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HANDBOOK

THE FIRST ANIMAL MEDIATORS



**ERASMUS+ PROJECT
2024-2026**



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Introduction

The *Animals for You(th)* project, co-funded by the European Union, was implemented in 2024 and 2025 through cooperation between two project partners: the Adult Education Centre, Ormož from Slovenia and the Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom in Banská Bystrica, Banská Bystrica from Slovakia, within the Erasmus+ programme.

The aim of the project is to promote the innovative approaches to working with young people by including various forms of animal-assisted interventions. The project was developed in response to the growing need for new methods that support adolescents' mental health, personal growth, and social skills.

In this handbook, the term *animal-assisted interventions (AAI)* is used as an umbrella term that includes different types of activities involving animals, such as *animal-assisted therapy (AAT)*, a structured, documented, and evaluated form of therapy, and *animal-assisted activities (AAA)*, which are less formal, more motivational, and recreational, and aimed at supporting well-being.

The first part of the handbook presents selected organizations from Slovenia and Slovakia that implement animal-assisted interventions in their work. Each organization is introduced through its logo, basic contact information, and a short description of its main activities and programmes. The purpose of this section is to provide a clear and accessible overview in the field.

The second part offers recommendations and guidelines for the safe and responsible inclusion of animals in work with young people. Following these guidelines is essential to ensure high quality, ethical and safe implementation of animal-assisted activities.

The third part presents example of good practices in the form of workshops with adolescents supported by dogs and horses. The standardized workshops structure is the result of collaboration during the fourth project activity, which took place in Ljubljana. Practical experience shows that animal-assisted workshops contribute to improved well-being, support the development of social skills, and help build trust among participants.

In the final part of the handbook, we look toward the future and introduce guidelines for incorporating apitherapy and falconry into work with young people. These approaches based on rich natural and cultural heritage, offer additional opportunities to promote mental health and personal development among youth.

We hope that this handbook will serve as a practical resource and starting point for further work with young people. It aims to encourage exploration of different ways to include animals into youth work, strengthen cooperation between organizations, and support the planning of activities that promote youth well-being through the human and animal connection.

1. FIELD RESEARCH IN SLOVENIA

1. TAČKE POMAGAČKE–Slovenian association for dog assisted therapies (2009)



Contact information:

TAČKE POMAGAČKE–Slovenian association for dog assisted therapies

Address: Gledališča BTC 6, 1000 Ljubljana

Phone: +386 31 865 800

E-mail: info@tackepomagačke.si

Tacke pomagačke is a non-governmental humanitarian organization that has been improving the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of people through animal-assisted therapy (AAT) since 2008. Special attention is given to children and adolescents, who are supported in a safe environment together with therapeutic animals. The organisation carries out individual and group therapy sessions, visits healthcare and educational institutions, participates in school programs, and provides training for professionals and volunteers. Their work has been shown to reduce stress, encourage positive behavior, and contribute to a long-term benefits for individuals and the wider community. In addition to practical work, the organization is also active in research, development, and education.

Association programs

a. Dog-assisted therapy

Dog-assisted therapy is a goal-oriented intervention in which specially trained dogs play an important role in the therapeutic process. Sessions are prepared and led by qualified professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, and speech therapists. Each session is carefully planned and adapted to the needs of one or more participants. The implementation is documented, and progress is regularly monitored. Sessions usually last between 30 and 40 minutes, with breaks for the dog as needed.

b. Dog-assisted activities

Dog-assisted activities are non-structured, non-goal-oriented activities carried out to support the quality of life of individuals or groups (heterogeneous or homogeneous). Both the therapeutic dog and handler participate. Sessions last 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the mood of the participant or group, and are adapted to their wishes, abilities, and needs. A professional from the institution is not required to participate.

c. Reading with dogs – R.E.A.D.

R.E.A.D.® is a licensed program registered with Intermountain Therapy Animals, USA. It helps children improve reading and communication skills through a special method: children read to dogs. Dogs participating in R.E.A.D.® are trained therapy dogs who, together with their handlers, visit schools, libraries, and other institutions as listeners for children who read.

R.E.A.D.® program types:

- **Library program:** Motivational, educational, and fun; takes place once a week or month; goals are not specifically defined.

- **School program:** Conducted with a professional who monitors and documents progress; goals are set by the professional.

d. Awareness and companionship

These activities teach participants the correct approach to dogs, basics of canine communication, respect for animals and nature, and awareness of the work of shelters and volunteers. Sessions include discussions, puzzles, practical demonstrations, and always involve interaction with the dog, who happily performs tricks.

e. Education with dogs

Dog-assisted education is carried out by trained therapists with specific pedagogical knowledge. After careful preparation, they bring a dog into the classroom. Forms of work vary depending on the age and abilities of students, for example:

- Regular classroom work in primary and secondary schools with standard or adapted curricula.
- Participation in extracurricular activities or group sessions.
- Individual support for students with special needs in mainstream schools.

f. From fear to friendship program

This program is designed for children who are afraid of dogs (cynophobia). It gradually encourages them to face their fear, progressing from initial distrust to relaxed interaction with dogs. With the help of therapy dogs, experienced handlers, and, if necessary, specialists, children go through several stages—from imaginary play to real socialization. The goal is to replace fear with trust and a positive experience.

g. Professional staff training

Tačke pomagačke provides regular training for both handlers and their dogs, preparing them for work as a therapy team. Training lasts six months and includes theoretical and practical components. Theoretical topics cover canine ethology, communication, basic first aid, and approaches for working with different user groups. The practical part includes dog socialization, adaptation to various environments, and simulated therapy work. Before joining the program, dogs must pass a basic behavior and social suitability test. During training, the suitability of the handler for working with people in sensitive situations is also assessed. Upon successful completion, participants receive a certificate and can begin visiting institutions as therapy teams.

2. AMBASADORJI NASMEHA – Slovenian association for animal-assisted therapy (2004)



Contact information:

AMBASADORJI NASMEHA – Slovenian association for animal-assisted therapy

Address: Knobleharjeva ulica 21, 1000 Ljubljana

Phone: +386 41 771 655

E-mail: ursa.ivanovic@ambasadorki-nasmeha.si

Ambasadorki Nasmeha is an organization that strives to establish animal-assisted therapy and activities as recognized forms of support in healthcare, education, and other fields. Their mission and programs demonstrate the value of the human–animal connection in promoting health and well-being. The programs also include individual home visits conducted in collaboration with trained professionals.

Association programs

Animal-assisted activities (AAA)

Animal-assisted activities (AAA) provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic support to improve quality of life. AAAs are carried out in various environments by specially trained professionals and/or volunteers together with their animals, which meet specific standards.

b. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT)

Animal-assisted therapy involves goal-oriented support in which the animal, meeting specific criteria, is an essential part of the healing process. Therapy is conducted by a professional in healthcare or social work with the necessary expertise and experience. The program is designed to enhance human physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functions. Therapy can be delivered individually or in groups. Each session is documented and evaluated, with specific goals set for each participant and progress monitored.

c. Program for overcoming fear of dogs

Assistance in overcoming cynophobia (fear of dogs).

d. Reading with a smile

The goal of the program is to improve reading skills. Students read various texts, including prose and poetry, instructions (reading comprehension exercises), encyclopedias, newspapers, and comics.

e. Learning with the help of animals

This program supports the general school curriculum through the involvement of animals in the learning process. Trained therapy teams (animals and professionals) implement activities in schools. In collaboration with schools, the association organizes programs where therapy dogs help reduce stress and anxiety among students, promote positive behavior, and enhance

the learning environment. These programs are an excellent way for children to relax, develop emotional intelligence, and build empathy.

f. Educational workshops

The association also organizes educational workshops for caregivers, teachers, and healthcare professionals, introducing participants to the benefits and methods of animal-assisted therapy. These events raise awareness of the therapeutic potential of animals and increase access to such practices.

g. Responsible animal care

This program is aimed at children and adolescents in kindergartens and schools. It presents the essential aspects of living with animals, the needs of animals, and the responsibilities of the caregiver. **Proper Approach to Dogs** teaches recognition of canine body language and safe ways to approach dogs.

3. ASSOCIATION FOR ANIMAL-ASSISTED ACTIVITIES AND THERAPY (2007)



Contact information:

Association for animal-assisted activities and therapy

Address: Glavna cesta 1, 4202 Naklo

Phone: +386 41 387 782

E-mail: mira.marinsek@gmail.com

The Association for Animal-Assisted Activities and Therapy was established in 2007 with the aim of providing supportive programs of animal-assisted therapy and activities.

Association programs

a. Animal-assisted therapy and activities

The association provides animal-assisted therapy for individuals and various target groups.

b. Adapted animal-assisted therapy programs

These therapies are designed to help children and adults with various psychological difficulties or disorders, with a special focus on children with special needs such as selective mutism, anxiety disorders, and attention-related difficulties.

c. Animal-assisted activities

Animal-assisted activities promote relaxation, socialization, and learning in a safe and friendly environment. They are suitable for anyone facing significant social, emotional, or learning challenges, particularly in preschool and school integration. By leveraging the unique human–animal bond, these programs provide a supportive and enriching environment for personal growth and well-being.

4. INSTITUTE NAZAJ NA KONJA (2005)



Contact information:

Institute Nazaj na konja

Address: Starošince 37b, 2326 Cirkovce

Phone: +386 40 416 604

E-mail: info@nakonju.si

The Institute *Nazaj na konja*, established in 2005, systematically develops therapy and other psychosocial interventions involving horses, with a focus on the holistic care of children, adolescents, and adults with special needs and mental health challenges.

Institute programs

a. Equine-assisted therapy and activities (E/AA)

Equine-assisted therapy and activities are designed for various target groups, including:

- children and adolescents with emotional disorders
- children and adolescents with behavioral challenges
- children and adolescents with learning difficulties and/or hyperkinetic disorder
- children, adolescents, and adults with special needs
- individuals experiencing psychological distress
- individuals requiring health or psychosocial rehabilitation

b. Organization of workshops

The institute organizes workshops for various groups, providing structured learning and therapeutic experiences with horses.

c. Training and education of therapy horses

Programs focus on preparing horses for therapeutic and activity-based interventions, ensuring safety, reliability, and suitability for working with diverse participants.

d. Establishment and organization of professional training systems

The institute develops educational programs for professionals working in equine-assisted activities and therapy. In collaboration with other experts in the field, they maintain a joint register of formally trained specialized professionals and organizations conducting equine-assisted interventions in Slovenia. The register can be accessed here:

<https://nakonju.si/register-strokovnih-delavcev-za-izvajanje-intervenc-s-pomocjo-konja-v-sloveniji/>

e. Horse riding programs

Programs that integrate riding activities as part of therapy and personal development.

f. Volunteering

Opportunities for volunteers to participate in equine-assisted programs and support the institute's mission.

5. REHATOPIA–Institute for animal-assisted therapy and activities, Murska Sobota



Contact information:

Inštitut REHATOPIA , Institute for animal assisted activities and therapy Murska Sobota

Address: Miklošičeva street 21, 9000 Murska Sobota

E-mail: info@rehatopia.org

Organization Programs

a. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT)

Animal-assisted therapy is a goal-oriented intervention in which the animal, meeting specific criteria, is an integral part of the therapeutic process. AAT is conducted individually or in groups by qualified professionals within their field of expertise. Therapy sessions last between 15 and 60 minutes, with mandatory breaks for the animal.

b. Training for conducting Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities

With dedication and professionalism the founders of the Institute for Animal-Assisted Therapy and Activities aim to develop high-quality educational programs in the field of animal-assisted therapy and activities through research. These programs provide trained professionals with comprehensive support for launching new initiatives.

In parallel with educational programs, the institute conducts activities such as:

- Raising public awareness about the positive effects of intensive contact with animals in educational or therapeutic processes.
- Connecting professionals in the field of animal-assisted therapy in Slovenia and internationally.
- Networking professionals who conduct animal-assisted activities and therapy.

6. HORSE-RIDING AND YOUTH CENTRE ŠKATLICA (2017)



Škatlica

Contact information:

Horse-riding and youth centre Škatlica (2017)

Address: Senik 1, 2258 Sveti Tomaž

PE Ljubljana: Dolenjska cesta 57, 1000 Ljubljana

Email: info@skatlica.si

The Horse-Riding and Youth Institute Škatlica begun operating in 2017 by a group of friends who met at a youth center in Ljubljana. From the very beginning, they dreamed of building a community and creating spaces for people like themselves – a little lost, endlessly curious, sometimes standing out, and not fitting into the “boxes” society tries to categorize us in.

Organization programs

a. Psychological support for youth

- Providing free psychological counseling via Zoom as part of the project *(Za)upam si*
- Counseling for young people

b. Support for youth workers

- Participation in Erasmus+ projects, such as *“Let’s Draw Together”*
- Researching and developing tools for more effective, creative, and innovative work with young people

c. Contributing to community development

- Building a community as a playground for testing and realizing ideas
- Encouraging positive changes at both individual and societal levels

7. PET INSTITUTE–Canine Therapy Unit, Institute for animal-assisted therapy with dogs (2005)



Contact information:

PET – Canine Therapy Unit, Institute for animal-assisted therapy with dogs

Address: Zvezda 16, 1210 Ljubljana Šentvid

E-mail: info@zavod-pet.si

Institute Programs

a. Dog-Assisted therapy (AAT)

Dog-assisted therapy is a goal-oriented intervention in which the dog, meeting specific criteria, is an integral part of the therapeutic process. AAT is implemented individually or in groups by qualified professionals within their field of expertise. Therapy sessions last between 15 and 60 minutes, with mandatory breaks for the dog.

b. Dog-Assisted education

Dog-assisted education is made for educational purposes in kindergartens, schools, and other institutions or organizations providing education for children and youth. The primary aim of the workshops is to raise awareness about living in harmony with nature and animals, volunteering, and responsibility toward the community, or to motivate learning in lessons, sports activities, or additional educational support.

Workshops are aligned with school curricula and can be delivered as therapy or as an activity, individually or in groups, either as a single session or a series of sessions over a longer period, with a maximum of 30 participants. Each session lasts from 15 to 60 minutes, with mandatory breaks for the dog.

c. Dog-Assisted Activities

Dog-assisted activities are a selection of various activities that provide motivational benefits and improve quality of life. These activities are delivered by specially trained professionals

together with dogs meeting specific criteria. Goals are not predefined, progress tracking is not mandatory, and the content of the visit is spontaneous. Activities can be individual or group sessions, lasting from 15 to 60 minutes, with mandatory breaks for the dog.

d. Reading with PET – R.E.A.D.

®R.E.A.D.® is a licensed program of Intermountain Therapy Animals, USA, implemented by the Institute. The program aims to improve children’s reading literacy, increase motivation for reading, and foster a positive relationship with books. It is conducted in educational institutions, boarding schools, libraries, bookstores, and similar settings.

e. Listening with PET

Listening with PET is a program by the PET Institute aimed at promoting reading culture and personal development in children through a therapy dog. The program may include both therapeutic activities (AAT) and dog-assisted activities (AAA).

The main objectives are to develop a love for reading, expand vocabulary, and improve reading comprehension. It also encourages sustained attention, auditory focus, and social skills. A strong emphasis is on enhancing self-esteem and confidence in participating children. In the therapeutic version, a professional team plans, monitors, and evaluates the sessions and progress. The dog handler ensures the dog’s well-being and participates in reading and discussion activities with the children. Schools or institutions must provide a suitable space for the activities, which can be conducted in various environments, including schools, libraries, hospitals, or care institutions.

8. PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTION, YOUTH CLIMATE HEALTH RESORT–RAKITNA



Contact information:

Public health institution, Youth climate health resort–Rakitna

Address: Rakitna 96, 1352 Preserje

Phone: +386 1 365 98 00

E-mail: info@mkz-rakitna.si

Youth climate health resort–Rakitna is a public health institution in Slovenia that integrates equine-assisted interventions within comprehensive therapeutic programs in the field of mental health.

Institute programs

Health programs:

- School of healthy growing;
- Reintegration and rehabilitation program for adolescents;
- Bladder training school;
- Outpatient services;
- Center for child and adolescent mental health.

Supportive therapies:

- Dog-assisted activities;
- Equine-assisted occupational therapy;
- Hospital school.

Animal-assisted activities and equine therapy

The equine-assisted occupational therapy offered at Rakitna includes activities on, with, and around the horse, positively affecting participants' body awareness and sensory-motor integration, as well as their ability to adapt to environmental stimuli. This therapy is designed for children and adolescents with sensory-motor integration disorders.

The goals of the program primarily focus on improving motor skills, cognitive processes, and social interaction abilities, contributing to more independent and effective performance of daily activities.

Rakitna also implements specialized supportive therapies involving **Tačke pomagačke** – therapy dogs, which significantly enhance participants' outcomes. Interaction with therapy dogs positively influences motor abilities, promoting movement, balance, and coordination in children and adults. Dog-assisted therapy also benefits sensory regulation, as contact with a warm, animal-friendly body provides calming effects, helps regulate sensory perception, and strengthens emotional stability.

Incorporating dogs into daily activities such as dressing, grooming, feeding, and play encourages independence, motivation, and perseverance, ultimately improving participants' functionality and quality of life over the long term.

2. FIELD RESEARCH IN SLOVAKIA

1. APIPRAKTIK – Slovak Association for Apitherapy and therapy with bee products (2015)



Contact information:

Apipraktik-Slovak association for therapies with bees and bee products

Address: Lipova 1, Humenne

Phone: +421 918 482 017

E-mail: info@apipraktik.sk

Association programs:

a. Apitherapy

Individual therapeutic sessions are performed at beehives in the apiary. Clients participate in personalized therapy, lying near the hives and interacting with the bees under the guidance of trained professionals. The goal of the therapy is to alleviate health, mobility, emotional, and psychological issues, including migraines, musculoskeletal problems, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, as well as anxiety, depression, trauma, and behavioral disorders.

b. Workshops and seminars

The association organizes educational activities and workshops on the benefits of bee products and shares the latest knowledge and experiences in the field of apitherapy.

c. Public events

APIPRAKTIK participates in various events and seminars to promote awareness of the benefits of using bee products and interacting with bees.

d. Education and training

The institute provides training programs and certification for beekeepers-therapists. Courses are offered as *Practical Apitherapy* Level I and II, ensuring compliance with professional standards and guidelines.

2. AUSIFA MAY – Association for dog-assisted therapy and activities (2021)



Contact information:

AUSIFA MAY–Association for dog-assisted therapy and activities

Address: Rudohorská 24, 97411 Banská Bystrica

Phone: +421 908 109 231

E-mail: mich.chrenova@gmail.com

Association programs:

a. Dog-assisted therapy and activities

The association provides individual and group therapies, as well as individual and group dog-assisted activities. The purpose of these sessions is to support participants in coping with emotional, psychological, and physical challenges.

b. Educational programs

AUSIFA MAY collaborates with educational institutions to integrate therapy dogs into the education of children and students. These programs help reduce stress, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties while promoting a positive learning environment. Participating institutions include special schools, primary and secondary schools, universities, and youth camps. The association also organizes professional lectures delivered by experts in cynology, focusing on dog health, nutrition, and ethology.

c. Workshops and seminars

The association conducts educational workshops and professional seminars to raise awareness about the benefits of dog-assisted therapy among educators, healthcare professionals, and public. These activities highlight the positive effects of incorporating animals into educational and pedagogical programs.

d. Visits to hospitals and healthcare facilities

AUSIFA MAY organizes visits to hospitals, nursing homes, and rehabilitation centers, where therapy dogs and their handlers provide emotional, psychological, and physical support to patients undergoing treatment or rehabilitation.

e. Professional development

The association offers educational programs and courses for obtaining certification for therapy dogs and handlers.

f. Assessment of dogs for therapeutic work

The organization tests individual dogs to determine their suitability for training as therapy dogs. Testing is not limited by breed; both purebred and mixed-breed dogs are assessed, and there are no size restrictions.

3. HIPONY – Hippotherapy Centre (2011)



Contact information:

Hipotherapy centre HIPONY

Jozefinska 711/12, 93040 Štvrtok na Ostrove

Phone: +421 903 828 181

E-mail: hipony@hipony.sk

Centre programs:

a. Equine-assisted therapy and activities

Equine-assisted therapies and activities are conducted individually or in groups. Their most frequent participants include:

- children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral difficulties
- children and adolescents with learning deficits and/or hyperkinetic disorders
- children, adolescents, and adults with special needs
- individuals experiencing psychological distress who require health or psychosocial rehabilitation

b. Educational-psychological riding

The educational-psychological riding program is based on the interaction between the child, the horse, and the therapist. It represents a holistic approach that incorporates physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects. The main focus is on establishing a friendly relationship between the child and the horse, which gradually develops into a partnership.

c. Course organization

HIPONY organizes educational and supportive programs aimed at strengthening personal development, offering relaxation techniques using horses, and activities to enhance group dynamics (team-building).

4. LESAN – Riding and rehabilitation centre (2006)



Contact information:

LESAN–Riding and rehabilitation Centre

Address: Opatovce 6, 913 11 Veľké Bierovce

Phone: +421 903 925 099

E-mail: lesan@lesan.sk

LESAN – Riding and rehabilitation centre programs

a. Equine-assisted therapy and activities (A/TPK)

Equine-assisted therapies and activities are conducted individually and in groups. They aim to improve motor skills, emotional well-being, social interaction, and cognitive development for children, adolescents, and adults with physical, psychological, or developmental challenges.

b. Social rehabilitation and counseling

Social rehabilitation and counseling provide a holistic approach that promotes emotional, social, and physical recovery for individuals with special needs or psychosocial challenges. The inclusion of horses as therapeutic partners fosters empathy, enhances self-esteem, and strengthens social skills through direct experience, collaboration, and movement. These activities complement traditional counseling and rehabilitation methods and allow for individualized support in a natural environment, often leading to increased motivation and longer-lasting therapeutic effects.

c. Educational programs

The center collaborates with educational institutions to integrate horses into the teaching and learning process. Programs are conducted in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, universities, and children's and youth camps. LESAN also organizes lectures with equestrian experts on horse health, nutrition, and behavior.

d. Riding school

The center offers riding school programs from beginner level to competitive licenses.

e. Horse breeding and management

The program includes systematic breeding, care, and training of horses to ensure their physical fitness, stable behavior, and work performance. This expertise is essential for conducting safe and effective equine-assisted therapy, ensuring proper selection and preparation of the horses and adherence to their behavioral and physiological characteristics.

f. Organization of sports events

LESAN organizes equestrian sports events to promote skills, community engagement, and awareness of equestrian activities.

g. Workshops and camps for children

The center conducts workshops and camps designed for children, focusing on learning, recreation, and personal development in a safe and engaging environment.

5. OZ Felinoterapija—Association for cat-assisted therapy (2020)



Contact information:

OZ Felinoterapija—Association for cat-assisted therapy

Address: A. Sládkoviča 152/2, 01851 Nová Dubnica

Phone: +421 903 304 384

E-mail: info@felinoterapia.sk

Association programs:

a. Cat-assisted therapy for health and support of vulnerable groups

Protection and promotion of health, as well as providing social support to vulnerable groups—particularly children and the elderly—through cat-assisted therapy.

b. Preparation and training of cats for therapeutic use

Breeding, selection, training, and education of therapy cats for felinotherapy. This includes support for their placement and adaptation to the user's home or an institution, as well as ongoing monitoring.

c. Education, awareness, and counseling in felinotherapy

Development of educational programs in felinotherapy, raising awareness of the positive effects of cats on humans, and providing advisory services.

6. HIPOEDU–Association for equine-assisted therapy and activities (2012)



Contact information:

HIPOEDU–Association for equine-assisted therapy and activities

Address: Májová 6, 05304 Spisské Podhradie

Phone: +421 907 151 045

E-mail: janinkakika42@gmail.com

Association programs:

a. Hippotherapy

HIPOEDU primarily focuses on hippotherapy, using horse movement and motor activity to improve physical functions, particularly motor skills, in individuals with special needs.

b. Psychosocial support with horse

The organization provides psychosocial support with horses for children, adolescents, and adults facing emotional, behavioral, or social challenges. The program is based on the therapeutic relationship between the human and the horse, which fosters trust, enhances self-esteem, and strengthens social skills.

c. Educational-therapeutic riding

HIPOEDU conducts educational riding programs primarily for children and adolescents with special cognitive or social needs. Activities on and around the horse are designed to promote motor, cognitive, and social skills through play and structured tasks.

7. VČELI DOMČEK–Apitherapy and beekeeping company (2021)



Contact information:

VČELI DOMČEK–Apitherapy and beekeeping company

Address: Radostka 194, 023 04 p. Stara Bystrica

Phone: +421 915 818 493

E-mail: info@vceli-domcek.sk

Company programs:

a. Apitherapy

The company offers individual or group therapeutic sessions at bee hives, including inhalation of bee air. Under the guidance of a trained specialist, participants interact with bees, with the primary aim of addressing health, mobility, and psychological issues.

b. Education, awareness, and counseling in apitherapy

The company conducts workshops and educational programs for the public, schools, libraries, various companies, and institutions on the long-term benefits of apitherapy and the use of bee products. Participants learn about using different bee products for therapeutic purposes or as a preventive measure.

c. Beekeeping education and workshops

They organize one- and multi-day seminars and workshops on beekeeping, legislation and its requirements, appropriate site selection for hives, and the selection of basic equipment for starting beekeeping.

d. Bee products

The company offers a wide range of its own bee products.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SAFE INCLUSION OF ANIMALS IN WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

This section presents recommendations developed within the framework of the project and followed throughout the implementation of project activities. These recommendations are essential for ensuring the safe, ethical, and high quality implementation of animal-assisted interventions when working with young people. The key points highlighted are:

- a) the importance of appropriate professional education for staff and the need for additional specialized training in animal-assisted interventions;
- b) the importance of selecting suitable animals for animal-assisted interventions;
- c) the importance of an appropriate, well organized environment for conducting animal-assisted interventions.



Photo 1: Participants and facilitators of the project workshops First Animal mediators within the Animals for You(th) project (photo: Adult Education centre Ormož).

The key elements of an effective process are well trained professionals, properly trained animals, and a well-maintained environment in which intervention takes place. The guidelines for working with adolescents, developed within the framework of the project are based on the integration of several key aspects: staff professionalism, environmental suitability and organisation, and the welfare of the animals within the overall design of the therapeutic program. The shared goal of these recommendations is to ensure high-quality, ethical, and sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders involved in the process.

3.1. The importance of appropriate professional education and additional training for staff in implementing animal-assisted interventions with young people

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) are becoming an increasingly widespread and recognized approach in work with children and adolescents. Their effectiveness and safety depend largely on the professionalism of those delivering them. It is essential that staff involved in these interventions have appropriate professional education in fields such as pedagogy, psychology,

social work, or healthcare. Such educational backgrounds enable professionals to understand the developmental needs of participants and to accurately recognize emotional and behavioral responses in individuals involved in animal-assisted therapies or activities. Properly trained staff can set clear and realistic therapeutic goals, structure the intervention process correctly, document sessions and participant responses accurately, and regularly evaluate outcomes of the therapeutic process. This level of professionalism is crucial for ensuring both the quality and accountability of the intervention.

In addition to formal professional education, implementing animal-assisted interventions require further specialized training. This includes knowledge and of animal behavior, animal welfare, safety protocols, and ethical standards. Practitioners must be able to recognize signs of stress in animals, interpret their body language, and assess the suitability of individual animals for working with young people. Such training enables professionals to integrate therapeutic techniques thoughtfully and purposefully with specific methods of working with animals.

At the same time, staff must be able to organize activities in a way that prevents animals from becoming overloaded, ensuring they have adequate rest, appropriate living conditions, and sufficient physical activity. An important component of training also includes managing



Photo 2: Participant of the workshop and the horse Čiko (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

interactions between participants and animals, approaching different users correctly, guiding interaction processes safely, and anticipating potential challenges within the environment. Qualified therapists are trained to document therapy sessions accurately, evaluate achieved goals, and adapt methods to the individual needs of the participants. This contributes to the professionalization of the field and ensures that animal-assisted therapy and activity programs maintain a high level of effectiveness and ethical standards. Staff qualifications are therefore not merely a formal requirement, but the foundation of quality safety, and long-term sustainability in animal-assisted interventions.

3.2. Appropriate selection of animals

Assessing the suitability of animals before inclusion in training

The careful and appropriate selection of animals is one of the most important factors in ensuring the safety, effectiveness, and well-being of all participants. Animals included in therapeutic activities must be chosen based on their temperament, tolerance of touch, noise, and unfamiliar situations, as well as their ability to remain calm and respond appropriately in different environments. Before an animal is included in training, a thorough suitability assessment should be conducted to determine whether it has the appropriate predispositions for training and for participating in various forms of human support.

Assessing the suitability of animals prior to training

Before involving an animal in training, it is essential to conduct structured behavioral tests that evaluate the animal's reactions to various environmental stimuli, sudden movements, physical contact from strangers, the presence of other animals, and, importantly, the quality of the relationship between the animal and its handler. These tests help determine whether the animal enjoys working with people or is merely tolerating the situation, which has a critical impact on its long-term well-being.

Animal welfare as a fundamental ethical framework

The welfare of the animal must be regarded as equally important as the benefits it provides to participants in therapies and activities. For this reason, the basic conditions for animal well-being must be consistently and unconditionally ensured for all animals involved in animal-assisted interventions.



Photo 3: Participant of the workshop and therapeutic dog Sky (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

- Guaranteed access to water, food, and proper nutrition to maintain the health and vitality of the animal;
- Appropriate living conditions that provide animals with comfort, including shelter and adequate space for rest;
- Protection from pain, injury, and disease through proper prevention, prompt diagnosis, and effective treatment;
- Opportunity to express natural behaviors by providing sufficient space, appropriate equipment, and companionship of the same species;
- Prevention of fear and distress by creating conditions that minimize the animal's physical and psychological suffering.

The “Good Fit” model

Appropriate animal selection also requires careful consideration of how well the animal matches the specific needs of the target group. Therapeutic contexts vary, and animals must therefore possess different characteristics depending on the setting. For example, an animal suitable for working with children on the autism spectrum may require different behavioral and emotional traits than one working with adolescents experiencing behavioral crises.

The foundation of a successful selection is based on a thorough understanding of developmental, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of the individual or group participating in animal-assisted interventions. Only in this way can we choose an animal that is not only safely included in the process but also contributes to achieving therapeutic goals with its inherent qualities. A well balanced relationship between the client, the animal, and the therapist is essential for the effectiveness, stability, and safety of the entire process.

Preventing animal burnout

An animal that is not suitable for working with vulnerable population but are nonetheless included in interventions may develop stress related behavioral, burnout, or anxieties. This reduces their effectiveness and can compromise the safety of participants. Continuous monitoring of animal well-being, regular breaks, and appropriate limits on participation are therefore crucial. Animals must be provided with adequate care, sufficient rest, and free time including opportunities for movement in natural environments.

Proper animal selection and balanced workloads directly contribute to the safety of both young participants and professionals.

Contribution to effectiveness

When animals are carefully selected and appropriately matched to the therapeutic context, deeper emotional bonds can form between the animal and the participant, enhancing the overall therapeutic effect. Adolescents are more likely to develop trust, express emotions, and build empathy when interacting with animals that are calm, responsive, and emotionally stable. Trust, in turn, forms the foundation of an effective and meaningful therapeutic process.

3.3. Appropriate selection and arrangement of the environment intended for Animal-Assisted Therapy and activity processes

Alongside staff training and appropriate animal selection, the choice and organization of the environment play a crucial role in ensuring safe, professional, and effective animal-assisted interventions. A well-designed environment supports physical activity (such as walking, grooming, or leading the animal), social interaction (including group activities), and emotional regulation (through quiet areas and contact with nature). The environment directly influences the quality of interaction between participants and animals and significantly contributes to successful outcomes in work with young people.



Photo 4: Therapy horse Bela at rest (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

The environment as a foundation of safety and predictability

The space in which animal-assisted activities and therapies take place must be physically safe and as predictable as possible. Both animals and participants are sensitive to sudden changes such as loud noises, strong smells, or rushed movement, which can cause stress and negatively affect behavior and safety. A stable environment helps both the user and the animal feel secure, facilitating trust and meaningful interaction.

Minimal sensory load

For adolescents with autism, ADHD, or emotional distress, a sensory-balanced environment is especially important. Excessive visual, auditory, or movement-related stimuli can interfere with concentration and emotional self-regulation,

reducing the ability to form a positive connection with the animal. Animals also perform better in calm environments, where they can remain attentive and responsive to subtle cues.

Possibility of withdrawal and rest

The environment should provide opportunities for both animals and participants to withdraw when they feel overwhelmed. Animals must have designated areas where they can rest without interruption, which is a key aspect of animal welfare. Similarly, adolescents should have the option to take breaks when needed.

Alignment with nature and functionality

Natural environments, such as gardens, pastures, or well-designed indoor spaces with natural light, have been shown to promote relaxation and openness. The space should be functionally adapted to the planned activities—large enough for movement, tasks, and the use of materials and equipment (e.g., brushes, leashes). Such functionality directly supports effective cooperation and engagement.

Stability and continuity of the environment

Animal-assisted therapies and activities conducted in familiar spaces help establish routines and provide a sense of security, which is particularly important for adolescents with developmental or behavioral challenges. Animals also respond more positively in familiar environments, as this reduces uncertainty and supports cooperation.

Compliance with hygiene and veterinary standards

Indoor facilities where animal-assisted programs take place must meet hygiene standards, allow for easy cleaning, and provide appropriate storage for food and equipment, as well as access to fresh water. Compliance with veterinary guidelines is essential, particularly when animals are not permanently housed at the facility.



Photo 5: Therapeutic horses, Banská Bystrica (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Organizations that develop their programs in line with standardized guidelines and protocols can, over time, ensure a professional workforce capable of delivering safe, effective, and goal-oriented interventions. Such programs often include mentorship and supervision, further enhancing professional competence and participant safety.

4. GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN COUNSELING ACTIVITIES AND WORKSHOPS

The success of most interventions—whether in therapeutic settings or within various animal-assisted activities—depends on the appropriate selection and clear definition of goals, as well as a well-planned process structure. Clearly defined goals enable focused and purposeful work and make it possible to assess outcomes. A structured process provides a framework within which professional practice can be carried out safely and effectively.

Below, we present general guiding objectives that served as a reference for conducting activities in which outcome measurement was not essential, but guidance, structure, and process quality were of primary importance.

4.1. Key elements of the professional process

Goals

General objectives:

- Establishing a sense of safety and trust in the process;
- Encouraging self-reflection and awareness of current experiences;
- Enabling the expression of thoughts, feelings, or experiences in an acceptable manner;
- Developing basic social skills through cooperative experiences;
- Learning to be present in the moment without expectations or pressure.

When planning animal-assisted activities, these general objectives provided an overall framework for shaping the process.

In therapeutic contexts, these objectives can be further developed into specific and measurable goals aligned with the individual treatment plan and the adolescent's developmental needs. It is essential that these goals build on the user's strengths and emphasize positive outcomes, such as increased self-confidence and successful task completion.

Specific, measurable objectives:

- Improving self-regulation, social skills, or emotional stabilization;
- Aligning goals with the comprehensive treatment plan and the child's developmental needs (e.g., improved school performance or increased social inclusion);
- Focused on the child's strengths, emphasizing positive outcomes such as increased self-confidence and task success;
- Regularly monitoring process and adjusting goals and methods as needed.

Process structure

A clear and thoughtfully planned structure of the therapeutic process is essential for safety and effectiveness:

- Each workshop (therapy session or activity) should begin with clear instructions about the program and clearly defined rules for interacting with the animals;
- It is advisable to plan structured and goal-oriented activities, adapted to the age and abilities of the user, and divided into smaller, manageable steps.
- Where the process requires it, it is necessary to maintain a consistent routine that provides the user with a sense of stability and predictability.

Documentation and monitoring

Accurate and consistent documentation is fundamental for the quality implementation and evaluation of animal-assisted therapy:

- After each therapy session, observations should be recorded, such as behavioral changes, emotional responses, level of participation, and achieved goals.
- Standardized forms (e.g., tables, notes) should be used to ensure consistency among practitioners.
- Individual plans and the structure of the therapeutic process should be developed in collaboration with an interdisciplinary team.
- Records of animal health and behavior must be kept to ensure their welfare and the ethical implementation of therapy.

Evaluation of effectiveness

Regular assessment of therapy effectiveness allows for adjustment of approaches and ensures high-quality care:

- Conduct regular evaluations of user progress according to therapeutic goals using measurable indicators (e.g., improved concentration, reduced hyperactivity).
- Based on results, goals and methods should be adapted to the user's current needs.
- Monitor program effectiveness through assessments, feedback, and data analysis.

- Regularly check the welfare of animals to ensure their comfort and safety throughout the process.

4.2. General guidelines for practical work with a group

Based on experiences gained during workshops conducted within the *Animals for You(th)* project with adolescents aged 15 to 19, a set of guidelines was developed that proved essential for high-quality group work. These guidelines support safe, effective, and cohesive group dynamics.

One of the main challenges in group work with adolescents is motivation. While adults often participate voluntarily, adolescents are frequently referred by parents, schools, or other institutions. A key objective is therefore to establish a relationship that gradually encourages voluntary and genuine engagement in the therapeutic process.

An important role of the group leader or therapist is to foster interest and inclusion while allowing space for peer-to-peer interaction. This enables adolescents to practice cooperation, participate actively in discussions, and learn how to manage emotions such as boredom, anger, or sadness. Through this process, they gain insight into respectful communication and strengthen social skills such as empathy, respect, and care for others.



Photo 6: Young people participating in workshops (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Key guidelines for group workshops

a. Establishing and maintaining a genuine and professional relationship

The foundation of successful group work is a respectful, authentic relationship between the therapist and the group, with clearly defined professional boundaries. The therapist should engage with each individual while maintaining overall group cohesion.

b. Listening to and understanding the individual as a key skill of an effective leader

Every group member has the right to be heard and understood. The therapist's attention to each individual is crucial for creating a supportive group environment. A nonjudgmental and accepting approach allows adolescents to express themselves without fear or shame. When the therapist truly listens, members feel valued, important, and accepted as they are. Active, empathetic listening strengthens the sense of connection, reduces feelings of loneliness, and opens space for growth and change.

c. Authenticity of the group leader or therapist

The leader's communication must be consistent and genuine. Alignment between words, emotions, and body language is essential, as adolescents are particularly sensitive to insincerity. Authenticity is therefore key to building trust.

d. Recognizing and valuing the progress of both the group and individual members

The group leader must be able to observe and acknowledge the contribution of each member and provide positive reinforcement. This strengthens the sense of acceptance and connection in the group, which is essential for creating a safe space for self-expression.

e. Flexible leadership in accordance with group dynamics

For successful group leadership, it is extremely important to understand, recognize, and adapt to the group dynamics. The leader must know how to guide the group, support emerging processes during workshops, and respond to the needs of the members while maintaining the structure and safety of the process.

f. Emotional literacy and empathy of the group leader

The group leader must be able to help adolescents recognize, understand, and express their emotions. This primarily involves active listening, empathy, and expressing acceptance without compromising professional boundaries.

g. Trying to establish contact where it is not yet present

It is also the leader's responsibility to gradually and patiently establish contact with more withdrawn or emotionally less accessible young people. This should be done using various techniques and approaches that support safe and non-intrusive engagement and foster the development of a trusting relationship.



Photo 7: Participant of the workshop at rest (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

4.3. General guidelines for including animals in work with young people

The inclusion of appropriate and well-trained therapeutic animals in counseling work with an individual adolescent or a group of adolescents enriches the therapeutic process in every case. It increases users' motivation to participate in program activities, accelerates the development of a positive relationship between the therapist and the user, and is highly effective in managing behavioral difficulties and improving self-esteem. However, before involving animals in work with adolescents, it is essential to follow basic guidelines that address the environment, the user, and the therapeutic animal.

a. Creating a supportive environment

Before including an animal in therapy, it is important that the adolescent feels safe. The therapist must ensure that the adolescent is informed about the role of the therapeutic animal and agrees to its presence.

b. Considering the individual needs of the young people

The therapist must adapt the use of the therapeutic animal according to the specific needs of the adolescent and the goals of the therapeutic process. For example, the presence of a calm animal may help an adolescent with anxiety to relax, while more active interaction with the animal can foster a sense of competence in an adolescent with low self-esteem.

c. Collaboration with parents or guardians

Involving parents or guardians in the therapeutic process is crucial, especially for minors. The therapist must ensure that parents are informed about the use of the therapeutic animal and agree to its involvement in therapy. In some cases, families may be encouraged to consider pet ownership as a supportive factor for socially isolated adolescents.

d. Ensuring animal wellbeing

Animal wellbeing must be given equal importance as the therapeutic effect that the animal has in the process. While working with an animal, behavioral signs of stress, burnout, or discomfort must be continuously monitored, as these directly affect the animal's ability to participate. The animal is not merely a tool but an active partner in the relationship, whose state significantly influences the quality and course of therapy. Regular evaluation of the animal's behavior and working conditions, in accordance with ethical guidelines for the use of animals in therapeutic settings, is therefore essential.

4.4. Different ways of involving animals in work with young people

Below, we present several ways of including animals that were applied during youth workshops in the project. These various approaches in implementing animal-assisted interventions allow adolescents to express emotions and experiences in a way appropriate to their age and developmental stage, while also providing the therapist with flexibility to approach the adolescent and begin building a quality, constructive relationship.

a. Encouraging responsibility and care for others

Involving adolescents in activities where they take on some responsibility for the animal helps develop a sense of care, duty, and reliability.

Activities:

- the young person helps feed the animal (e.g., preparing the meal, then feeding together with an adult);
- the young person participates in basic animal care (grooming, cleaning the animal's area);
- the young person learns to observe and recognize signs of the animal's well-being.



Photo 8: Participant of the workshop with horses (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

b. Encouraging relaxation

Interaction with an animal allows adolescents to calm down, relax, and develop strategies for managing tension.

Activities:

- gently grooming and petting the animal;
- calmly walking with a dog or horse;
- breathing and relaxation exercises with animals (e.g., synchronizing breathing with the slow movements of the animal).

c. Encouraging creativity

Animals can inspire adolescents to express creativity and push their personal boundaries.

Activities:

- creating drawings, stories, or poems about the therapeutic animal;
- learning and performing simple tricks or exercises with the animal;
- taking a photo of different moments or recording different sounds and later presenting them to the group.

d. Encouraging emotional expression

When working with adolescents, it is essential to provide a safe environment that allows multiple ways of expressing emotions, as individuals differ in maturity, personality traits, and coping strategies. The therapist must always keep in mind that a flexible approach encourages emotional expression and strengthens the process of recovery and personal development.



Photo 9: Participants of the workshop with horses (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Activities:

- telling a story from the perspective of the animal (e.g., “What do you think your dog is feeling today?”);
- writing short letters to the animals (dog, horse, cat) in which the adolescent shares their thoughts and feelings.

d. Encouraging social skills

Social skills form the foundation for successful integration into society. Activities that involve collaboration, listening, and conflict resolution help adolescents learn respectful communication and build healthy relationships with others. Through various activities, we can support and strengthen the development of social skills in adolescents.

Activities:

- two or more adolescents lead a dog or horse together on a leash;
- the group collectively creates a story about the animal (each person contributes a part of the story before moving to the next);
- taking care of the animal together (brushing, cleaning the space, preparing food).



Photo 10: Participants of the workshop with horses (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

e. Promoting the young person’s self-confidence

Encourage the adolescent to engage in positive interactions with the therapeutic animal, so that through these experiences they can develop a sense of self-worth and confidence in their abilities.

5. THE FIRST ANIMAL MEDIATORS—WORKSHOP WITH ANIMALS AND YOUTH IN MENTAL DISTRESS

WORKSHOP: RECOGNIZING, ACCEPTING, AND EXPRESSING MY EMOTIONS

Workshop with horse(s)

Location: Tie-up area, outdoor arena, pasture

Participants: Adolescents, therapist assisted by horse and handler, psychologist or youth worker

Why it is important for young people to recognize and express their emotions

Adolescence is a period full of emotional ups and downs, experiencing emotions of varying intensity, which can be very challenging. Recognizing, understanding, and appropriately expressing these emotions is crucial for the adolescent's mental health and for maintaining stable and healthy relationships. When adolescents understand what they feel and can articulate it, they can better understand themselves, cope with difficulties, and make decisions that support their well-being. Expressing emotions in an appropriate way is equally important, as it allows the release of internal tension and improves communication with others.



Photo 11: Participant of the workshop with horse Miško (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Encouraging adolescents to express their emotions in a healthy way and creating an environment where they feel heard and safe is crucial for their personal and social development. Emotional regulation is especially important during adolescence for several reasons related to their development, social relationships, and mental health.

It is essential for the development of emotional intelligence, which includes the ability to understand one's own and others' emotions and to cope with them effectively. Emotional regulation also strengthens relationships, as expressing emotions allows deeper connections with peers, family, and others, fostering trust and mutual understanding.

Appropriate recognition and expression of emotions reduce the likelihood of conflicts and improve problem-solving skills.

By effectively regulating their emotions, adolescents are better able to manage stress, as they can quickly seek support and understanding from others. This strengthens self-confidence, as others are better able to understand them, which helps them feel accepted and develop a sense of self-worth. In this way, the prevention of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or anger outbursts becomes highly effective, and adolescents learn to seek help in a timely manner on their own. All of this is an essential part of the process of forming and understanding their own identity.



Photo 12: Participant of the workshop in the company of the best therapist (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Adolescents face the challenge how to express their emotions. There are various techniques for expressing emotions that help them develop healthier coping strategies. One such technique is talking, whether with a friend, parent, or counselor, as words help relieve emotional burden. Journaling is another effective method, allowing the adolescent to express everything that troubles them in a safe environment. Additionally, emotions can be expressed through creative activities such as drawing, music, or dance, or released through physical activity, such as running or yoga.

The emotions most commonly experienced by adolescents include uncertainty related to growing up, anger due to feelings of injustice or restrictions, and joy when achieving successes or spending time with friends. Although they are often aware of these

emotions, they sometimes struggle to express them appropriately. It is important to talk openly about emotions and teach adolescents that expressing their feelings is a sign of strength, not weakness. This helps them face challenges more effectively and build healthier relationships.

Short-term workshop goals:

Participants will:

1. Analyze examples from their own lives and identify the emotions that arose in those situations (self-reflection on emotional states).
2. Learn the basics of strategies for expressing their emotions in a healthy and constructive way (various emotion expression techniques).
3. Develop empathy: Participants will practice recognizing emotions in others through role-playing, practicing communication, and thereby learning empathy.

Long-term workshop goals:

Participants will:

1. Build greater emotional resilience: Participants will gradually develop the ability to cope with different emotional states and intensities, recognize them, and respond to them in a healthy way.
2. Improve emotional literacy: Participants will enhance their ability to identify, understand, and regulate their emotions.
3. Strengthening interpersonal relationships: By improving the recognition of their own emotions and the ability to express them appropriately, participants will build better and more authentic relationships with others.

1. INTRODUCTION

Greeting and group introduction: The facilitator and youth worker greet the group, introduce themselves, and present the topic of the workshop. Before starting, a brief discussion about workshop rules is held: participants are included without judgment, everyone has the opportunity to participate and express their opinions, and also the option to step back from the group if needed. The content of the workshop is not to be shared outside. Participants are encouraged to listen carefully, actively participate, and understand that there are no right or wrong answers. The facilitator explains the different methods and formats used in the workshop: guided discussion, individual work, role-play, pair work, group work, and chain method.

Introductory games (ICE BREAKERS):

Ice breakers are activities designed to help participants get to know each other. The facilitator and youth worker also take part. These activities promote familiarity among group members.

Game 1—"Name + a moment that made you happy"

Description: Participants stand in a circle. Each participant says their name and briefly describes a moment from the past week that made them happy. After everyone has shared, the group plays a ball game where the ball is thrown to another participant while saying their name. The game ends when participants are confident in knowing each other's names.

Goal: To help participants get to know each other and support further group communication.

Game 2—"Truth and Lie"

Description: Each participant states two facts about themselves – one true and one false. The rest of the group tries to guess which statement is false.

Duration: 2–5 minutes per person.

Goal: To create a relaxed atmosphere and learn interesting facts about each participant.

Game 3—"Find someone who..."

Description: The facilitator gives each participant a card with a prompt, e.g., "Find someone who can sing" or "Find someone who traveled abroad last month." Participants must find one or more people matching the description, talk to them briefly, and introduce them to the group.

Duration: 10–15 minutes.

Goal: To encourage communication and connection among participants.

2. MIDDLE PART

At the beginning of the main session, the facilitator announces the workshop topic, explains the methods and flow of the session, and reminds participants of the agreed-upon principles and workshop rules.

We begin with social games on the theme **"RECOGNIZING AND EXPRESSING MY EMOTIONS."**

1. Activity: EMOTIONS, EMOTIONAL STATES, AND RECOGNITION GAME

The workshop facilitator distributes Worksheet No. 1 to the participants. Instructions are given to read the listed emotions and add any additional emotions that are not included in the column. Once finished, each participant reads aloud the emotions they added, and the facilitator writes them on the board. Participants are then divided into groups and select a specific emotion, which they attempt to represent. Finally, together they add some more emotional expressions corresponding to the emotions listed on the board.

2. Activity: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS NON-VERBALLY

Participants are divided into two groups. The facilitator gives each member of the group a card with a specific emotion written on it. Each participant must express that emotion non-verbally to the other group members, who then try to guess which emotion is being represented.

3. Activity: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS WITH WORDS

Participants mix and are again divided into two groups. The facilitator gives each participant a card with an emotion written on it. Each participant has the opportunity to describe the emotion, but they are not allowed to name it directly. They can describe the emotional state, a situation, or an emotional expression. The goal is for the other participants to identify which emotion is being described.



Photo 13: Participants at the workshops, (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Preparation and work with horses

In the next part of the workshop, the facilitator informs participants that horses will be included in the activities. First, they will get to know the space where the horses move and observe the dynamics within the herd.

Observing horses' body language

1. Activity: OBSERVING HERD DYNAMICS

Discussion about the herd: herd size, horse behavior within the herd, and observing the surrounding environment. Followed by a discussion about observations.

2. Activity: OBSERVING HORSE BODY LANGUAGE

The workshop facilitator, who is also the equine-assisted therapist, explains

the basics of horse body language. Participants observe the horse and discuss what they see.

3. Activity: HORSE PREPARATION

Participants will get to know the horses they will be working with. They will learn important horse care procedures and become familiar with some of the equipment most commonly used when working with horses.

4. Activity: WORKING WITH HORSES ON THE GROUND – “MIRROR OF EMOTIONS”

Goal of the activity: Participants explore emotions through interaction with horses, learn to express and recognize emotions, and improve communication through body language and energy.

Instructions for the activity:

Horse exercise

1. Preparation:

- Horses are either on a lead or free to move, depending on the situation and participants' experience.
- The facilitator explains that horses will act as a “mirror” of participants' emotions, as they are highly sensitive to energy and body language.

2. Activity flow:

Recognizing emotions

- The participant enters the space with the horse and chooses an emotion to “carry” (e.g., joy, calm, sadness, fear, anger).

- Without words or explanation, the participant expresses this emotion through posture, movement, and energy.
- Participants observe the horse's reaction (e.g., whether it becomes attentive, calm, distant, restless) and note different parts of the horse's body and behavior.
- After the activity, the group discusses which emotion was expressed and how the horse responded.

Expressing emotions

- The participant is tasked with "communicating" a specific emotion to the horse (e.g., "joy" or "calm").
- This is done using a combination of:
 - **Body language:** slow or energetic steps, posture.
 - **Vocal tone:** low, calm, or high, energetic.
 - **Touch:** soft, soothing contact or playful tug.
- The horse's reaction (e.g., movement, approaching, or stepping back) indicates how it interpreted the message.

Emotion circle

- Participants form a circle, with the horse standing in the center.
- Each participant, in turn, says aloud one emotion (e.g., "I am happy.", "I am nervous.") and takes a step toward the horse.
- Participants are encouraged to be genuine and observe how their energy affects the horse (e.g., whether the horse moves closer or stays in place).

3. CONCLUSION

Discussion after the activity: After each activity, participants conduct a joint evaluation of the exercise. The facilitator leads a group discussion using the following questions:

- How did you feel while expressing your emotions?
- What connection did you feel with the horse?
- How can you better express your emotions or adjust them for clearer communication?

Key points:

- **Emphasis:** Honest and clear communication of emotions through body language and energy.
- **Adaptations:** The activity can be conducted individually or in groups, depending on the number of horses and participants.



Photo 14: Participants at the workshop after the evaluation (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

6. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING FALCONRY AS A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH IN WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

6.1. Introduction to falconry as a therapeutic approach

Falconry is the traditional art of training and coexisting with birds of prey, with deep historical, cultural, and ecological roots. In recent years, this approach has been used not only as a form of hobby or environmental activity but also as an alternative form of therapy. It has proven to be highly beneficial when working with young people facing emotional, social, or behavioral challenges.

Therapeutic falconry combines animal-assisted therapy with environmental education and experiential pedagogy, utilizing the unique characteristics of birds of prey—their majesty, dignity, and the precision and trust required in working with them.



Photo 15: Participant at the workshop with falcons (photo Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica)

6.2. Quality environment for therapeutic falconry

A high-quality environment for falconry is crucial for the success of the therapeutic process. It must meet the following conditions:

- **Natural environment**—an open space with sufficient visibility and room for the birds of prey to fly (e.g., meadow, pasture, forest edge).
- **Safe environment**—a dedicated falconry area or aviary for raptors that meets the requirements for animal protection (shade, bathing opportunities, sturdy perches, enough space for movement).

Health and well-being of the raptors—the birds must be healthy, in good condition, content, and safely housed. Their well-being is a fundamental prerequisite for successful therapy; therefore, regular veterinary check-ups are mandatory, a balanced diet, and appropriate lighting and temperature conditions.

- **Space for participants**—a covered area for preparation, theoretical sessions, and relaxation (e.g., a small club or pavilion).
- **Calm atmosphere**—reducing noise and distractions that could negatively affect the concentration of the young participant and the behavior of the raptor.
- **Safety measures**—a fenced area, presence of a trained falconer with a valid falconry license, and supervision by a therapist or educator.

The environment represents a harmonious space where participants learn responsibility, focus, and trust through interaction with a living being that responds sensitively and naturally.

6.3. Training and care of birds of prey as a therapeutic method

Raptors used in therapy must be accustomed to human presence while maintaining their natural behavior and dignity. Their training differs from classical hunting falconry; the goal is not hunting but developing a relationship between human and bird.

Basic phases of raptor training:

- **Imprinting**—a young raptor becomes accustomed to human contact, facilitating later work with youth.
- **Habituation**—the raptor adapts to the presence of multiple people, sounds, and movements in the environment.
- **Building trust**—positive reinforcement (food rewards) establishes a stable relationship between the falconer and the bird.
- **Glove training and recall**—the raptor learns to respond to commands, land on the glove, and return after release.
- **Maintaining fitness and health**—regular exercise, bathing, veterinary check-ups, balanced nutrition, and behavioral observation.

Species commonly used in therapeutic work include the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Eurasian eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*), barn owl (*Tyto alba*), and the goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)—these are the species suitable for human interaction.

The professional responsible for training, health, and safe handling of raptors is a qualified falconer with a valid falconry license, experienced in working with people and able to adapt activities to therapeutic goals.

6.4. Tools and equipment

Basic falconry tools, which are also part of the therapeutic process, include:

- **Leather glove**—protects the hand when the raptor lands.
- **Jesses**—straps attached to the bird's legs, allowing safe handling.
- **Carabiners**—for securing the bird during transport or training.
- **Lures**—tools for calling the bird, associated with a reward.

- **Scale**—for checking weight, crucial for proper activities adjustments.
- **Transport box**—for safely moving the raptor.
- **Aviary or perch**—for the raptor to rest when not interacting with participants

The use of these tools becomes part of experiential learning, in which the participant takes responsibility for the equipment, safety, and well-being of the bird. This activity also has an important educational impact.

6.5. The process of working with falcons as part of therapy

Therapy with birds of prey is conducted gradually and respects the pace of all participants in the process. The process should be led by a trained falconer in collaboration with a therapist or special educator. The recommended duration of the therapeutic process depends on the individual participant, but usually consists of 8 to 12 weekly sessions. In cases of long-term work with participants with behavioral challenges or social integration difficulties, the program can be extended over several months or even an entire school year, with the phases (observation—contact—trust—independent interaction) adapted to the dynamics and goals of each therapy.

The process of integrating a bird of prey into work with adolescents involves the following steps:

1. **Initial introduction to the raptor**—theoretical introduction, safety rules, and observation of the bird's behavior.
2. **Passive interaction**—the participant observes the falconer's work, noting the bird's movements, sounds, and reactions.
3. **Active participation**—the participant helps with cleaning the aviary, preparing food, and providing water, developing a sense of responsibility.
4. **Establishing contact**—the participant, under the falconer's supervision, attempts to hold the raptor on the glove.
5. **Basic training exerciss**—the participant calls the bird to the glove, learning correct movements, patience, and focus.
6. **Evaluation**—after the activity, a discussion about experiences, successes, and fears reinforces self-reflection and emotional awareness.

The range of activities can be expanded with additional tasks such as photographing or drawing birds of prey, keeping a care journal, or creating informational charts, promoting creativity and long-term interest in nature.

6.6. Benefits of falconry as a therapeutic method:

- **Development of responsibility**—the young person becomes aware of their direct responsibility for a living being.
- **Increased self-confidence**—managing contact with the raptor strengthens an internal sense of competence and achievement.
- **Improved concentration and self-regulation** working with the bird requires calmness, precision, and discipline.

- **Reduction of anxiety and aggression**—interaction with nature and animals has a relaxing and stabilizing effect.
- **Development of empathy and relationship**—understanding the bird’s behavior fosters empathy toward others.
- **Support for social integration**—group activities promote cooperation, communication, and respect.
- **Increased environmental awareness**—participants gain an understanding of the importance of protecting raptors and the broader ecosystem.

Specific Activity:

1. Activity: “Touch of Trust”–Establishing contact with the raptor

Goal:

Develop self-confidence, manage fear, and train self-regulation through direct interaction with the bird of prey.

Activity description:

After an initial theoretical preparation (learning about the raptor species, safety rules, and observing behavior), the client, under the supervision of the falconer, approaches the raptor, which is positioned on a perch. The client puts on a protective glove, and the falconer explains the correct posture, breathing, and movements. The falconer then carefully transfers the raptor onto the client’s glove.

The participant observes the bird’s breathing, movements, and sounds, while trying to maintain calmness, balance, and concentration. After the activity, a reflection session follows, discussing overcoming fears, self-confidence, and self-control.

Therapeutic effects:

- reduces anxiety and tension;
- strengthens a sense of competence and courage;
- supports concentration and the ability to stay “present”;
- Develops emotional stability and self-control.

2. Activity: “Landings”–Calling the bird to the glove

Goal:

Build trust and patience, develop coordination, precision, and emotional stability.

Activity Description:

Once the participant has established basic contact with the raptor, the next exercise involves calling the bird. The participant stands at a safe distance (5–10 meters), wearing a protective glove and holding a reward. The falconer releases the raptor and guides the participant on when to give the signal or raise the glove.

The raptor flies and lands on the glove, receiving an immediate reward. The participant experiences a strong sense of trust and accomplishment, as the raptor responds to their calmness and movements.



Therapeutic effects:

- develops patience, precision, and concentration;
- strengthens the sense of trust—“the bird trusts me because I am calm”;
- Improves physical coordination and self-regulation;
- Enhances emotional resilience and stress management.

Photo 16: Participant at the workshop with falcons, (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica)



Photo 17: Participant at the workshop with falcons, (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Educational benefit:

- The participant becomes aware that every impulse and movement has consequences.
- Develops responsibility and an understanding of their impact on living beings in the environment.

3. Activity: “Caring for birds” – daily routine and behavior observation**Goal:**

Encourage a sense of responsibility, empathy, and understanding of the needs of a living being.

Activity description:

The participant takes part in the daily care of the raptor cleaning the aviary, inspecting feathers, preparing food, providing water, and keeping a simple behavior journal (observing appetite, mood, activity).

Through these activities, the participant gradually develops a relationship with the bird, learning to recognize its signals, moods, and reactions. During the activities, the therapist or falconer leads discussions about parallels between caring for the bird and responsibility in one’s own life (e.g., self-care, following routines, respecting boundaries).

Therapeutic effects:

- develops empathy and observational skills;
- teaches responsibility, consistency, and organization;
- reinforces emotional stability and inner calm;
- builds self-esteem through meaningful activities.



Photo 18: Participants with their birds at workshop with falcons, (photo: Adult Education Centre Ormož).

Possible upgrades:

Participants can enhance their experience with activities such as keeping a journal, creating a drawing of the raptor, or making a short video about “their” bird. This allows them to connect the therapeutic process with creativity and self-reflection.

The three core therapeutic activities in falconry –**“Touch of trust,” “Landing” and “Caring for birds”**–form the heart of falconry therapy. They combine interaction with a living being, the experience of success, and practical responsibility, helping young people develop emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and social competencies.



Photo 19: With birds we share friendship, participant at workshops with falcons, (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

7. Conclusion

Introducing falconry as a therapeutic approach represents an innovative and effective way of working with young people, particularly those facing challenges in social interaction, self-esteem, or emotional regulation. It combines practical elements of environmental education, experiential pedagogy, and animal-assisted therapy.

The success of this method depends on:

- the professional preparation of the falconer, including a certified falconry qualification;
- the health, well-being, and safe housing of the raptor;
- a suitable environment and safety measures;
- gradual and sensitive work with the client over a reasonable period of time.

In this way, falconry as therapy creates a unique space where the beauty of nature, the power of trust, and the understanding of life values intertwine – through the relationship between a human and a bird of prey.



Photo 20: Participant at the workshop with falcons, (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom in Banská Bystrica).

7. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING APITHERAPY AS A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH IN WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

7.1. Introduction

Apitherapy and its various methods for youth promote relaxation, improve concentration, enhance physical and emotional well-being, and increase awareness of the importance of bees. Apitherapy is based on experiential learning about bees, aromatherapy using air from hives, listening to bee sounds, and connecting with nature. It also involves exploring and preparing various bee products, which contain a complex of active substances; these substances work synergistically to stimulate the mechanisms of the human immune system. Interaction with bees and working with bee products reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, and alleviates feelings of loneliness and emotional exhaustion. When opening a beehive, one must fully focus on the small, diligent bees, ensuring not to harm them or trigger their defensive reactions, thus avoiding stings. This focused attention allows one to forget worries and pain and enter the “bee kingdom.” Within this kingdom, one must move slowly and carefully, observing all its details. Every “visitor to the bee world” begins to naturally and spontaneously breathe in the bee air more slowly and deeply; the heart rate calms, and a sense of inner peace takes over.

At first glance, bees may not seem like typical animals suitable for therapy, as they cannot be petted or cuddled. However, the fact that bees have survived on our planet for millions of years without significant changes to their species encourages exploration of the traits, behaviors, and activity patterns that have enabled this.

Unlike other animals used in animal-assisted therapy with youth, bee products and activities involving bees offer additional opportunities for experiential learning and help young people cope with emotional and behavioral challenges. The following presents several activities with bees and bee products designed to engage youth and foster greater empathy toward other living beings on our planet.



Photo 21: Participants at apitherapy workshops, (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom in Banská Bystrica).

7.2. Basic recommendations for incorporating bees and bee products in work with youth

To ensure the quality and safety of youth in bee-assisted therapies and activities involving bee products, the following factors must be considered:

- **Proper professional qualifications and continuous training**—Staff must have completed additional education in beekeeping, including apitherapy. It is also beneficial if they have completed other certified courses with experts in activities related to bees' lives and their positive impact on human well-being.
- **Competence in guiding interactions**—Staff must be capable of leading interactions between participants and bees, selecting and planning appropriate activities, incorporating therapeutic techniques, anticipating situations, documenting interventions, and evaluating achieved goals. It is essential that staff can provide first aid and treatment in case of allergic reactions or injuries arising from contact with bees or bee products.
- **Allergy screening**—Participants must be checked to ensure they are not allergic to bee venom, pollen, honey, propolis, wax, or other bee products (confirmation from parents or a doctor is required).
- **Healthy bee colony**—Only healthy bee colonies may be used for apitherapy. Colonies should not have been exposed to strong chemical treatments, must live in suitable conditions with abundant and diverse forage, be calm, and not sting when the hive is opened.
- **Appropriate environment**—The space where interventions with bees take place (hives, apiary, observation hives, etc.) must be properly arranged, equipped both materially and physically, and suitable for the activity. The same applies to areas where activities with bee products occur, where all hygiene principles must be observed and participants must feel calm and comfortable (e.g., inhaling propolis, breathing hive air, working with wax, making candles or wax packaging, flavored honey, etc.).



Photo 22: Participants at apitherapy workshops, Banská Bystrica (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

7.3. Environment for apitherapy

The environment in which apitherapy takes place is crucial for the success of the therapeutic process. Apitherapy can be conducted:

- **outdoors**—in an apiary or near hives, allowing direct contact with bees;
- **indoors**—where multiple bee colonies are kept in hives, or in a “bee house” where participants do not have direct contact with the hives;
- **using observation hives**—with transparent sides, allowing participants to observe the bees safely.

Workshops can also be conducted in spaces where hives are not present, focusing solely on activities with bee products.

Requirements for the outdoor space:

- It should be located away from busy roads and densely populated areas.
- There should be sufficient diverse forage and water supplies for the hives.
- Lighting conditions must be appropriate for working with bees.
- The apiary area should be fenced and clearly marked with signs warning of bee presence.

The goal is to create a harmonious environment suitable both for the healthy life and growth of bee colonies and for youth, allowing them to feel relaxed, connected with nature, and mindful of themselves in relation to the natural world.

Requirements for indoor spaces:

Spaces for participant activities, such as theoretical preparation, introduction to tools and equipment used in beekeeping, working with honeycombs, or workshops with bee products, must be free from disturbances and noise to avoid negatively affecting participants' concentration and the behavior of the bees.

7.4. Specific activities with youth in apitherapy

7.4.1. The apiary and bee house

Type of bee house:

A specialized enclosed wooden structure with a small footprint and natural ventilation. On the longer side, four hives are placed close together so that the tops of the hives form a “bed,” allowing participants to lie above the hives. A traditional design is recommended, and insulation of the ceiling and walls with ecological materials (eco-wool, straw, etc.) is also suitable.

Hives:

- At least four hives, using a horizontal hive type.
- Stationary hives with wooden panels placed in a frame on top, allowing observation of the bee colony while forming a bed.
- The bed is separated from participants by a mesh barrier to prevent direct contact with bees.

- Hives with separate boxes, where the brood area is at the bottom and the honey space on top, are less suitable; it is important that lying directly above the brood area is possible.



Photo 23: Participant at apitherapy workshop, Banská Bystrica (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

Air from the hives:

Air is supplied to the room through openings at the top of the hives, creating a microclimate filled with aromatic substances, essences, honey, pollen, propolis, brood pheromones, royal jelly volatiles, etc.

Safety from bee stings:

Protection is ensured with a mesh placed on top of each honeycomb, sealing the hive and preventing bees from leaving their designated area. The bee house area must be clearly marked, and access is only allowed under the supervision of a certified therapist or beekeeper following proper instructions.

Environment:

The bee house should be located in a calm, green area with enough forage for the bees, away from traffic or noise sources. Bees should have sufficient sunlight at the entrance, especially in winter. Positioning the bee house so that the hive tops are in direct sunlight all day is not ideal.

Therapeutic process in bee houses:

- **Group size:** 1–3 young participants, gradually placed on the hives, one at a time.
- **Duration:** 20–45 minutes per lying session.
- **Frequency:** 9–12 sessions in a series, 1–2 times per day, only during the brood period in the hives; the maximum break between sessions is 48 hours.

- **Season:** April–August (during active bee season).
- **Preparation:** Introduction to the effects of bee air, micro-vibrations, auriculotherapy, safety rules, and relaxation exercises.
- **Procedure:** Cover the bed with linens, lie down slowly with a straight back, bend knees with feet (preferably barefoot) near the bed to ensure bees affect biologically active points; place hands with palms down alongside the body. Lie quietly in this basic position for 2–5 minutes. Afterward, get comfortable, avoid sudden movements that may disturb bees, and turn the head gently right and left to allow bee energy to reach auricular points.
- **During therapy:** Listen to bee sounds, inhale clean ionized air from the hive, enjoy aromatherapy with honey or propolis, and observe the bees in a calm environment; micro-vibrations from the bees' wing and abdomen movements provide a gentle massage effect on hollow organs. Drink clean water if necessary, preferably from a glass bottle placed near the hive.

Equipment and clothing for the bee house:

- Participants should wear lightweight, comfortable clothing without perfumes or strong scents. Jewelry, watches and other metallic items must be removed. Mobile phones or tablets are strictly prohibited.
- Cotton socks or barefoot is recommended.
- Bring your own cotton or linen sheet to cover the hive bed and a small elongated pillow (cylinder) filled with natural materials.
- Entry and lying in the bee house are only allowed under the supervision of a therapist.

Health of bees in the bee house:

- Bee colonies must be healthy and regularly checked by a qualified beekeeper.
- Aggressive chemical treatments are prohibited near the therapeutic area.

Therapist qualifications in bee houses:

- Completion of a certified apitherapy course (e.g., through a national beekeeping association or an equivalent institution).
- Basic knowledge of psychology, pedagogy, or social work.
- Experience working with youth and first aid knowledge for allergic reactions.

7.4.2. Inhalation of hive air

Apitherapy with inhalation of bee air involves breathing air from a hive with high humidity and a temperature of 36°C from the brood area. This air contains a mixture of aromatic substances, including pollen, beeswax, honey, propolis, and essential oils.

Suitable hive type: Horizontal hives with healthy, strong colonies that have not been treated chemically. Priority is given to the brood area, especially during the queen's brood-laying period (spring to the end of August).

Therapeutic procedure:

- Inhaling hive air strengthens the immune system and helps cope with stress and chronic fatigue.

- A mask connected via tubing to a device positioned over the brood chamber allows direct inhalation. Each participant uses their own mask.
- It is recommended to inhale through the nose for 15 minutes from one colony, directing the air into the lower lungs, and hold the breath for a few seconds after each inhale.
- Alternating long inhalations with natural breathing is advised.

Equipment and clothing:

- Loose, comfortable, breathable, light-colored clothing made of natural materials, personal breathing mask, closed shoes, and tied-back hair.
- Hive air devices may have motors or allergy filters. Loose pollen is not dangerous due to processing by the bees.
- Jewelry, metal items, mobile devices, perfumes, and strong scents should be removed.
- If hives for inhalation are placed outdoors, clothing should suit weather and temperature conditions.
- Prepare a comfortable, hygienic seat near the hive.

Health of bees: The colony used for inhalation must be healthy and regularly inspected. Inhalation is only performed when colonies have not been treated for diseases or pests.

7.4.3. Candle making

Handmade candles from pure beeswax are 100% natural and emit the scent of honey, propolis, and resin. This aroma and the wax itself have a calming effect, helping relaxation, stress relief, and elevating mood.

Making candles from wax sheets:

Materials:

Wax sheet roll, clean virgin wax; sheets 1–2 mm thick are recommended for easier handling, longer burning, and a stable flame. Verify the wax source to ensure purity. Choose the appropriate wall thickness; thicker sheets require a round shape with a larger diameter for longer burning (0.8–1.2 mm). Scissors are needed to cut the wick.

Procedure:

- Adjust sheet size carefully. If brittle, gently warm with a hairdryer for easier handling.
- Cut the wick to 1–1.5 cm above the edge of the sheet. Dip both ends in melted wax and place along the sheet edge.
- Roll the sheet evenly along the wick, ensuring a tight wrap without gaps.
- Participants can choose different shapes and sizes for their candles to make the activity relaxing, fun, and enjoyable.



Photo 24: Participants at the apitherapy workshop making candles, Banská Bystrica (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

Activities with the candle:

- The therapy participant selects a quiet space where they will not be disturbed. They prepare their candle, a jar of honey with a spoon, a propolis spray, or a honey-based scrub.
- Light the homemade candle, placed on a non-flammable surface, and notice the gentle scent of honey while attempting to calm and relax the mind.
- Optionally, take a spoonful of honey to further enter a state of peace and harmony.
- During the candle cleansing ritual, propolis can also be used by spraying it around the candle and throughout the room. Propolis has antibacterial and antiviral properties, promotes a healthy atmosphere, and cleanses the space of negative energy.
- Prepare a homemade scrub (mixture of honey, coconut oil, and brown sugar or coarsely ground coffee) and gently massage the hands while imagining that all stress and tension are being removed from the body.

When to conduct activities with candle:

These activities are suitable for young people who need a break after a demanding study period or exams, for calming the mind after conflict experiences, during major changes, or as part of seasonal rituals such as All Saints' Day, Christmas, or New Year. During the activity, it is recommended to observe changes in the participant's behavior or energy, e.g., concentration improvement or reduction in hyperactivity during and after activities with bee products. After the activity, any changes in the participant's state should be noted and discussed or evaluated.



Photo 25: Participants at the apitherapy workshop (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

7.4.4. Other bee products for workshop use:

- Honey, propolis, pollen and beeswax can be used for aromatherapy and sensory activities. Their use for medical treatment purposes should only occur under professional medical supervision.
- During workshops: preparation of a propolis pad – during the beekeeping season, pieces of cloth (100% cotton) are placed on top of the honeycombs in the upper honey box. Bees enrich this cloth with propolis. The cloth is then removed from the hive, cut into smaller pieces, and, together with other natural materials, can be used as filler.



Photo 26: Participants at the apitherapy workshop handling bee products (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

7.5. Psychological and social effects of apitherapy in work with young people

Although bees cannot be perceived as pets and do not provide easily interpretable feedback like other animals, interaction with them holds significant psychological, emotional, and educational potential. Bees respond to external stimuli as well as to sudden or nervous gestures and movements. Direct contact with bees fosters a sense of responsibility and awareness of one's own impact on these living beings. Interaction with bees requires courage and balance, strengthens an internal sense of achievement, and enhances awareness of personal abilities in overcoming fears and anxiety.

Concentration, precision, fluidity, and calmness in movements and the execution of individual actions within bee colonies are very important. Observing hives during work has a strong relaxing and stabilizing effect, and young people become aware of the importance of each member of the bee colony; they observe the cooperation of the worker bees, which fosters empathy toward others and enhances the transfer of social integration and respect to joint activities within the group they belong to. Another great advantage is the increase in environmental awareness and ecosystem protection, as young people realize that life without bees would be seriously endangered.

We recommend implementing apitherapy as a therapeutic approach when working with young people. It is an innovative method for working with youth who have difficulties with social inclusion, processing their own emotions and self-confidence. During the apitherapy process, participants gain a great deal of useful knowledge about the environment, bees, and

other bee products. They also learn a lot about plants and, through experiential pedagogy, acquire numerous practical skills, such as creating honeycomb structures from wax, preparing spreads and honey-based pastries, making balms, soaps, creams, and other products that contain various bee products.



Photo 27: Participants at apitherapy workshop, Banská Bystrica (photo: Secondary Vocational School Pod Banošom, Banská Bystrica).

Conclusion

Including animals in youth work is a powerful way to support mental health, build trust, and develop social skills. Dogs, horses, birds, and even bees offer unique opportunities for learning and emotional growth. These interactions help young people relax, express feelings, and gain confidence while fostering empathy and responsibility.

To make this approach successful, cooperation is key. Professionals, educators, and communities must work together, share knowledge, and ensure ethical standards that protect both animals and participants. Proper training, safe environments, and well-chosen animals form the foundation of effective programs.

Looking ahead, animal-assisted interventions should become part of a broader network of schools, health institutions, and youth organizations. By connecting people and ideas, we create spaces where young people feel valued and inspired. This is not just therapy. It is a way to build stronger communities and a future based on care, trust, and collaboration.