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New Research to Study Impact of Therapy Dog-Assisted Forensic Interviews with Children

Human Animal Bond Research Institute and Pet Partners Award Grant to University of Toledo

(Washington, D.C.) November 13, 2019– The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) and Pet Partners announced today a grant to the University of Toledo for a new study, *Implementation of Canine-Assisted Forensic Interviews with Children*. This lab-based study will examine the effect of the presence of a therapy dog on the quantity and quality of children’s event reports.

“From countless anecdotal evidence, we know that a visit from a registered Pet Partners therapy dog can put a smile on a child’s face, no matter what they are going through,” said Annie Peters, President and CEO of Pet Partners. “Scientific research to validate the efficacy of therapy dogs in forensic interviewing has the potential to not only provide more children with much needed comfort and emotional support, but to also promote justice for such a vulnerable population.”

“The overarching goal of the study is to provide evidence-based guidelines regarding how and when to incorporate therapy dogs in legal settings,” said the study’s principal investigator, Kamala London, PhD, University of Toledo. “We expect that this study will help support therapy dog-assisted forensic interviews as a safe, affordable, and widely available technique that may improve the accuracy and quality of event reports among maltreated children.”

Only about 15% of all child maltreatment cases come to the attention of authorities. Among cases that do come forward, children may be reluctant to disclose traumatic experiences, particularly when those experiences involve family member perpetrators. Over the past decade, forensic and legal professionals have begun to incorporate dogs into their practices in an effort to build rapport and trust, and foster a warm, supportive environment for children. Despite the increase in practice, the effects of therapy dog-assisted forensic interviews have not been studied. This study will work to address this identified gap in human-animal interaction (HAI) research. 120 children age 6-9 will experience a rich, interactive, staged event. A week later, the children will undergo an analogue forensic interview, where exposure to Pet Partners therapy dogs will be randomly varied. Interviews will be transcribed and coded for accuracy and

completeness. Using video recording, behavior during the interaction with the therapy dog, including the duration of time the child spent petting the dog, will be scored. Principal Investigator Kamala London, PhD and co-investigator Janet Hoy-Gerlach, LISW-S, PhD, expect the therapy dog-assisted interviews to bolster children's event reports, leading to increases in both quantity and quality of children's reports.

"This study will build upon current knowledge of the benefits of therapy dogs while looking at a unique setting, forensic interviewing, which has not yet been studied," said HABRI Executive Director Steven Feldman. "HABRI is grateful for the support of Pet Partners for this project, which has great potential to make a difference for children who have experienced maltreatment or abuse."

About Pet Partners

Pet Partners is the national leader in demonstrating and promoting the health and wellness benefits of animal-assisted interventions. Since the organization's inception in 1977, the science proving these benefits has become indisputable. With more than 13,000 registered teams making more than 3 million visits annually, Pet Partners serves as the nation's most prestigious nonprofit registering handlers of multiple species as volunteer teams. Pet Partners teams visit with patients in recovery, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors living with Alzheimer's, students, veterans with PTSD, and those approaching end of life, improving human health and well-being through the human-animal bond. With the recent release of its *Standards of Practice for Animal-Assisted Interventions* and international expansion, Pet Partners is globally recognized as the industry gold standard. For more information on Pet Partners, visit www.petpartners.org.

About HABRI

HABRI is a not-for-profit organization that maintains the world's largest online library of human-animal bond research and information; funds innovative research projects to scientifically document the health benefits of companion animals; and informs the public about human-animal bond research and the beneficial role of companion animals in society. For more information, please visit www.habri.org.

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