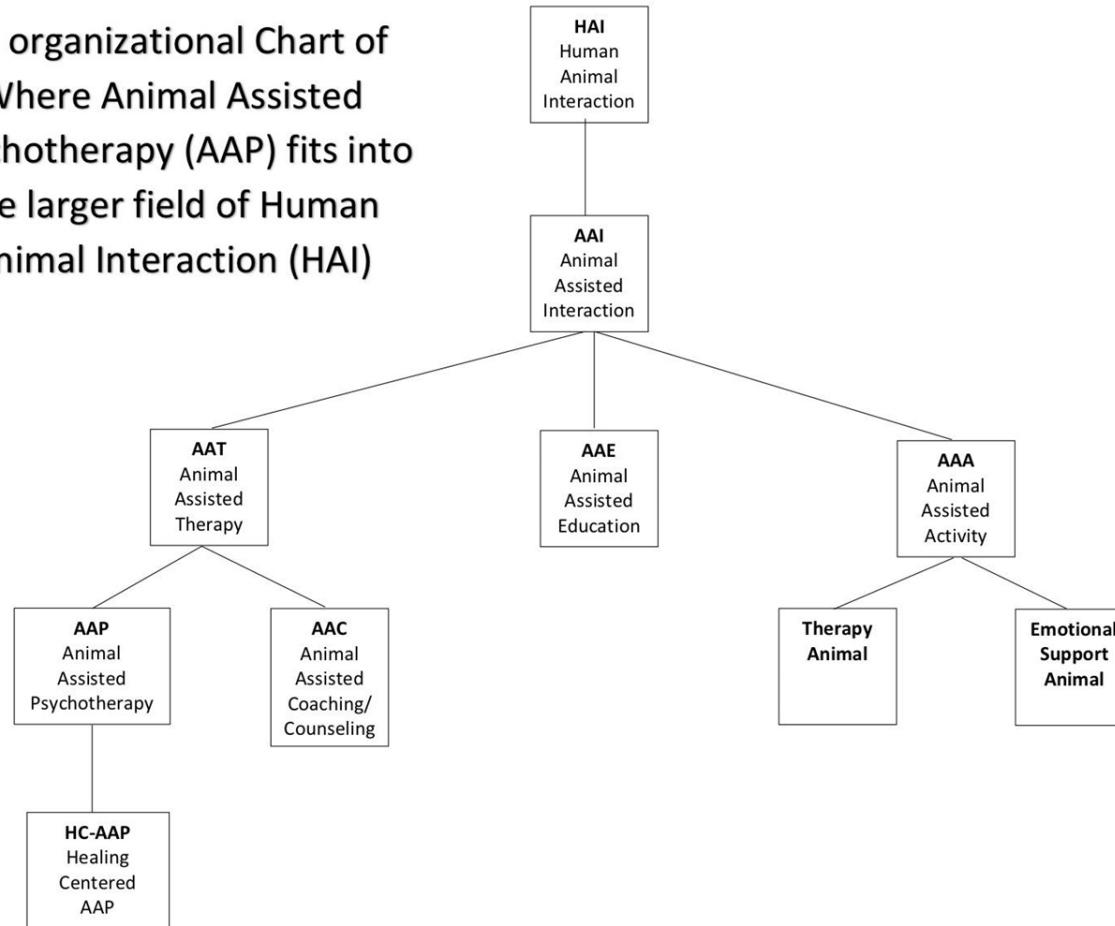
What is AAT/AAP?

And how does it fit in the larger field of
Human Animal Interaction?

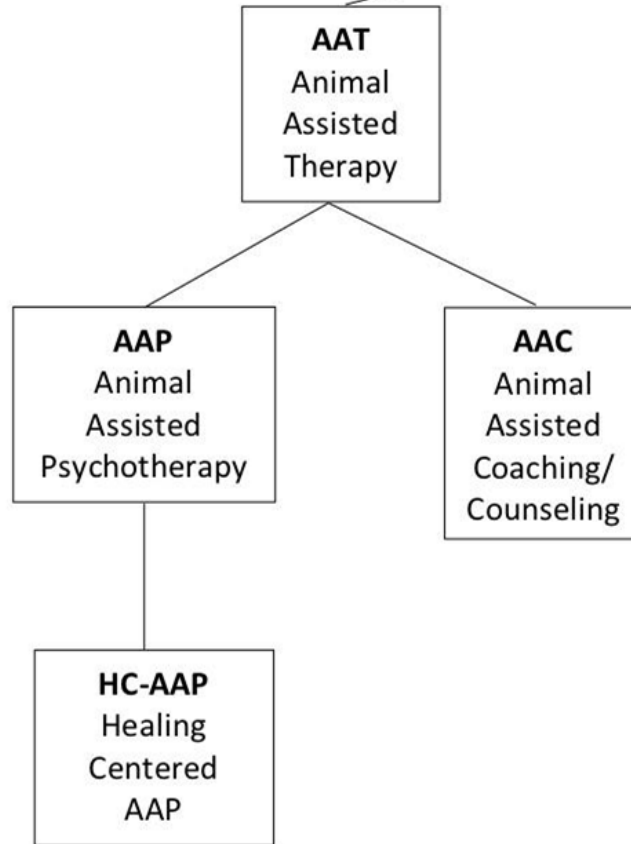


Human Animal Interaction (HAI)

An organizational Chart of
Where Animal Assisted
Psychotherapy (AAP) fits into
the larger field of Human
Animal Interaction (HAI)



Based on
definitions from
the International
Association of
Human Animal
Interaction
Organizations
(IAHAIO) White
Paper, created in
2014 and updated
in 2018.



What is HC-AAP?

- Relational Safety
- Parallel Work
- Co-regulation
- Sense of Agency
- Embodiment work





Dogie and Stevie AAT dogs of Walden School

Relational Safety

- The presence of the animal makes the strange setting and presence of a stranger less threatening

(Sacks 2008)



Relational Safety

- Talking to the Animal
 - Instead of therapist or staff
- Safe and appropriate touch

Parallel Work

- Talking about the Animals thoughts and feelings that are really our own
- Showing the Animal
 - Coping skills
 - Good Behavior
- Helping the Animal
 - To not be scared
 - To eat correctly



Parallel Work (*cont.*)

- Rat does > you do
 - ILS skills
 - Nonverbal communication
 - Nutrition
 - Personal boundaries
 - Basic needs being met
- Externalization/Narrative work



Example:

Grief and Loss

- Low stakes grief
 - Skill building
- Completed attachment
 - Model of healthy relationships
- Healthy processing
 - Support



Grief and Loss





Left: Dougie and Cora play. **Right:** Kaa the snake in Therapy

Co-regulation

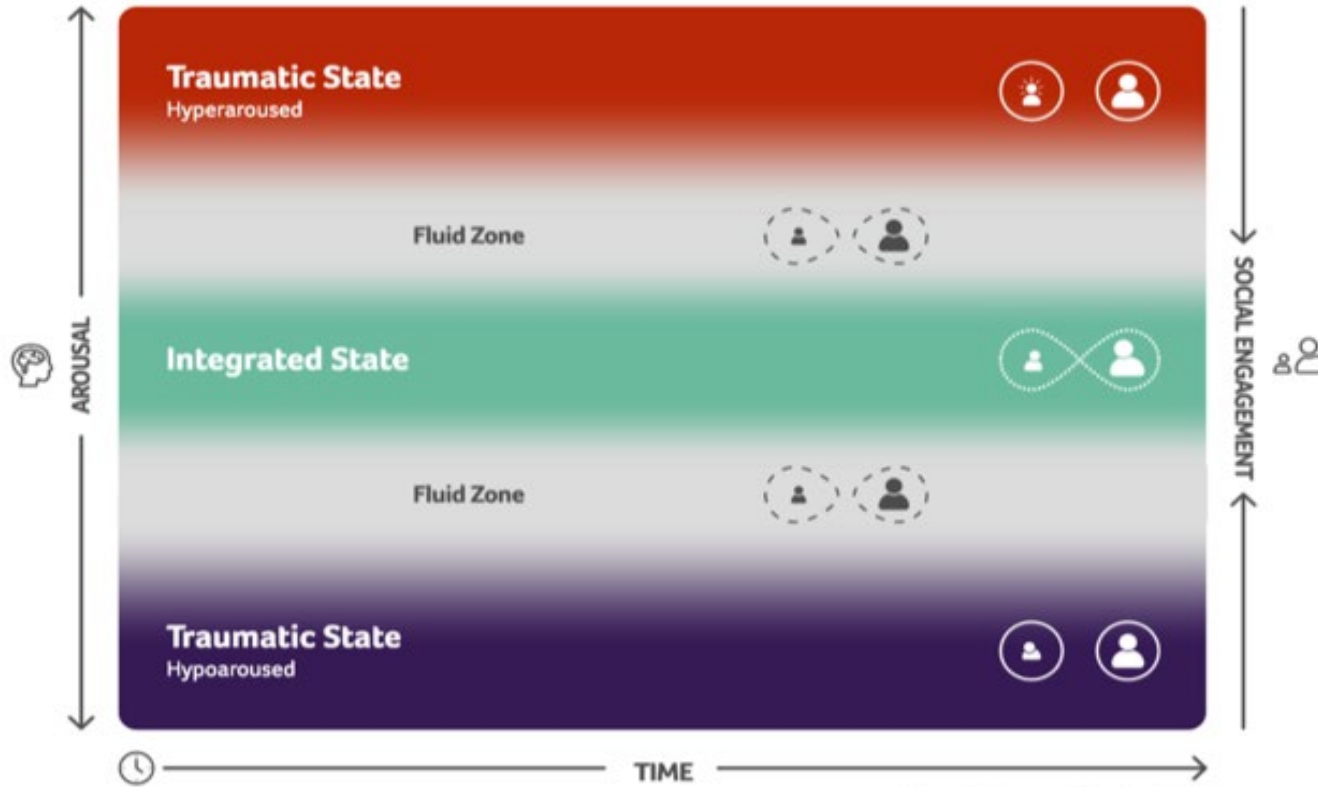
- Ties into relational safety
- Learns to regulate while therapist labels the interaction
 - Playing in the grass
 - Up-regulate
 - Sitting calmly
 - Down-regulate

(Warner, Wescott, and Cook 2020)



SMART Regulation Map

(Warner,
Wescott, and
Cook 2020)



Warner, Westcott, Cook, Finn, 2018

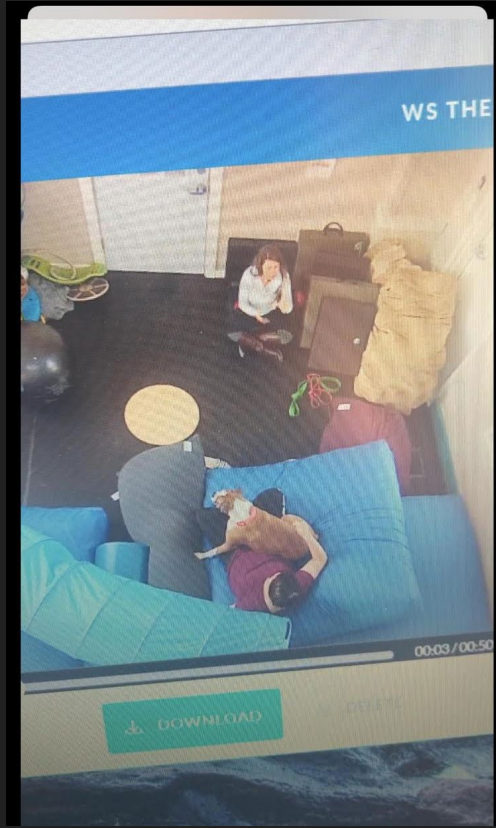
Sense of Agency

Taking fragmented pieces of self to create a comprehensive sense of self

- Empathy
- Responsibility
- Purpose
- Goal Setting

Example:





Left: Cora (AAT dog) sits with student. **Right:** Dougie in the SMART room.

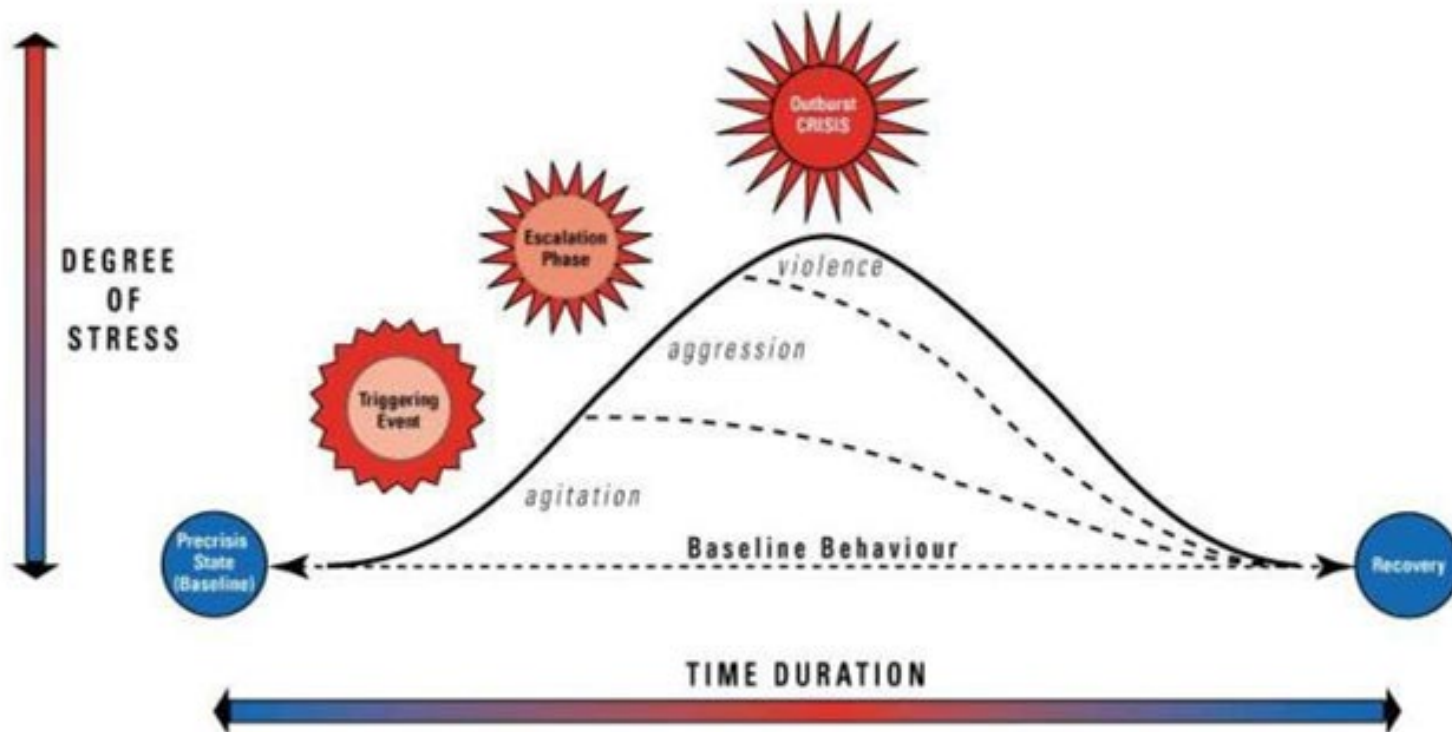
Embodiment Work

- Caring for the animal
- Pressure or sensory input from the animal
 - Dog lies on student
 - Rat claws on skin
 - Cat purrs in lap

Student Lead. Safety is Paramount

Example:





Dysregulation (*cont.*)

- Student becomes protector
- Surprise redirects/connects brain to body



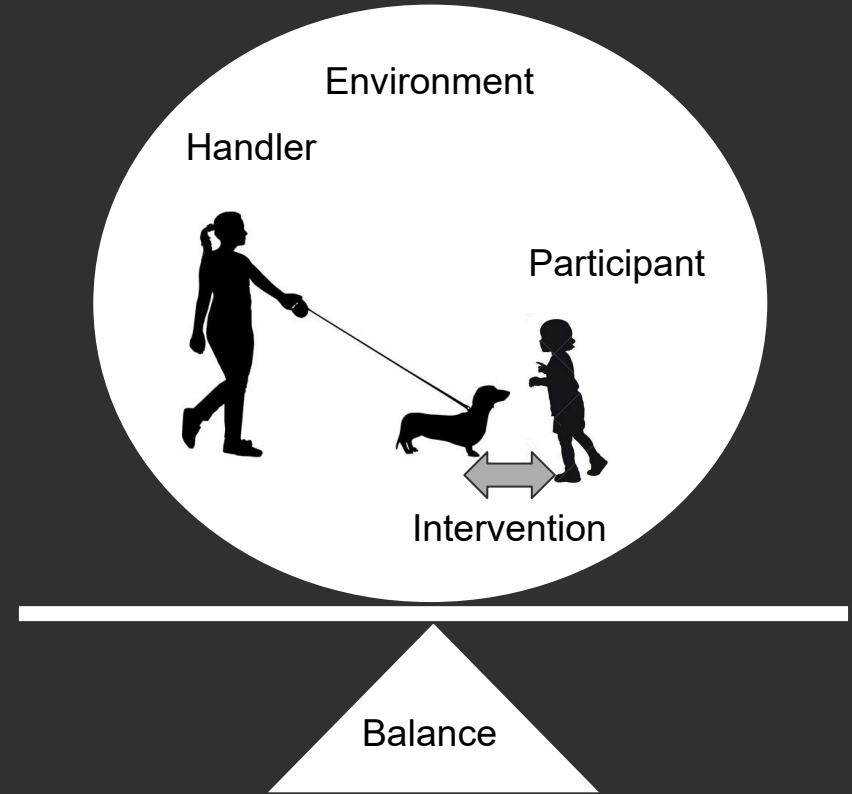
Dysregulation

- Depends on the student
 - Does the Student like?
 - Do they have a rapport?
- Depends on the rat
 - Is the rat a calming rat?
- Is the situation safe enough
- How to I introduce the rat?



Ethics

- Start with a good match
 - Physical Health screening
 - Behavior evaluation
- Ongoing monitoring of stress correlated behaviors
 - Managing stress
 - The handler
 - The Environment
 - The Participant
 - The Intervention



(Ng, Albright, Fine, and Peralta 2019)

TABLE 8.2 MacNamara Animal Capability Assessment Model

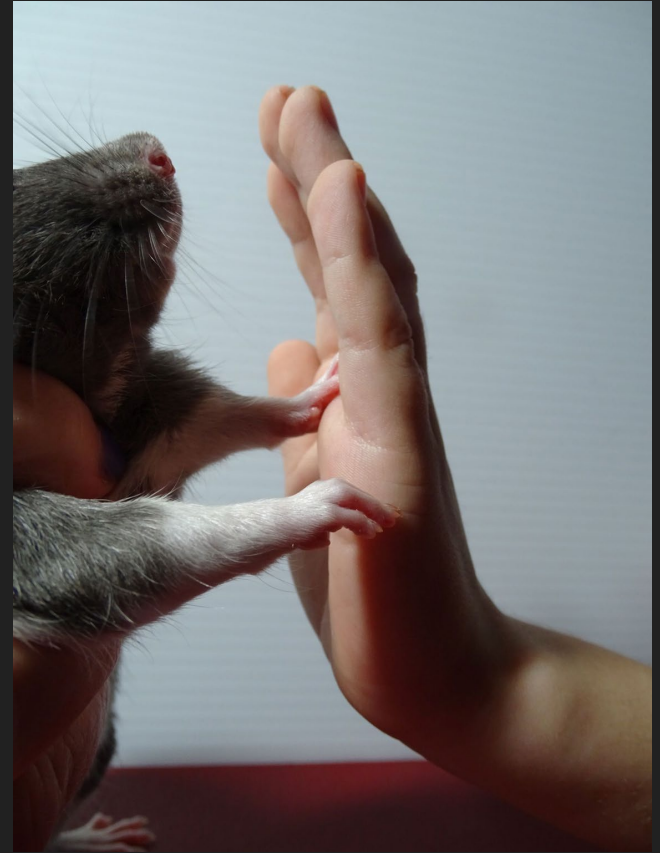
Responsiveness: Speed With Which Animal Transitions From One State to Another as Well as Presence or Absence of Transitional Behaviors		Ideal Animal Profile	Test Animal Profile
A.	Reactivity: degree of reactivity; high or low (high degree of reactivity means animal ramps up quickly within a certain behavior)		
B.	Flexibility: degree to which animal is flexible or stereotypic (responding to all stimuli with the same behaviors); regulation of response		
C.	Behavioral cues: animal displays overt or subtle cues		
Capacity: Degree to Which Animal Interacts With Environment			
D.	Recovery: degree to which animal copes with and recuperates from stimulation (tactile, olfactory, auditory, and visual)		
E.	Affiliation: degree to which animal spontaneously seeks interaction with strangers		
F.	Behavioral repertoire: diversity of behaviors used by animal to respond to stimuli		
G.	Explicit communication: degree to which animal displays behaviors that client population recognizes as communication		
Skills: Trained Behaviors Relevant to Intervention Aims			
H.	Verbal response: response to verbal commands		
I.	Gestural response: response to gestural commands		
J.	Novelty response: response to new environments, activities, or tasks		
K.	Equipment acceptance: degree to which animal manages variety of training or performance equipment		
L.	Cue interpretation: degree to which animal understands stranger's attempts at familiar cues or commands		
M.	Attentional response: degree to which animal uses observable behavioral cues such as eye contact and eye, head, and body orientation to respond to clients		
Attributes: Physical Characteristics Contributing to Delivery Approach			
N.	Species/breed type: degree to which animal may be associated with cultural, ethnic, or racial experiences		
O.	Appearance: coat color, texture, markings, etc. (plumage or scale color)		
P.	Size: in relation to client and client experience		
Q.	Vocalizations: loudness, tone, frequency, predictability		

Ethics (cont.)

YAYABA

“You are your animal’s best advocate”
(petpartners.org)

“A *successful* AAI is one in which mutuality is present, and when the human benefits from contact with a *non-stressed* animal.”
(Ng, Albright, Fine, and Peralta 2019)



Why Rats?



#COVIDmood

Why Rats?

Originally for conversation
starter on implicit bias

~ But ~

They are a good fit for AAT/AAP



Implicit Bias

- What is Implicit Bias?
- What is Stigma?
- Comparing Rats stigma to Walden School students stigma
- Can you learn to love the rat?



Implicit Bias

n: a bias or prejudice that is present but not consciously held or recognized

Stigma

n: a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person



Residential Student or Rat? (actual quotes)

“I was traumatized

Rat

previously”

“I will just not go to that area [where they are]”

Rat

“Not so bad [now that I met
him]”

Rat

“Oh, they’re so calm, I’m surprised”

Resi Student

“I can’t have him in my classroom”

Resi Student

“If he goes in my office I will quit!”

Rat

“I’m surprised you can tolerate working with him”

Resi Student

“I would like them to not be in the group photo”

Resi Student

Who has implicit Bias?

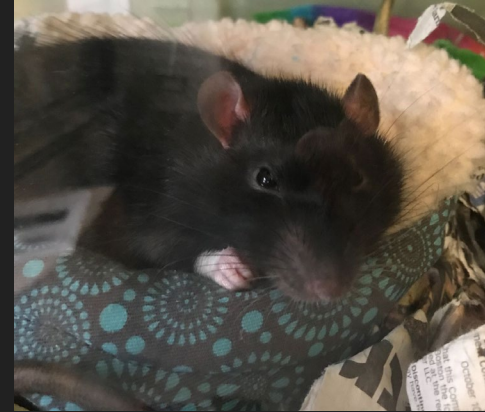
The Pew Research Center conducted a study with single-race white, Black and Asian individuals, as well as biracial white/Asian and white/Black individuals. The study found that about 3/4th of respondents demonstrated implicit racial bias.

(Pew Research Center 2015)



Common myths about Rats and Common misconceptions about residential students:

- Rats are dirty and carry disease
- Rats make bad pets
- Rats have small brains
- Residential settings are dirty
- Those are the “bad” kids
- Kids in residential setting are less intelligent



Can you learn to love the Rat?

- Becoming aware of your own bias
- Helping staff with frustration surrounding student behavior
- Students accept the rat translates to self love



Can you learn to love the Rat?

- Rat's tail as adaptation
- Students behavior as adaptation
- Accepting them as they are

Sarah's Story:



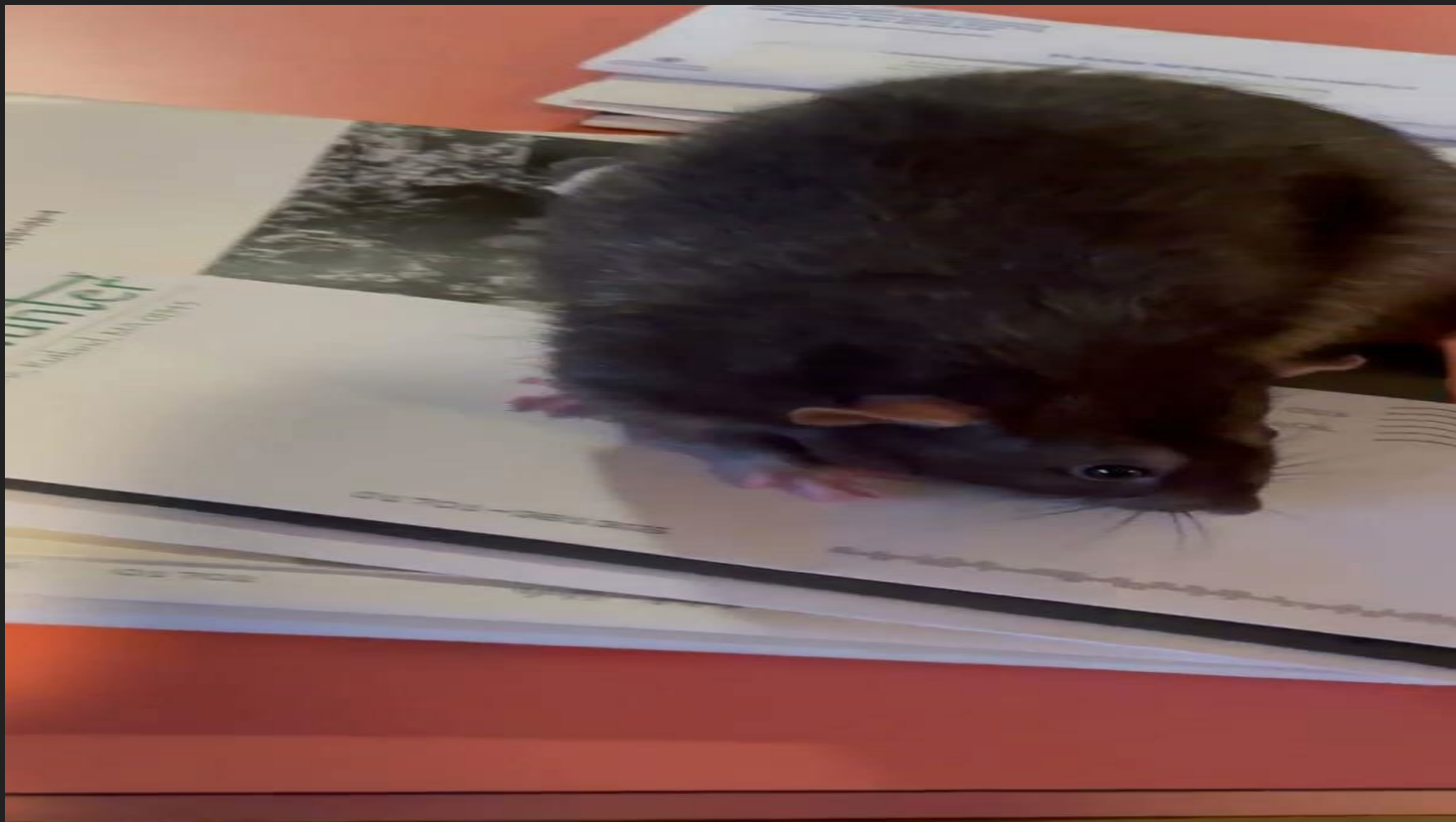
R.A.T.

Animal Assisted Therapy

Handling small animals

- Confidence
- Firmness
- Proper approach
- Trust goes both ways

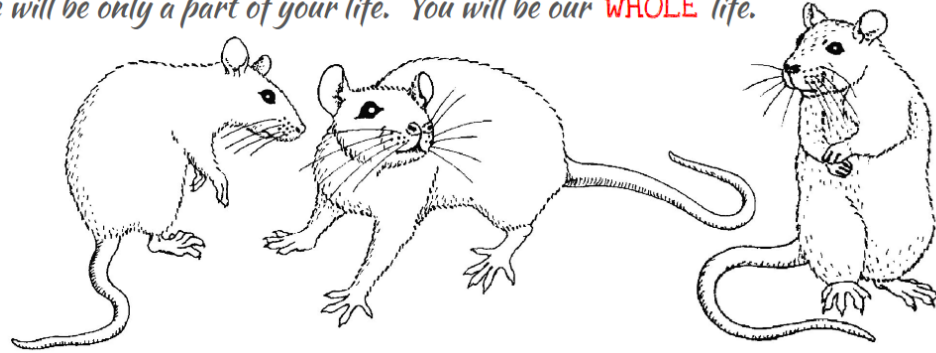




Special Delivery

Josephine's Rattery & Rescue a not-for-profit charity

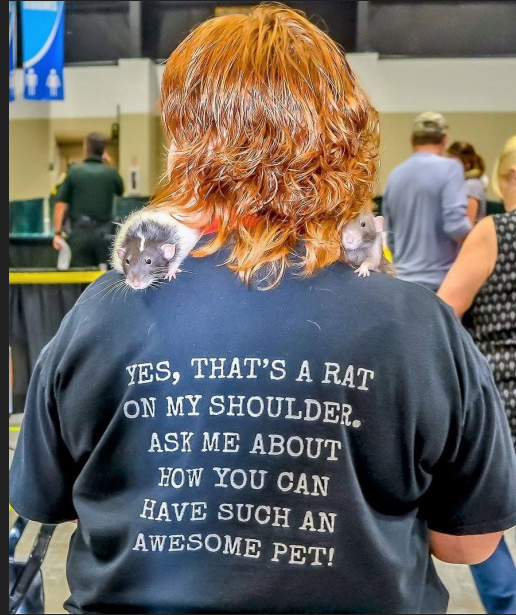
*We will be only a part of your life. You will be our **WHOLE** life.*



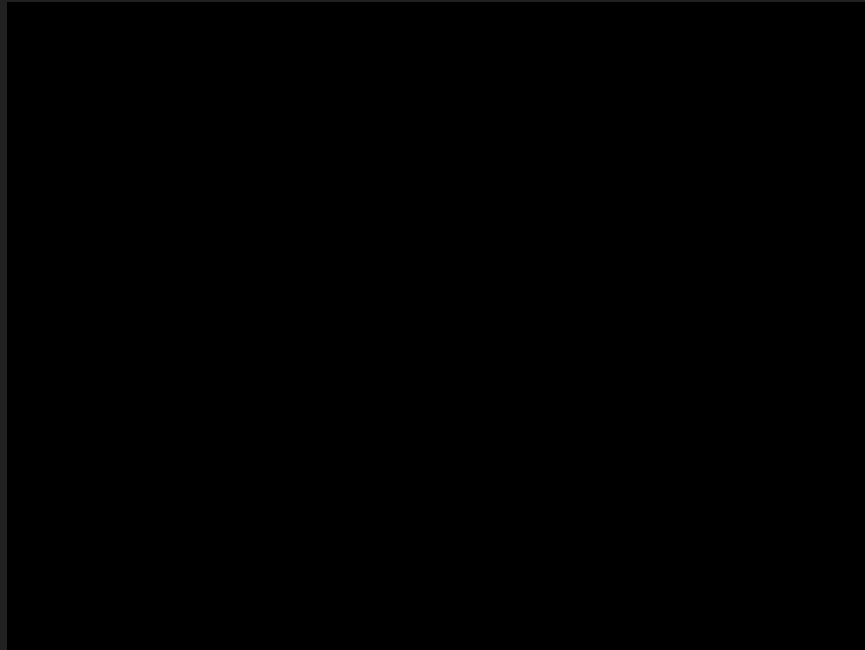
- <https://josiesrattery.com/>
- (516) 510-3728



Rat Ownership



The future of HC-AAP



The future of HC-AAP

- Full training course on HC-AAP
- Evidence based



Sources

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Questions?

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