# Interspecies care work in theory and practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

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# Interspecies care work in theory and practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

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Abstract

This thesis explores how interspecies care is co-constituted in a third-sector mental health organisation and how such experiences offer opportunities for mutual flourishing. Rooted in an ethics of care, the study examines how shared marginalisation between humans and animals sparks affective relational engagement, potentially challenging neoliberal ideologies of individualism. It investigates the benefits and tensions of focusing on care within a neoliberal organisational context.

Using an interspecies ethnographic approach, immersive fieldwork was conducted in an Animal Assisted Intervention organisation (AAI). Data collection included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, photographs, and reflections. The analysis is based on a series of interspecies stories that unravel the social, cultural, and political factors embodied in these relationships, offering new possibilities for a mutually beneficial interspecies existence.

This thesis makes two key contributions. First, it offers a detailed exploration of care in AAIs, illustrating how shared marginalisation between humans and animals fosters mutual flourishing, enhancing emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing for all species involved. Second, it frames this analysis within the organisational context, showing how a third-sector care organisation navigates neoliberal pressures whilst maintaining ethical care practices. The findings reveal that balancing ethical care with financial and psychological challenges is critical to achieving wellbeing for both humans and animals.

The research highlights how narratives of care intersect with systems of marginalisation, particularly how marginalised groups like women and those with mental health challenges are likened to animals, reinforcing their marginal status. These narratives demonstrate that

care, whilst often seen as inherently positive, can perpetuate power dynamics and inequalities depending on how it is structured. The findings have significant implications for interspecies care theory and practice, particularly in the context of human-animal organisations. Recognising shared marginalisation calls for a critical rethinking of care practices to promote mutual flourishing rather than reinforcing inequalities. Practical recommendations are provided for embedding interspecies care in AAI organisations, and future research directions include exploring interspecies care for individuals diagnosed with autism and using postcolonial lenses to reframe ethical care practices, integrating indigenous and relational understandings of interspecies coexistence.

In conclusion, this study reveals the transformative potential of interspecies care to foster ethical and sustainable relationships. Personal reflections on the research process highlight the emotional and ethical dimensions of care-based research, contributing to a deeper understanding of its possibilities and limitations.

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## Narrative Glossary

Based on the significance of narrative in care, I have chosen to include a narrative glossary to illustrate the careful decisions made regarding terminology throughout this thesis. For each term, I provide a brief theoretical justification for its use and, where appropriate, situate it within the context of the field organisation, Noah's A.R.T. (A.R.T. is an abbreviation of Animal Rescue Therapy). The glossary begins by considering the term "animal," acknowledging the complexities of language in human–animal studies. From here, it moves through foundational concepts such as **"becoming-with," "companion,"** and **"intersectionality,"** which inform how relationality, subjectivity, and care are understood in this thesis. These ideas then underpin later entries that examine how such concepts take shape in organisational settings—particularly through terms like "**interspecies organisation," "neoliberalism,"** and "**third sector organisation."** The glossary concludes with terminology used in the context of mental health and animal-assisted interventions, including a discussion of "client" and the contested notion of the "human–animal bond."

I begin by addressing the term **"animal"**. A common discussion in human-animal studies highlights that humans are conceptually classified as animals, though this is often forgotten (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007; Donovan and Adams, 2007). Terms like "nonhuman" or "non-human animal" are frequently used, but I argue that the prefix "non-" creates a disturbance in the flow of the text and, more importantly, implies a hierarchical distinction. By using "non" before "human", there is an implicit suggestion that lacking humanness renders the animal somehow lesser in status (Derrida and Spivak, 1997). Terms such as "non-sense," "non-verbal," or "non-white" similarly imply a diminished state (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010). Given the focus of this thesis on human-animal relationality, using language that reinforces hierarchy seems contradictory. Since language shapes how we think about and relate to animals, it is essential to choose terms that affirm animals' agency in an interspecies world (Despret, 2013). Whilst the term **"animal"** condenses the diversity of species into a singular term, this thesis uses it for clarity, except where specific species distinctions are necessary.

As this thesis focuses on human–animal relationality, ***"becoming-with"*** has become a central concept (Haraway, 2008:1). Whilst I will explore the theoretical ideas in more detail in Chapter 2, a brief explanation of this concept is important to understanding the rationale behind other terms in this glossary. ***"Becoming-with,"*** for Haraway, revolves around the process of making kin—generating kinship that fosters possibilities for a mutually flourishing, caring world. As Haraway—like others before her, such as Strathern (1992)—has emphasised, kinship is not restricted to biological ties but is actively made through shared practices of care, co-presence, and responsibility. Kinship, whether forged through family, friendship, or interspecies companionship, emerges from relational practices and can involve both inherited and chosen connections (Charles and Davies, 2008). This framing recognises the relational labour involved in sustaining kin — "an active making together, a collective knowing, being and doing, becoming-with each other by rendering each other capable to create flourishing worlds" (Bozalek, 2021:144). **"Becoming-with"** fosters relational interconnectedness, recognising that "the partners do not precede the relatings" (Haraway, 2008:17), meaning that subjectivity and being are always in motion. Understanding kinship in this way helps to foreground relational responsibility and the potential for mutual flourishing across species boundaries.

I now turn to Haraway's notion of **"companion."** Whilst I refer to "animal," I often modify this with the notion of **"companion,"** sometimes using terms like "companion animals" or "human companions." Primarily, this decision was made to enhance readability, but it is also rooted in Haraway's concept of "becoming-with" and her emphasis on generating kinship, as outlined above. For Haraway, companion species—entangled beings in human–animal relations—are chosen partners, introducing a responsibility that goes beyond individual interest. These relationships challenge the transactional, consumptive nature of neoliberalism, which prioritises efficiency over care. Companionship and choice are central to the organisational ethos, and by employing **"companion"** in the writing, the imperative for non-exploitative, empathetic connections is emphasised. These companion species relationships, grounded in

interdependence, offer an alternative to individualism and help foster mutual flourishing (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). However, relationships of care and companionship do not exist outside of power. Understanding how these connections are shaped by structural inequalities and histories of marginalisation requires an intersectional lens.

**"Intersectionality"**, first theorised by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights how systems of oppression—such as racism, sexism, ableism, and classism—intersect and shape lived experience. Crenshaw's work was rooted in Black feminist legal critique, exposing how the experiences of Black women were rendered invisible by frameworks that treated race and gender as separate or additive. Since then, **"intersectionality"** has developed into a broader analytical tool used across disciplines to explore how power operates simultaneously through multiple axes of identity.

In the context of care ethics, early feminist scholars such as Gilligan, Noddings, and Held did not use the term **"intersectionality"**, but their attention to situated experience and critiques of abstract moral reasoning resonate with intersectional thinking. Held's (2006) framing of care ethics as political theory, in particular, highlights how care labour is shaped by gendered, racialised, and economic systems. This thesis builds on that work to explore how relational care practices are always situated within broader structures of power.

I develop this understanding of **"intersectionality"** further by extending it to include interspecies care, drawing on scholars such as Haraway (2008, 2016), Timeto (2021), and Weaver (2013), who explore how subjectivity, agency, and care are co-constituted across human and nonhuman lives. Whilst Haraway did not always use the term explicitly, her later work explores how species, race, gender, and capitalism intersect within specific relational and historical contexts. These ideas invite us to consider how animals are not passive recipients of care but are themselves embedded in histories of marginalisation, exploitation, and relational entanglement.

In this thesis, **"intersectionality"** is not only used to explore how human categories shape experience, but to expand ethical attention across species boundaries. It underpins my use of the term interspecies and supports a framing of care that attends to the co-constitution of power, vulnerability, and relationality across human and animal lives.

In Chapter 4, I provide a more detailed account of the reasons for using the term "**interspecies"** in the context of the ethnographic inquiry. However, for the purpose of the thesis as a whole, I offer a brief explanation here. In human-animal studies, terms like "multispecies" (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; van Dooren *et al.,* 2016) and "interspecies" (Coulter, 2016) are used, with some writers alternating between the two. Govindrajan (2018) advocates adopting the term "multispecies", emphasising that it acknowledges the multiplicity of human-animal relationships which are simultaneously playing out in each moment. Adopting "multi", resists generalisation and highlights the specificity of each relational encounter. Whilst I recognise the importance of this specificity, I adopt **"interspecies"** in line with scholars working in human-animal organisation studies (Wadham and Dashper, 2024; Locke, 2017; Taylor and Carter, 2020), and in the field of animal assisted intervention (AAI), (Melson and Fine, 2015; Gee, *et al.,* 2015) where "interspecific relations" is also employed (Menna *et al*., 2019). This thesis adopts the term **"interspecies"** to align with a philosophical position that emphasises reciprocal relationships. Turning back to the etymology, the Latin prefix "inter" refers to notions of "between", "amongst", and "reciprocal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), making it an appropriate term for discussing the co-constitution of care between humans and animals in the context of AAI.

The use of the term interspecies within this thesis is therefore not only philosophical but also political. It builds on **"intersectionality"** by recognising how care, power and identity, are shaped across species boundaries.

At Noah's A.R.T., these ideas have practical and affective resonance. Both humans and animals in this setting may have experienced objectification and marginalisation. A client who identifies with a rescued guinea pig or retired rat may find a shared language of care and recovery—one that transcends conventional service-user dynamics. These encounters offer not only comfort but also a form of re-storying: a way of reconfiguring one's identity through shared vulnerability and mutual becoming. This commitment to framing relationships as reciprocal and co-constituted also informs my use of the terms **"interspecies organisation"** and **"human–animal organisation",** which are discussed below in relation to their specific conceptual and contextual applications.

This thesis deliberately employs the terms **"human–animal organisation"** and **"interspecies organisation"** to reflect different emphases in the research. These terms are used interchangeably, but purposefully, depending on the conceptual and contextual focus of the discussion. The thesis, and its contribution to knowledge, is situated within the field of human–animal organisation studies. Accordingly, **"human–animal organisation"** is used when engaging with relevant literature in the field (e.g. pg. 25), and when referring to institutional structures, policies, and sectoral contexts in which it is important to acknowledge the central role of humans in organising and managing animal-involved work (e.g. pg.47). Importantly, this usage is not intended to re-centre the human, but rather to emphasise relational responsibility and to avoid erasing the human presence and accountability within organisational practices. In contrast, the term **"interspecies organisation"** is used to highlight the relational, co-constituted, and affective nature of organisational life—where animals are not simply present, but active participants in shaping the dynamics of care, practice and meaning (e.g. when referring to Noah's A.R.T. see Ch.4). This framing draws from feminist theories that challenge anthropocentric assumptions, attending instead to mutual entanglement and becoming-with. The use of dual terminology reflects the theoretical and empirical complexity of the field and mirrors broader shifts in scholarship that seek to capture the layered realities of organisations involving both humans and animals. By using both terms,

this thesis acknowledges the need to attend to structural, institutional dimensions as well as relational, affective, and co-constituted aspects of interspecies organisational life.

In Chapter 1, I explore the notion of neoliberal capitalism and how it frames the current research. Throughout the rest of the thesis, I predominantly adopt the term **"neoliberalism"** rather than *capitalism* to reflect the specific political-economic logic shaping care, identity, and organisational life in the twenty-first century. Following Lynch (2022), neoliberal capitalism is understood as the dominant form of capitalism in this era—characterised by privatisation, individualisation, and the extension of market logic into all areas of life (Harvey, 2005; Streeck, 2016). This framing aligns with feminist care theorists such as Tronto (2013), who argue that **"neoliberalism"** systematically devalues care, privileging autonomy and productivity over mutual dependence and ethical responsibility. Whilst capitalism provides a broader economic structure, **"neoliberalism"** is the specific formation that has reshaped care, subjectivity, and organisational life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It therefore provides a more precise framework for analysing the tensions and possibilities within interspecies care practices and third-sector organisational contexts explored in this research. At pertinent junctures—for example, in Chapter 5 and Chapter 9—I deliberately invoke the term neoliberal capitalism to emphasise that care, especially interspecies caring, is not only affective and relational, but also economic and politically disruptive.

Within this broader political-economic context, AAI services in the UK operate within the context of **"Third Sector Organisations" (TSO)**. TSO play a significant role in providing care, particularly in health and wellbeing. These organisations are variously referred to as voluntary or community sector organisations (VCSOs), charities, or social enterprises. However, it is important to note that definitions of TSO, along with their legal and financial standings, continue to be debated. Their nature, role, and purpose often shift in response to changing political ideologies (Miller, 2013). In this thesis, I adopt the term "**Third Sector Organisation"**

(TSO) to reflect its usage in the context of mental health and wellbeing services (see Blake, 2016; Newbigging *et al*., 2020). Building on the care-focused foundation of this thesis, I draw on Tronto's (1993) argument that non-governmental organisations can respond to a crisis of care. More recently, Dowling (2021) has extended this insight, highlighting the third sector's role in addressing the contemporary care crisis. In the context of mental health and wellbeing, TSO are particularly pivotal, filling critical gaps in service provision that are often left uncovered by the public or private sectors. These organisations frequently cater to people marginalised by society, aiming to promote choice and provide a platform to amplify the voices of those who are often overlooked.

This emphasis on supporting marginalised individuals also extends to the language used within the organisation, particularly in how people and relationships are described. In this thesis, I do include the term **"client"** as this was the choice of term within the organisation. I use it to reflect a dynamic, relational process rather than a static role typically assigned to a person receiving services. Traditionally, in social work, as McLaughlin (2009) suggests, "client" implies a formal relationship in which the person agrees to follow the professional's advice, establishing a sense of dependency on the expertise of the professional. However, in the context of this research, **"client"** takes on a more fluid meaning, rooted in the co-constituted nature of human-animal relationships. Drawing on Haraway's concept of "becoming-with" and the emphasis on the relational processes involved in interspecies kinship, I use "client" to signify that the human-animal relationship itself becomes the site of expertise. The term **"client"** thus does not simply designate the human participant but refers to a mutual engagement where both human and animal are actively shaping and responding to the emerging relational dynamics. The use of "client" in this context reflects a contract or agreement with the relational processes at play, recognising that the outcomes of these relationships are unpredictable and emergent. In this sense, the term **"client"** acknowledges the voluntary participation in a process that centres the relationship between the human and the animal as the primary force driving the therapeutic or caring interaction. This aligns with

Haraway's idea of kinship as a chosen relationship—one that moves beyond conventional hierarchies of human authority or animal subordination, and instead, positions the relationship itself as the source of mutual benefit and transformation. By accepting the term **"client",** participants engage in a contract with relationality itself, accepting the openness and potentiality of where these processes may lead.

In the context of mental health, there is ongoing debate about the most appropriate language to use. In this thesis, I use the term "**people experiencing mental health difficulties**." I adopt person-first language to reduce stigma (Granello and Gibbs, 2016), acknowledging that perceptions of language shift over time. The term "**difficulties"** is chosen based on the Latin origins of the prefix *dif*, which refers to "apart," "not," or "away from." This highlights that mental health difficulties are not inherently rooted in the individual but are instead the result of a complex range of intersectional factors that create challenges in daily life. By focusing on these difficulties in context, this approach avoids centring on specific diagnoses, thereby promoting a more holistic understanding of mental health.

I will now explore the terminology used in relation to Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI), beginning with the foundational concept of the **"human–animal bond"**, which underpins much of the practice. I then move on to examine the varied definitions of AAI found within the field, highlighting the tensions between regulatory frameworks, disciplinary assumptions, and the lived practices within the research organisation.

As a discipline, animal-assisted intervention (AAI) work was founded within the field of psychology, based on the belief in a naturally occurring **"human–animal bond"**. The history of this work is explored in more detail in Chapter 1, but it is important to establish here that whilst AAI is often predicated on the assumption of a pre-existing therapeutic bond between humans and animals, this framing has been critiqued within human–animal studies for its simplistic and anthropocentric assumptions. Rather than accepting that a universal bond

exists, scholars such as Irvine (2004), Haraway (2008), and Despret (2016) emphasise the contingent, relational, and situated nature of human–animal encounters. Haraway (2008), in particular, resists sentimental notions of bonding, instead drawing attention to the ongoing, negotiated labour of becoming-with—where humans and animals co-create the conditions for care and meaning through shared practices and attentiveness. Within this thesis, I remain attentive to these tensions by resisting an assumed **"human-animal bond"** and instead focusing on the relational dynamics that emerge in interspecies encounters. When critically analysing or interrogating the concept, I present **'human–animal bond'** in inverted commas to signal its provenance and contested status. In other instances—for example, when referring to the language used by Noah's A.R.T. or within research situated firmly within the AAI field—I use the term without inverted commas, to reflect the terminology as it is commonly accepted and applied within those contexts.

The diverse definitions and the lack of regulation in the sector prompted concern for the wellbeing of animals. In 2014, the International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO) was established in an attempt to define the field of Human-Animal Interaction and create consistent, common understandings of the ethical requirements for the protection of humans and animals during such experiences. The White Paper, which was revised in 2018, outlines the different forms of animal assisted practices starting with **animal assisted intervention** (AAI) and then outlining animal assisted therapy (AAT), education (AAE) (or pedagogy) (AAP) activity (AAA) and coaching (AAC). Whilst the organisation in which this project has been conducted incorporates elements of therapy and education (AAT and AAE) they also provide AAA through "informal interaction and visitation" (IAHAIO, 2018:5), known in the organisation as outreach provision.

According to IAHAIO (2018:5)

> "**Animal Assisted Intervention** is a goal oriented and structured intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human services (e.g., social work) for the purpose of therapeutic gains in humans. It involves people with knowledge of the people and animals involved." (IAHAIO, 2018:5)

This definition is significantly human-centric, focussing on human knowledge and the therapeutic gains for humans, the animal agency is obscured. The sector remains largely unregulated, yet other organisations have been established to help standardise work and professionalise the field. The Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII, 2021:np) was established as a non-profit organisation. They suggest that

> "**Animal-Assisted Intervention** (AAI) is an interdisciplinary term that describes unstructured or goal-oriented activities that intentionally incorporate animals into human services, healthcare, education and similar fields. AAIs may be individual or group in nature and are appropriate for a variety of ages and abilities. AAI is an umbrella term that encompasses the AAII membership fields including Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Animal Assisted Education (AAE), Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal Assisted Special Programs (AASP) and Animal Assisted Placement Programs (AAPP). AAIs promote wellbeing and benefits for humans and provide a positive experience for the animals without force, coercion or exploitation. AAIs may directly or indirectly involve the animal".

The IAHAIO definition is often the preferred choice for research in this field (Fine, 2015). However, the definition from AAII suggests AAI is an umbrella term which encompasses all other areas. It also includes the importance of unstructured activities incorporating humans

and animals in which animals may or may not be involved directly. As the focus is upon caring, the unstructured interactions that constitute such practices are significant to the research focus.

Drawing together elements of both definitions, I propose the following definition:

> **Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)** is an umbrella term that encompasses Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Animal Assisted Education (AAE), Animal Assisted Pedagogy (AAP), Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal Assisted Placement Programmes (AAPP). It refers to the unstructured, structured or goal-oriented activities that intentionally include or incorporate animals into human services, in health, education and similar fields to promote wellbeing benefits for humans and provide a positive experience for the animals without force, coercion or exploitation. AAIs may directly or indirectly involve the animal.

Amalgamating elements of both definitions is an attempt to encompass all elements of animal assisted work that is undertaken in the research organisation. More importantly, it encapsulates the structured and unstructured elements of work, whilst also ensuring that the significance of the animal is brought to the fore. In the thesis when referring to **Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)**, I am referring to this amalgamated definition, unless stated otherwise.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AAI | Animal Assisted Intervention |
| AAT | Animal Assisted Therapy |
| IAHAIO | International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organizations |
| SCAS | Society for Companion Animal Species |
| TSO | Third Sector Organisation(s) |
| PDS | Pet Directed Speech |

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

Fig. 1. Merlin, a bearded dragon

Fig. 2. Ant, a skinny guinea pig

> Care relations are a residual political space they offer the potential for mobilization and resistance, as they are governed by different logic and values from those of the market. The challenge is to enable affective care relations to find an intellectual and political voice, to resuscitate them politically and intellectually (Lynch, 2022: 133)

Lynch's quote serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for care relations to resist and mobilise against the dominant logic of the market. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 depict common human-animal encounters within the Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation. The necessary and routine practices of caring for animals, feeding and stroking, provide an opportunity to become absorbed, making sense of the needs of another being. Such experiences foster an experience of deep interconnectedness which has the potential to resist the forces of neoliberal capitalism. This thesis justifies this claim; through a process of writing and interrogating stories, crafted based on data obtained as part of an interspecies ethnography,

I explore how care relations between humans and animals are co-constituted through multisensory experiences, emphasising the importance of the organisational context in shaping these care relations and further considering how interspecies caring might offer opportunities for mutual flourishing. Positioned within the broader context of neoliberal capitalism, this thesis starts from the premise that interspecies "care relations are a residual political space" which "offer the potential for mobilization and resistance" to neoliberal notions of care—although, in the context of the organisation, this is not without significant challenges and costs (Lynch, 2022: 133).

This thesis explores the moral and practical challenges faced by AAI organisations within the context of neoliberal market logics. As outlined in the glossary, AAI involves various types of activities—whether structured, unstructured, or goal-directed—that intentionally integrate animals into human services, such as health and education, to enhance human wellbeing. At the research site, AAI is used to support mental health and wellbeing through a behaviour activation approach (see Lewinsohn, 1974), which engages clients in positive, goal-directed activities with animals. This method aims to improve mood by reinforcing healthy behaviours and promoting active participation in meaningful routines. Whilst AAI services have been established for over seventy years, with the 'human-animal bond' recognised as beneficial for mental health and wellbeing for much longer (Fine, 2015), research in this field has predominantly focused on the benefits for humans (Galardi *et al.,* 2021). In response to the increasing demand for mental health support in the UK, there has been significant growth in third sector organisations (TSO) that provide wellbeing services through the 'human-animal bond' (IAHAIO, 2024). The reduction of welfare state services has created space for creative, community-oriented approaches to relational care (Newbigging *et al.,* 2020). However, these organisations are inevitably entangled in neoliberal market logics, which challenge their ability to sustain a focus on care. Capitalism commodifies animals, treating them as economic assets for profit (Lynch, 2022). In the context of AAIs, this raises ethical concerns about whether animals are being used solely for human benefit. AAI organisations must navigate

the challenge of prioritising care and ensuring mutually beneficial relationships, rather than exploiting animals for economic gain. Balancing these ethical priorities within a capitalist framework is crucial to maintaining responsible, humane practices. In this introductory chapter, I begin with an overview of the research, drawing together work on AAI, mental health, the third sector, and neoliberalism to highlight the necessity of this study in the present context. This sets the stage for the research aims and key questions. It also provides an orientation to the centrality of stories within the thesis, justifying how they have been incorporated. Finally, I summarise the thesis' chapters before introducing the cast of animals you will meet throughout thesis.

## Context and Background

In this section, I offer a brief introduction to AAI, tracing its origins, key epistemological foundations, and regulatory framework. I then position AAI within the broader landscape of mental health services in the UK, emphasising the critical role of TSO. This discussion is framed against the backdrop of neoliberalism, highlighting how it shapes care practices and service provision. Finally, I conclude this section by drawing attention to the necessity of this research in the current context.

The therapeutic benefits of the human-animal bond trace back to the pioneering work of Boris Levinson, often referred to as the father of animal-assisted therapy (Fine and Beck, 2015). Levinson (1969) observed that the presence of his dog, Jingles, improved children's engagement during therapy sessions. Similarly, it was later revealed that Freud (1959) had also incorporated his dogs into the therapy space, noting comparable benefits (Coren, 2015). The physiological evidence provided by Beck and Katcher (1983) further supported these observations, suggesting that friendly interactions with dogs could slow heart rates and relax muscles. This belief in the potential of the human-animal bond to enhance human health and wellbeing led to the growth of AAI services. However, Fine (2015) raised early concerns about

the scientific rigour of the evidence base on which this work was built. Stern and Chur-Hansen (2013) suggest that the evidence from qualitative and quantitative studies was inconclusive, yet there was still a proliferation of therapeutic work which capitalised on the human benefits of the human-animal bond (Fine, 2015). Olmert (2009) made a significant contribution to scientific justification for the benefits of AAI. She identified the release of oxytocin during human-animal encounters; particularly evident during practices like touching, stroking, and talking to animals—behaviours that are closely associated with early parent-child attachment, where evidence of the hormone has also been used to explain the bonding process (Scatliffe, *et al.,* 2019). This shared biological mechanism suggests that the emotional connections formed through AAI may be neurologically similar to foundational human attachment experiences, offering a potential explanation for the therapeutic potential of interspecies care.

Initially, AAI work predominantly focused on human-canine interactions, reflecting societal preferences at the time (Glenk and Foltin, 2021). Despite the field's diversification to include other animals such as horses (De Santis *et al.,* 2017), dolphins (Taylor and Carter, 2020), cats (Tomaszewska *et al*., 2017), rabbits (Molnár *et al*., 2020), guinea pigs (Talarovičová, *et al.,* 2010), fish (Edwards and Beck, 2002), and reptiles (Murry and Allen, 2012), dogs remain the preferred therapy animal (Lee *et al*., 2023). Different animals have been identified as appropriate for different demographic groups, and this diversification reflects evolving understandings of therapeutic relationships and is indicative of societal priorities in human health and wellbeing (Fine *et al*., 2019). Initially, AAI focused on understanding the health benefits for the elderly in the home (Kramer *et al*., 2019) and in healthcare facilities (Banks and Banks, 2002). This later expanded to explore how animals can aid socialisation for children with autism (O'Haire, 2013), and more recently, research has examined the benefits of the human-animal bond in trauma (Beetz *et al*., 2019) and in mental health and wellbeing services (Grajfoner, *et al.,* 2017). The organisation's purpose helps to define the role of animal assistance; for example, in hospitals where patients are awaiting surgery, the installation of

an aquarium has been found effective in lowering stress levels. In healthcare contexts, this provision requires minimal support and poses limited risk (Cole and Gawlinski, 2000), illustrating how organisations are tied into systems that define the parameters of the relational experience.

As the field evolved, there has been increased attention to the rights and welfare of the animals involved (Nussbaum, 2006). Fine *et al*., (2019) advocate for further research that considers the cost/benefit balance as a means of ensuring animal welfare, whilst Gorman (2019:313) has questioned the ethical implications by asking, "What's in it for the animal?" Animal-based therapeutic services often work with marginalised groups—including children, the elderly, people experiencing mental health difficulties, and people who identify as disabled. These groups are often perceived to pose a greater risk to animal welfare (Zamir, 2006) due to assumptions about their ability to interact safely with animals. However, Serpell *et al.,* (2010) argue that these concerns are largely anecdotal rather than evidence based. Similarly, rescue animals—who are also seen as vulnerable due to their unknown histories and temperaments—are often considered too risky for use in therapy. The parallel between marginalised human groups and rescue animals highlights how both are often viewed through a lens of risk and unpredictability, despite evidence suggesting that these concerns can be mitigated. Whilst using rescue animals in therapy may offer mutual benefits, it is often discouraged due to these shared perceptions of vulnerability (Hatch, 2007). To address these concerns and provide consistency in practice, an international task force developed the International Association of Human-Animal Interactions Organization (IAHAIO) guidelines, which focus on the wellbeing of both humans and animals, underpinned by a synergy between One Health and One Welfare perspectives, aiming to ensure the wellbeing of both. Whilst evidence-based research on AAI continues to grow, particularly regarding the intensity and dosage of interventions (Fine *et al*., 2019), there remains a lack of research into the specific contexts in which AAI programmes are provided (Galardi *et al*., 2021).

As the field of AAI has diversified and evolved, attention has increasingly focused not only on the welfare of the animals involved but also on the broader structural forces shaping care practices. This shift reflects the growing complexity of care provision, particularly as AAI services expand to address the needs of marginalised groups within a changing socio-economic landscape. The rise of these services is not isolated from broader trends in care under neoliberalism. Neoliberal capitalism is reshaping the concept of care, with detrimental effects on societies globally, including in the UK (Lynch, 2022). As state involvement in welfare services has decreased, particularly under neoliberal governance, the responsibility for care has increasingly shifted to individuals (Lynch, 2022). In the UK, these dynamics have created a context where care is increasingly seen as a commodity, purchased through services offered by the market, rather than a public responsibility. Neoliberalism, whilst nuanced in how it operates in different contexts (Hall and Gingerich, 2009), consistently promotes individualism and privatisation, leading to the commodification of care and the rise of self-care markets. This shift raises ethical concerns about how care is provided and who has access to it, particularly as neoliberalism exacerbates inequalities by limiting the availability of care to those with economic means. The reduction in welfare state provision has led to a rise in TSO in the context of care services, particularly in providing mental health and social care interventions. As TSO step in to fill the gap left by a retreating welfare state, they are simultaneously entangled in neoliberal market logics that challenge their ability to prioritise care over productivity and sustain ethical, mutually beneficial services.

As TSO increasingly fill the gap left by the retreating welfare state, the impact of neoliberal market forces on care provision becomes especially pronounced within AAI services. In the UK, AAI typically falls within the third sector, often associated with “green care” initiatives and characterised by a relational and socially oriented style of operation (Galardi *et al*., 2021:1). Neoliberalism has led to a decrease in state involvement in care, resulting in a rise in care provision from TSO in the UK. Such organisations are well-suited to provide mental health services (Newbigging *et al*., 2020), reflecting Lorenz’s (1991) suggestion that the

human desire to connect with animals is part of a broader desire to connect with nature. For individuals who are isolated or struggling with mental health, forming relationships can be particularly challenging (NICE, 2013). In a neoliberal context, the emphasis on individualism, increased reliance on technology for communication, and the decline of community spaces reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction (Dowling, 2021). The expectation that care will be provided within the family—most often by women—has shifted due to increased mobility, technological advancements, and changes in work patterns, resulting in kin living further apart and complicating traditional assumptions about care responsibilities. The gendered distribution of care work, often hidden within the discourse of 'family,' has long been critiqued for masking the burden placed on women (Charles and Davies, 2008; Charles, 2014). These shifts in proximity and support networks have significant implications for human subjectivity and the broader functioning of society.

Whilst pet ownership is often recommended to support those with mental health difficulties, the costs associated with owning pets (Muldoon and Williams, 2023), along with restrictions in rental properties, can make this option inaccessible for some (Power, 2017). Fox and Gee (2019:44) suggest that the UK has a longstanding history of being a “nation of animal lovers,” with relationships with animals often preferable to human connections, as Cudworth notes that animals “provide affection without strings” (Cudworth, 2023:117). For those with an existing affinity for animals, third sector AAI organisations offer an “invitation to connect” (Huopalainen, 2023:96), fostering relational bonds that can form the foundation for the process of “becoming-with” (Haraway, 2008:1). However, these organisations are still tied to neoliberal market forces through economic funding structures. They often rely on external funding from grants, donations, or contracts, which are typically tied to demonstrating measurable outcomes, efficiency, and productivity. Whilst TSOs strive to be values-driven and relational, the market processes that dictate their income commodify all resources, including the animals and the care they both need and provide. This raises tensions between maintaining a commitment to the value and practice of care and navigating the pressures of

neoliberal forces. These tensions are further compounded by the fact that much of the relational and emotional labour within AAI organisations is performed by women, echoing broader societal patterns where care work—though central to outcomes—is consistently undervalued and gendered.

This thesis is situated within, and contributes to, the field of human–animal organisation studies—an emerging area of interdisciplinary research that examines the significance of animals in organisational contexts, particularly regarding their commercial potential and their role in shaping human activities (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023a). This field draws from a diverse range of disciplines, including organisational studies, sociology, philosophy, geography, and science. In this thesis, I bring together insights from these various disciplines to frame the research. For example, I draw on an organisational geography perspective informed by Gorman's (2017; 2019) exploration of care farms, where human-animal relationships are co-constituted through a complex network of "heterogeneous actants, events, practices, and processes" across multiple timespaces (Gorman, 2017:318). His proposition that care settings like care farms "open up potentialities for mutual and more-than-human benefit" is one of many perspectives shaping this research (2019:321). Similarly, from sociology, I engage with Charles and Wolkowitz (2019), who highlight how neoliberal systems of governance influence the nature and boundaries of human-animal relationships in university settings. Philosophically, this thesis draws on the work of early care theorists, such as Noddings (1984) and Tronto (1993), along with Haraway's (2003; 2008; 2016) exploration of interspecies caring, to examine how care is co-constituted in interspecies relationships. Whilst these perspectives help frame the theoretical aspects of this research, Galardi *et al*. (2021) note that there is limited research into the specific organisational contexts in which AAI programmes are implemented. By bringing these diverse perspectives into conversation with one another, and with other scholarship in the field, this thesis responds to Gorman's (2019) call for further empirical work exploring how care for humans and non-humans can be brought together, opening up potentialities for mutual flourishing.

Through close examination of a particular organisation's contextual practices, this research aims to unravel the ways in which interspecies interconnectedness offers an alternative form of kinship—one that has the potential to reinvigorate relationality as the foundation for a moral and mutually flourishing society (Greenhough *et al*., 2023).

## Project Aims and Research Questions

The aims and research questions of this thesis are grounded in the exploration of interspecies care within the context of an AAI organisation.

**Aims**

1. To explore how care is co-constituted in an interspecies organisation
2. To consider how interspecies care might offer opportunities for mutual flourishing

**Research Questions**

1. What is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation?
2. How does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation?
3. How can interspecies care practices foster mutual benefits for both humans and animals?
4. Can interspecies care help challenge neoliberal values?

These aims and research questions are designed to guide the empirical project into how interspecies care operates within the specific context of an AAI organisation. By exploring the co-constitution of care between humans and animals, this research seeks to provide a deeper

understanding of how relational care practices emerge and organise in these settings. The questions also probe the broader potential of interspecies care to not only foster mutual flourishing but also challenge prevailing neoliberal values, which often prioritise individualism and commodification over relationality and reciprocity. In doing so, this thesis contributes to both the theoretical discussions around human-animal relationships and the practical implementation of care in organisational contexts.

## Orientation

Before providing a more detailed account of what is included in this thesis, I would like to orientate the reader to my use of storytelling. Throughout the fieldwork, stories were central. They emerged from the day-to-day happenings and goings-on in the organisation where people narrated their experiences, often through tales of their pets or through stories of what the animals might be thinking and feeling. These stories reflected a sense of interspecies interrelatedness, as Kerrigan (2018:2) notes, Haraway's work teaches us that "we come to know ourselves through the kin and family we make in the world—through our social relations with others—both human and nonhuman". Throughout the thesis, I invite the reader to become immersed in *care-full* stories, which offer a "means of making vanished experiences available again" (Despret, 2015:126). Here, I introduce The Sticks' Story.

*Fig.3. The Sticks' Story*

**The Sticks' Story**

On the other sofa we have Dani. *"What are you thinking?"* Sarah asks. Dani shrugs. *"Rat?"* Dani looks to the floor. *"Guinea?"* Still no positive response from Dani. *"How about Velvet?"* She slides open the cage and reaches towards her. *"Oh dear, she seems a bit cold…I might have to leave her where she is today… how about one of the Sticks?"* Sarah says, walking towards the octagonal tank outside the kitchen. Dani looks across and nods. Sarah places the stick insect on Dani's hand. *"Are you okay?"* She asks. Dani nods intently watching the stick crawl up her arm, twisting and contorting her body to allow the stick to move safely and steadily. Sarah talks words at Dani, *"watching carefully", "responsive", "calm", "careful", "flexible", "tickles".* Dani is unperturbed by the chatter; her eyes do not stray from the stick. *"Shall we get some bramble leaves and see if he's hungry?"*

This excerpt captures a moment of therapy during a small group AAI session, an integral part of the weekly Animal Welfare courses offered by the organisation where I conducted my fieldwork. Storytelling lies at the heart of this thesis, shaping both its ontological and epistemological foundations. Stories have a long-standing history of influencing animals' positions in society (Sands, 2021), and in this thesis, they are used to foster connections and evoke affective experiences that aim to promote change (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Though stories may be fixed in words on a page, they possess a dynamism that continues to influence beyond their written form (Gibbs, 2015). Haraway argues that storytelling is essential to disrupting dominant capitalist narratives, as neoliberalism represents only one "way to organise modern society" (Kerrigan, 2018:2). By telling "other stories" (Haraway, 2016:12), this thesis opens up new possibilities for imagining different futures (Despret, 2015). The multi-layered practice of storytelling in this thesis also serves as a method for centring animals and their capacity to influence place, people, and practices. By "storying otherwise" (Middleton, 2019:np), I challenge hegemonic narratives that dictate norms of living and dying in an interspecies ecological system. Stories like the Sticks, above, create an affective connection, providing "an affective shock, needed to jolt thought out of the banal structures

of common sense and allow it to participate in new possibilities of life" (MacLure, 2024:1648). Through these micro-moments of interspecies care, the stories unravel the entanglements of social, cultural, and political factors, generating alternative narratives that envision a future richer in possibilities (Despret, 2015).

Starting in the middle, as I do here with The Sticks' Story, is intentional. The purpose is twofold. First, I draw inspiration from Huopalainen (2022:959), who suggests that new forms of human-animal storying have the capacity to "creatively confuse, disrupt, and transform more 'conventional', mechanical, and human-centred forms of academic writing." Second, this approach reflects the sense of disorder and disorientation I experienced during my interspecies fieldwork, which will unfold throughout the thesis (explored specifically in Chapter 8). In most chapters, I begin with stories without providing pre-emptive context to guide the reader's interpretation. The rich, detailed stories of human-animal interactions allow the reader to piece together the context as they move through the narrative, mirroring the process of understanding the complexities of caring—specifically, the uncertainties involved in caring for an "unknown other" (Barnes, 2015:39). This approach aligns with the thematic underpinnings of the thesis, where the interplay between human and animal lives—shaped by external socio-political forces—is often complex and not immediately transparent. By challenging conventional narrative structures, I invite the reader into a process of "becoming-with," where language does not fix meaning but allows it to travel (MacLure, 2013).

Later in the thesis, I explain the detailed process of constructing and analysing the stories presented throughout the chapters (see Ch.4). For ease of reference, all stories are assembled together in Appendix 1. The stories are not merely illustrative; they are integral to the analysis, providing a rich, textured understanding that goes beyond simple examples, deepening the theoretical exploration of interspecies care. Rather than functioning as isolated anecdotes, the stories are woven into the fabric of the research to highlight how

narrative can reveal complex relationships and power dynamics. Built from various ethnographic data sources, they serve to "resuscitate" the practices of caring through a focus on interspecies relationality (Lynch, 2022:133). By centring these narratives, I aim to foreground the voices and experiences of those often marginalised or overlooked in broader discussions of care, neoliberalism, and organisational life. This process creates a "politically and intellectually" informed appraisal of the relational individual whilst drawing out the benefits of interspecies relationality for the organisation and wider society (Lynch, 2022:133).

In summary, the use of stories in this thesis is both a methodological choice and a reflection of the research focus on relationality and care (Gilligan, 1982). These stories are not only a way to represent the lived experiences of the research participants, both human and animal, but also serve as an integral part of the analysis, offering a deeper exploration of the complexities involved in human-animal interactions. By adopting a narrative style that occasionally withholds immediate context or explanation, I aim to immerse the reader in the uncertainties and ambiguities that define both the research process and the experiences of interspecies care. This approach encourages a more active engagement with the material, inviting readers to reflect on their own interpretations as the stories unfold. The concept of choice in research, as it pertains to storytelling and methodology, will be explored further in Chapter 4.

## Thesis Overview

This section provides an outline of the chapters in the thesis.

**Chapter 2 – Literature** – **Marginalisation to Mutual Flourishing** - This chapter provides an interdisciplinary exploration of interspecies relationships within organisations, combining insights from organisational studies, sociology, philosophy, geography, and science. Drawing on the work of Haraway, it introduces the concept of *becoming-with* and explores its

significance for understanding interspecies care relationships within neoliberal contexts. The chapter then examines the evolving understanding of human–animal relationships across a range of organisational settings, offering a detailed account of care practices — particularly the role of touch and talk — whilst also addressing concerns about anthropocentrism.

**Chapter 3 – Literature – Co-constituted Interspecies Care -** This chapter explores the organisational, practical, and ideological dimensions of care in human-animal interactions, with specific attention to AAI work. Divided into three parts, it first examines how local values, societal ideologies, and economic structures shape care practices. The second part focuses on interspecies care, exploring the complexities of human-animal relationships, affective touch, and multisensorial communication. The final section explores empathy, analysing its connection to anthropomorphism and stressing the importance of organisational and ideological attentiveness. Broader themes of relationality, communication, and ethical anthropomorphism are introduced and will be expanded in later chapters.

**Chapter 4 – Methodology** - This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the thesis, focusing on the justification for framing the study as an Interspecies Ethnography (IE). It explores the philosophical underpinnings of the research, outlining the ontological and epistemological considerations which drive the research. The chapter addresses critiques of ethnography, particularly the challenges of affective engagement, voice, power, and anthropocentric bias in interspecies research. It explains how the study advocates for animals' agentic capacity and illustrates the significance of reflexivity. Finally, the chapter justifies the data collection practices, such as observations, interviews, and photographs, and details the practice of story-as-method for data analysis. This chapter is supported by documentation in the Appendices.

**Chapter 5 – Research Context** - This chapter introduces the research context, Noah's A.R.T., by exploring the values and purpose of the organisation within the broader framework of

neoliberal capitalism. Through storytelling, it examines the tensions and opportunities faced by a third sector, human-animal organisation in the UK. The chapter focuses on key human characters, including Sarah, the organisational lead, and Carrie, the Lead for Animal Welfare, to reveal how neoliberalism shapes the day-to-day operations whilst allowing space for resistance through human-animal relationships. In doing so, it highlights the emotional and economic challenges faced by the organisation, particularly regarding volunteer labour and the complex layers of caring, which reflect broader societal shifts in the devaluation of care work and the precariousness of TSO operating under neoliberal pressures.

At this stage, I transition into the Data Analysis section, which comprises four chapters, each centred around key themes that emerged from the complex interplay of the data: Touch, Talk, Organisational Interspecies Care, and Mutual Flourishing.

**Chapter 6 – Affective Touch: The Power of Connection** – This chapter examines the role of touch in interspecies encounters within an AAI organisation, focusing on how emotional connections with animals foster physical closeness that provides the spark for mutual flourishing. Beginning with Moose's Story, the chapter highlights how touch reshapes narratives of self. Cuddles' Story is then used to illustrate how organisational care can challenge neoliberal notions of care. The chapter examines how daily care practices help individuals practise empathy, vulnerability, and capability. In Ant and Herman's Story, Herman the tortoise, emphasises the importance of slowing down to attend to the affective experience of the relational self. Finally, the chapter reflects on the agency of animals in sparking human agency, discussing the importance of relational experiences throughout the life course to help challenge neoliberal ideologies of independence and autonomy.

**Chapter 7 – Caring Conversations: The Power of Language in Interspecies Relationships** – This chapter explores the role of communication, language, and talk in interspecies care practices. Beginning with Nutella and Oreo's health check, it illustrates how interspecies care

language is co-constructed, fostering mutually beneficial care practices. Their story highlights how animals communicate, how this is translated into human language, and how this process acknowledges animal agency whilst strengthening human-animal connections. The chapter examines how shared marginalisation between humans and animals creates a safe space for relational vulnerability, which helps to address broader societal inequalities. It also explores how small talk fosters a caring soundscape, and how anthropomorphism, despite critiques, supports caregiving and challenges neoliberal ideals. Finally, the chapter discusses how language shapes caregiving, showing that interspecies encounters promote human connectedness with implications for pet ownership and rehoming.

**Chapter 8 – Interspecies Care in Context: Relational Tensions within Neoliberal Organisations** – This chapter addresses Tallberg and Hamilton's (2023b) question on where animals fit in contemporary organisations, focusing on interspecies care practices within an AAI organisation. Beginning with the Story of Merlin's Beard, it explores how governance structures in the animal welfare room organise care, and how relational care can disrupt these systems, creating a sense of disorder. The chapter examines the economic and logistical challenges faced by TSO and critiques rights-based ethics in care policy. Merlin's interactions highlight how attentiveness to animals' movements fosters relationality, where presence and connectedness take precedence over productivity. Attentiveness to multisensorial interspecies languages sparks consideration of the 'Story of A Canine Orchestra', offering an unlikely "invitation to connect" (Huopalainen, 2023:96). The 'Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages' further illustrates how interspecies care within an organisational context creates a community of relationships that, whilst mutually beneficial, pose moral and ethical challenges for organisations in a neoliberal framework.

**Chapter 9 – From Shared Marginalisation to Mutual Flourishing** – **Interspecies Kinship and Care -** This chapter examines the personal, political, and societal costs and benefits of interspecies care within organisational contexts. It begins by exploring the opportunities and

challenges for organisations driven by an ethics of care, focusing on the tension between care and neoliberal organisational demands. Using Roland's Story, the chapter explores how organisational values intersect with societal narratives, generating both challenges and opportunities for mutually beneficial care experiences. The rescue stories of Hope the rabbit, and Cloud the guinea pig, are then discussed to illustrate the moral and therapeutic significance of animal rescue narratives in AAI work. Merlin, an exotic bearded dragon, reappears to highlight the risks and rewards of including exotic animals in AAI under neoliberal constraints. Finally, the chapter considers how everyday interspecies care practices provide a form of resistance to societal discourses, particularly around women and care, as revealed in informal *"sofa chatter".*

**Chapter 10 – Conclusion** – This chapter brings together the key findings of the thesis, summarising how interspecies care fosters mutual flourishing in the context of an AAI organisation. By addressing a gap in the literature, this research highlights how organisational structures shape the dynamics of care, offering new insights into the ethical and sustainable relationships between humans and animals. The chapter revisits the research aims and questions, tracing how the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of interspecies care practices within a neoliberal framework. It also outlines practical recommendations for embedding care into organisational settings, whilst discussing the broader theoretical implications for interspecies relationships. Finally, the chapter reflects on the research process, emphasising the significance of care-based research and offering personal reflections on its transformative potential. This chapter ultimately suggests that interspecies care experiences in caring organisations can provides an important counter-narrative to neoliberal values which is essential for the flourishing of both humans and animals.

## The Cast: Noah's A.R.T.

At this juncture, I introduce participants, both human and animal companions, who will accompany the reader through the stories that unfold in this thesis. I introduce the field site organisation, Noah's A.R.T.—where A.R.T. stands for Animal Rescue Therapy—which will be referred to as Noah's A.R.T. throughout the thesis. The organisation provides mental health and wellbeing support through the human-animal bond across the age range. Fig. 4 provides visual images of some of the animals at Noah's A.R.T. alongside their names, serving as a visual aide-mémoire to help navigate the stories (García-Rosell, 2023). In care-based research, Gilligan (2011:5) suggests that we begin with "questions about voice: who is speaking, and to whom? In what body? Telling what stories about relationships? In what societal and cultural frameworks?" These images help to identify who is "speaking" and "in what body" to help generate a visual image to accompany the stories. Similarly, in Fig. 5, I introduce the human participants, though without images. On ethical grounds, I do not include human faces, and all participant names are pseudonyms. The significance of images and the ethical considerations underpinning this research will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

I now move to the next section of the thesis, the literature chapters, in which I will provide a detailed insight into the literature that has informed this thesis. I explore key theoretical concepts, including those related to human-animal relationships, care theory, and the organisational context. This review will outline the current academic debates, highlight existing gaps, and set the stage for the subsequent analysis of interspecies care practices within the context of a neoliberal AAI organisation. By grounding the research in relation to the current literature in the field, the chapter establishes the critical lens through which the study's contributions to knowledge are framed.

*Fig.4. The Cast Animals*

*Fig.5. The Cast: Humans*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sarah** Organisational Lead | **Tim** General Manager | **Anya** AAI Lead | **Carrie** Animal Welfare Lead | **Holly** Client and Volunteer | **Katie** Client and Volunteer | **Kerry** Researcher |
| **Ronnie** Client and Volunteer | **Stacey** Volunteer | **Josie** Client and Volunteer | **Ben** Volunteer | **Laura** Client | **Kelly** Client | **Casey** Client |
| **Dani** Client | **Norah** Client | **Miriam** Client | **Millie** Client | **Lyn** Client | **Mary** Client and Volunteer | **Tina** Client and Volunteer |

# Chapter 2
# Literature: Marginalisation to Mutual Flourishing

## Introduction

I have divided the literature review into two chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, for clarity and ease of understanding. Chapter 2 identifies the rationale for this study by highlighting gaps in the current literature that informed the specific research aims and questions. It also considers the research frameworks used in existing studies, providing a justification for the theoretical framework adopted in this research. Beginning with early feminist theories of care ethics and progressing to Haraway's work on interspecies care as a critical practice for mutual flourishing, this chapter also challenges and rethinks categories of marginalisation and oppression, particularly focusing on mental health and gender, which are central to this research project.

Chapter 3 brings together scholarship from organisational studies, sociology, geography, philosophy, and science to generate a conversation that deepens understanding of interspecies relationships within organisational contexts. This chapter examines care practices, particularly the roles of touch and talk, and addresses key issues of interspecies empathy and anthropomorphism. Together, these two chapters establish the theoretical foundation for the empirical work conducted at Noah's A.R.T.

## Contextualising the Study: Care, AAI and the Third Sector in Neoliberal Times

As outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to explore how care is co-constituted in an interspecies organisation and how such care might foster opportunities for mutual flourishing. In this section, I situate my research within the current theoretical and empirical discussions surrounding the intersection of care ethics, Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI),

and third sector organisations (TSO) operating within a neoliberal framework. This exploration forms the rationale for the present study.

Care ethics have been applied in a range of philosophical, organisational, and practical contexts across both the public and private sectors (Urban and Ward, 2020; Hamington and Sander-Staudt, 2011). Whilst much of this research focuses on human experiences of care, there is growing attention to care within human-animal organisations (Connolly and Cullen, 2018; Gorman, 2017;2019). Feminist philosophers such as Donovan and Adams (2007) have advocated for an ethics of care as the basis for ethical animal protection, suggesting that human experiences with animals are emotional and relational, which challenges rational approaches to care that often perpetuate speciesism and human supremacy. In organisational studies, care ethics have been used to explore relationality and the interconnected agency of humans and animals (e.g., Davies and Sayers, 2023; García-Rosell, 2023). For example, Gorman's (2017) work on care farms shows how care is co-constituted through relationships, practices, and events, rather than being inherent in a space itself. This resonates with the argument made by Greenhough *et al.* (2023) that care is organisationally shaped, within the relational networks of animals, humans, and objects enhancing care provision. Furthering this, Dashper (2020) applies an ethics of care to examine the emotional labour of both humans and animals, particularly in tourism, where animals are engaged in care work. Emotional labour, a term introduced by Hochschild (1983), refers specifically to the regulation of one's emotions as part of paid work. In contexts where animals are commodified for human purposes, such as tourism or business, their emotional labour is often overlooked or undervalued. Connolly and Cullen's (2018) systematic review of Business and Management literature from 1995 to 2015 reflects this trend, revealing a predominant focus on the commodification of animals, with little attention to their welfare. In neoliberal contexts, where commodification dominates, this objectification aligns with Coulter's (2023:17) assertion that organisational activities cause "the most harm" to the most animals. The commodification of animals' capacity to care is particularly problematic in a society that

has long-standing history of undervaluing care work (Lynch, 2022; Galandini and Spoors, 2024). Hamilton and Taylor (2013) argue that this persistent objectification of animals in organisations highlights the need for further empirical research grounded in an ethics of care, which Connolly and Cullen (2018:416) expand upon, calling for research that explores the shared marginalisation of humans and animals. This approach aims to critique "the social structures that result in casting off the weak and vulnerable as well as undermining or dismissing those who care for them."

As discussed in the introduction, Noah's A.R.T. provides mental health and wellbeing support through the human-animal bond. People who attend the organisation have a diverse range of mental health experiences, spanning the spectrum from anxiety and depression to more severe mental health issues that may have led to hospitalisation. Mental illness often leads to the marginalisation and dehumanisation of those affected (Chambers *et al*., 2014). In Western thought, individuals struggling with mental health difficulties are sometimes perceived as lacking the rationality and moral responsibility associated with full personhood (Carlson, 2007). This perception can result in their objectification, much like other marginalised groups who are seen as failing to meet societal standards of reason and morality (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019).

As outlined above, there has been significant consideration of human-animal relations across various organisational contexts. This thesis focuses on an AAI organisation, named Noah's A.R.T. As outlined in Chapter 1, AAI has become a popular approach for enhancing human health and wellbeing (Fine, 2015). The evidence base for AAI has expanded over time, and whilst qualitative studies are becoming more common (Shen *et al.,* 2018), much of the research still stems from psychology (Pandey *et al*., 2024). In psychology, the studies predominantly focus either on the human benefits of AAI interventions (e.g. Nimer and Lundahl, 2007) or on improving animal welfare (e.g. Glenk, 2017), reinforcing a sense of separateness between humans and animals. However, in AAI, the human-animal relationship

is critical to the intervention. From a care-based perspective, it is essential to focus on how these relationships are co-constituted to generate mutual benefits for both species. Importantly, these relationships do not exist in isolation but are shaped by organisational structures. As Greenhough *et al*., (2023) suggest, "the capacity to care is generated and shared through the intertwining of architectural systems, governance, and discourse within socio-material infrastructures of care." Galardi *et al*., (2021) point out that there is a lack of research on the specific contexts in which AAI programmes take place. Human-animal relationships are embedded within these organisational contexts, and to fully understand how they are co-constituted, attention must be given to the organisational practices that shape them (O'Doherty, 2023; Charles *et al*., 2023). Similarly, Kandel *et al.,* (2023) highlight how organisational architecture reflects broader human attitudes toward animals, influencing how these relationships are structured, pointing to the significance of space and how it is organised. Collectively, these points suggest that the potential for care-based human-animal relationships to flourish depends largely on an organisation's ability to create infrastructures of care. Whilst much AAI research focuses on dyadic relationships between humans and animals, these relationships are shaped and influenced by their organisational context, providing a strong rationale for adopting an organisational perspective in this study.

In the UK, AAI organisations fall within the third sector, under the umbrella of green care wellbeing interventions (Haubenhofer *et al.,* 2010). TSO occupy a unique position, as they are considered neither private sector entities nor government-led statutory services. Instead, they are value-driven organisations (NAO, n.d.; Rees and Mullins, 2017) focused on responding to community needs through the provision of care and welfare services. People who establish such organisations are often seen as doing so in response to a calling (Wrzesniekski *et al.,* 2009), particularly when engaging in low-paid 'dirty' work (Tallberg and Jordan, 2023). However, whilst a 'call to care' drives these organisations, care is undervalued societally, and resources are often limited (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). This drive to care can be exploited, as these organisations rely heavily on grant funding or service

commissioning by local authorities—both of which are tied to broader government funding decisions creating a paradoxical position where such organisations must balance their values with the constraints imposed by funders. In the context of neoliberalism, TSO, driven by values of care, face further challenges because the prevailing ideology emphasises independence and autonomy over collective care. Blake (2016) highlights the limited empirical research on how organisational values translate into practice within third sector mental health services. Dowling (2021:12) argues that "the responsibility for caring is systematically handed down a societal care chain of paid, underpaid, and unpaid caring labour based on a core structural feature of capitalist economies," suggesting that TSO may inadvertently rely on and perpetuate the undervaluation of those called to care or those in need of care. Colebrooke and colleagues (2023) call for further research into cultures of care within TSO, emphasising the importance of exploring how the practices of caring and the values of the care, in this instance in an AAI organisation, contribute to addressing the "care crisis" (Dowling, 2021:1), whilst recognising that they operate within a system that undervalues and potentially exploits both caregivers and care recipients. Further insight into the relationship between AAI, the third sector, and neoliberalism will be provided in Chapter 5.

Building on the significance of neoliberalism, societal attitudes towards animals heavily influence organisational practices, determining levels of care (Kandel *et al.,* 2023; Greenhough *et al.,* 2023). In neoliberal capitalism, fostering the perception of animals as lacking morality or agency is critical to maintaining a sense of separateness that enables their exploitation, which is central to global economic interests (Coulter, 2023). Focusing on care in human-animal organisations has the potential to disrupt this capitalist pursuit of profit (Dashper, 2020). This may explain why management and organisation studies have lagged behind other disciplines in recognising the significance of animals (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023b). Initially, attempts to include animals in organisational studies aimed to fit them into existing dominant discourses, such as consumerism (O'Doherty, 2016; see, for instance, the

*Journal of Business Research's* 2008 focus on pets and consumerism). However, since 2008, there has been growing attention to multispecies activities in organisations (Dashper, 2020; Hannah and Robertson, 2018; Labatut, *et al.*, 2016; Sage *et al*., 2016). Early research focused on animals in laboratory contexts (Nuyts and Friese, 2021; Williams, 2021; Roe and Greenhough, 2021) and in food production, such as slaughterhouses (Baran *et al*., 2012, 2016; Hamilton and McCabe, 2016) and farming (Law, 2010; Singleton, 2010). This expanded to studies on veterinary care (Clark and Knights, 2019; Treanor and Marlow, 2021; Vogel, 2023), work (DeAngelo, 2018; Charles *et al*., 2023), and entertainment (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; García-Rosell and Hancock, 2022). More recent studies explore interspecies interactions both inside and outside organisational boundaries (O'Doherty, 2016; Huopalainen, 2023; Cunha *et al*., 2019; Kelemen *et al*., 2020; Wilkin *et al*., 2016), as well as in tourism (Wadham and Dashper, 2024; Dashper, 2020; García-Rosell, 2023) and therapeutic contexts (Gorman, 2017; Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019; Charles *et al*., 2023). Together, these contributions critically examine the interconnectedness of humans and animals in "commercial exchange and organisation of human activities" (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023b: 2). However, in neoliberal organisations, where the pursuit of profit often takes precedence, the treatment of animals can be compromised, reinforcing the need for ongoing research into how care-based approaches might disrupt these dynamics and foster more ethical human-animal relationships.

To summarise the arguments put forward here, this thesis builds upon existing work that highlights the importance of care ethics in human-animal organisation studies, particularly as a means of amplifying the voices of the marginalised, in this instance the animals and those who care for them. By situating the study within a third sector organisation, it addresses the shared experience of marginalisation between humans and animals, whilst acknowledging that this shared experience is not equally distributed (Rautio *et al*., 2017). It responds to Connolly and Cullen's call for research using care ethics to challenge societal perceptions of marginalisation (2018). Focusing on the third sector builds on Blake's research by advancing

understanding of how third-sector organisational values translate into practice and addressing Galardi's observation of limited research on AAI in context. Foundational work for this thesis includes Gorman's research on care farms (2017; 2019) and Charles and Wolkowitz's (2019) study on AAI in universities, which offer insights into how "architectures and systems of governance and discourse" within human-animal care organisations generate a capacity for care and reshape "socio-material infrastructures of care" (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023:1). I will elaborate upon the specific contributions these studies offer in the remainder of this chapter and subsequently in Chapter 3.

## From Care to Kinship: Rewriting Categorisations

Having contextualised and justified the rationale for this research, I now turn to outlining and justifying the theoretical framework that underpins the approach to care in this thesis. This section begins with a brief overview of the ethics of care before examining how Haraway extends this concept into the realm of interspecies relationships. I then consider how animals have informed practices of marginalisation, particularly in relation to mental health and gender. Finally, I establish the significance of AAI organisations in providing relational contexts that can intervene in broader discourses of oppression and marginalisation.

An ethics of care offers both an ontological foundation for understanding the world and a framework for examining relational practices (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993; Held, 2006; Kittay, 1999; Bubeck, 1995). This research resuscitates the concept of care within the context of human-animal relationships, focusing on how marginalisation impacts opportunities to care and be cared for. Relational practices are foundational to fostering a moral, flourishing society. First publishing her thoughts in 1984, Noddings (2013) focused on the parent-child relationship, arguing that the need for care as an infant is fundamental to survival. From this, she developed the idea that caring practices spark both vulnerability and capability, with the transition from one to the other depending on the recognition of care in the other. In this

thesis, I extend these relational aspects of vulnerability to human-animal relationships, a perspective that Noddings might have found controversial. Whilst she acknowledged that animals could nurture the capacity to care—much like gardening can be nurturing—it was her belief that animals lacked the capacity for mutual care. However, significant contemporary work challenges this view (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007), animals' capacity to care is foundational in contexts such as AAIs (Fine, 2015). Other early care ethicists, such as Tronto (1993), focused more on how structural factors like gender, race, and class exacerbate vulnerability, particularly in the context of care work. Similarly, Gilligan (1982) explored how socially constructed gender roles shape experiences of vulnerability. Since this early work, care ethics has expanded beyond human relationships, as discussed above. The urgency of planetary destruction and the recognition of human-animal interdependence have driven much research, particularly informed by Haraway's (2008:244) concept of sympoiesis, a biological term meaning "making with," more commonly referred to as "becoming-with" (Bozalek, 2021:141). This shift highlights the importance of understanding care not only in interpersonal contexts but also within broader political, economic, and environmental frameworks.

Both Haraway (2008) and Kirksey and Helmreich (2010) cite Tsing's (2012:141) proposition that "human nature is an interspecies relationship" as a call to recognise the interconnectedness of biotic and abiotic elements of existence. This interconnectedness is central to Haraway's work and provides the theoretical foundation for this thesis. Her theory of care builds on and extends original feminist ideas, focusing on the notion of "becoming-with," which moves beyond parent-child relationships to assert the centrality of kinship choices across species. This choice instils a sense of responsibility to attend to and be responsive to how "partners do not preexist the relatings" (Haraway, 2008:17). Amongst many threads of enlightenment, Haraway's project emphasises how relational encounters foster mutual becomings, where a flourishing interspecies world depends on caring relationships between humans and animals, involving both responsibilities and risks. By

focusing on relationality, Haraway argues that vulnerability is a product of both caring and being cared for—whether in relationships between humans and animals or between humans and the environment. In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she introduces "ontological choreographies," a concept borrowed from Charis Thompson's work, Haraway (2003:8) suggests "The scripting of the dance of being is more than a metaphor; bodies human and non-human, are taken apart and put together in processes…". This notion of taking apart and rebuilding establishes the vulnerability of bodies, emphasising the interconnectedness and relational co-constitution of beings, emphasising that our existence is shaped through interconnectedness. Haraway's focus on interspecies relationships also brings attention to how structural inequalities—particularly in the context of the Anthropocene, capitalism, and colonialism—exacerbate vulnerability. She highlights how humans, animals, and the environment are marginalised by dominant economic and social systems. Although Haraway addresses ontological, relational, and structural vulnerabilities, she is particularly interested in how these dimensions intertwine. Her call to "stay with the trouble" acknowledges that vulnerability—whether inherent, relational, or structural—is an unavoidable part of life, requiring continuous engagement and commitment (Haraway, 2016:2).

Neoliberalism stirs up trouble that threatens relationality and care. It works tirelessly to embed moral citizenship as independent, autonomous, and entrepreneurial (Lynch, 2022) engendering competitiveness which "has a corrosive effect on social relationships" (Layte, 2012:509). All forms of vulnerability—whether inherent, relational, or structural—are disregarded. This fosters and maintains structural inequalities; to need care or to provide it affirms dependency and vulnerability, threatening the capitalist pursuit of profit and rendering such citizens as abject (Tronto, 1993; Mol *et al.,* 2010). In a neoliberal context, the feminist preoccupation with inherent vulnerability could risk being co-opted into narratives that justify a reduction in care interventions for those in need (Martin, 2024). Yet, feminist scholars across disciplines continue to reassert the importance of relationality in resisting neoliberalism and the inequalities it perpetuates (Lynch, 2022). Tronto (2013) argues that

rather than defining equality based on the ideal of autonomous individuals, we should recognise shared vulnerabilities and interdependence. By doing so, it is possible to establish a society where care is central, and true equality arises from the mutual recognition of the need for care and support—without relying on the privatised, gendered model of care traditionally embedded in the ideology of the family (Charles and Davies, 2008). Noddings (2013:46) suggests that "as I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself." This insight could imply that, paradoxically, embracing relationality could support the neoliberal imperative of self-care. However, endeavours to place relationality at the centre are often undermined by their feminist roots, limiting their impact in patriarchal, neoliberal societies (Donovan and Adams, 2007). Yet, this does not signal the end of hope (Gruen and Probyn Rapsey, 2019). As Haraway advocates, it is important to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016:2) and continue pushing relationality as a force to resist neoliberalism and the inequalities it perpetuates (Lynch, 2022). For those considered vulnerable and abject, as a result of their need for care, this resistance is even more challenging. I now turn to Timeto (2021), who builds on Haraway's ideas to frame relationality within a broader political and multispecies context.

Timeto (2021) suggests that Haraway offers a proposition for a politics of multispecies flourishing based on intersectional co-constitution. This concept encapsulates how social and political factors intertwine with different biological bodies, producing diverse experiences of privilege or discrimination. In relationships with animals, their genetic and cultural positions, along with experiences of privilege or discrimination, generate allegiances that lead to response-ability. Haraway (2016: 5–6) advocates for "making kin, not babies," proposing kinship that extends beyond biologically based or heteronormative models of the family. Rather than grounding relational ties in reproduction or traditional household structures, Haraway calls for forms of kinship rooted in attentiveness, accountability, and enduring multispecies connection. This reimagining of kinship, which draws from anthropological writings (e.g. Strathern, 1992), challenges the ideological centrality of the nuclear family—an

institution long critiqued for obscuring the gendered and racialised distribution of care work —by recognising relational ties formed through shared vulnerability and mutual obligation. As Charles (2016) explores, non-human animals can play central roles in these reconfigured kin networks, revealing the extent to which care, dependency, and belonging exceed conventional family boundaries. As Paulson (2019, n.p.) explains, "By kin I mean those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can't-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences." Building on this, Despret (2004) suggests that expressing the feeling of love reflects an acceptance of mutual becoming, wherein the self is transformed by the agency of the other. Weaver (2013), in conversation with Deleuze and Guattari, proposes the concept of "becoming in kind," which considers how relationships between humans and non-human animals create the conditions for specific experiences of race, gender, class, sexuality, species, and breed. This intersectional approach has the potential to change how relationships between these categories are understood. It is also inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on feminist theory, posthumanism, animal studies, and critical race and disability scholarship to reframe care and kinship as relational practices shaped by overlapping structures of power and inequality. Building on these propositions, I explore how shared experiences of marginalisation give rise to the making of kin, where love and choice are central to the process. I consider how the affective experience of these relationships prompts a process of "becoming-with" that not only rewrites the story of the self and other but, in doing so, also challenges and rewrites broader narratives of marginalisation and oppression.

Intersectional oppressions are often rooted in comparisons to animals. Taylor (2024) argues that examining gender alongside animals is crucial because Western ideas about gender, race, sexuality, and ability have been shaped by how closely or distantly humans are associated with animals. These comparisons often dehumanise those who are seen as closer to animals. This distancing process reflects how society mobilises the notion of being 'more animal-like' to justify the exclusion of certain groups, thereby reinforcing anthropocentrism, ableism,

racism, and sexism. In what follows, I explore the marginalisation of individuals with mental health difficulties, before drawing this into a broader consideration of the gendered dimensions of marginalisation.

## Relational Vulnerability and Capability in Interspecies Care

As discussed in the introduction, Noah's A.R.T. provides mental health and wellbeing support through the human-animal bond. People who attend the organisation have a diverse range of mental health difficulties which reflect the mental health spectrum. Mental illness often leads to the marginalisation and dehumanisation of those affected (Chambers *et al*., 2014). In Western thought, individuals with mental health difficulties are sometimes perceived as lacking the rationality and moral responsibility associated with full personhood (Carlson, 2007). This perception can result in their objectification, much like other marginalised groups who are seen as failing to meet societal standards of reason and morality (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019). This perceived absence of rationality strips individuals of their subjectivity, exacerbating social exclusion and reinforcing cycles of mental illness (Baxter *et al.,* 2022). As a result, those experiencing mental health difficulties face structural vulnerability that impacts their relational experiences, often exacerbating their vulnerability and leading to social exclusion. In society, labelling a person or group as vulnerable carries moral and political significance (Martin, 2024). In the context of mental illness, perceptions of vulnerability often lead to othering and further marginalisation. Whilst relationality can be a means of addressing inequalities, structural perceptions of vulnerability and dependency frequently result in isolation (NICE, 2013). Under neoliberalism, the prevailing emphasis on independence and autonomy reinforces this isolation, as self-reliant citizens are idealised. Needing care is seen as a sign of weakness, which can justify avoidance of relational connections. Without relationality, in the form of both caring for others and being cared for, the ability to care for oneself is limited thus perpetuating cycles of inequality and deepening marginalisation (Noddings, 1984). I will now return to Haraway to consider how relationality impacts on

subjectivity and why human-animal relationships provide an alternative avenue for relationships that help to tackle oppression and marginalisation.

Haraway's concept of "becoming-with" emphasises relational encounters that shape subjectivity and offer a way to challenge marginalisation and isolation. A sense of self is shaped through relationality; however, as discussed earlier, heightened vulnerability for people experiencing mental health difficulties can restrict access to such experiences (Brown *et al*., 2021; DCMS, 2022). Human-animal relationships offer an alternative form of relationality (Charles, 2016). They have the power to absorb human companions and are considered beneficial for enhancing mental health and wellbeing (Hawkins *et al*., 2021). Acquiring a pet provides an experience of caring and being cared for, establishing the self as morally capable and reconnecting owners with "pre-illness identities," such as mother, pet owner, or animal lover (Brooks *et al.,* 2018:8). Haraway (2003:93) suggests that, in the US, caring for a pet is an outward demonstration of a moral position, with rescuing a dog conveying "high status." Human-animal relationships have social and political significance because, in the first instance, they establish the self as relational. However, cohabiting with animals is not available to all (Hart and Yamamoto, 2015). Social exclusion resulting from mental illness can affect income (Bond and Darcy, 2020) and living arrangements can limit the capacity to care for pets (Power, 2017). Additionally, the responsibility of caring for pets can create a sense of overwhelming inadequacy, which negatively impacts subjectivity (Wisdom *et al.,* 2009). This highlights how pets shape human subjectivity and moral positioning whilst also exposing the impact of marginalisation on people's ability to access these relationships. I will now explore how the organisational experience of AAI offers an alternative pathway to "becoming-with", providing opportunities to practise care that contribute to a positive sense of self.

AAI organisations, like Noah's A.R.T., provide structured opportunities for relational care, which establish mutual subjectivity (Irvine, 2008). Creating a safe space is critical to

engagement within TSO (White *et al.,* 2020). Animals provide an "invitation to connect…to become" (Huopalainen, 2023:96). Gorman (2017) outlines how the presence of animals can make an organisation feel more welcoming which in turn develops further relational connectedness that has mental health and wellbeing benefits. Drawing on Conradson (2005), Gorman elaborates upon this, explaining the impact animals have on human subjectivity suggesting

> Animals initiate a change from *Care Recipient* to *Care Giver*, enhancing participants' self-confidence and self-image, reframing them as capable. The non-human presence actively creates and facilitates a therapeutic engagement with place, influencing not only how people experience health and care on the farm, but also how they visualise themselves, a reconfiguring of the relational self, caused by the participants becoming imbricated with non-human actants (2017:326).

This quote illustrates how relational and structural vulnerabilities intertwine, highlighting the importance of understanding these dynamics in context. Structurally, it is often assumed that in human-animal relationships, humans hold more power, which evokes a sense of moral responsibility (Donovan and Adams, 2007). In a care farm context, as Gorman is referring to, this assumption can prompt a shift in the participant's role from care-recipient to caregiver. Whilst attending the care farm is based on being a care recipient, the presence of the animals shifts position to caregiver. Through these relationships, animals offer an alternative experience of relational vulnerability which starts from a position where the human reflects on the self, and in doing so see themselves as comparatively more capable, which leads to a sense of responsibility. In human-animal relationships, this comparison between self and other can ascribe a sense of capability and the need to act. Once immersed in relational practices, the flow between vulnerability and capability is inevitable, as Gasper and Truong (2010) suggest that vulnerability and capability are two sides of the same coin, fostering affective experiences of relationality. Barnes (2015:39) adds that relationships with "unknown others"—such as animals—require a moral imagination that transcends immediate, concrete interactions. Since there is no expectation for humans to have

knowledge or experience of how animals make sense of the world, caring for them involves imagination and experimentation, reducing a sense of vulnerability (Hamington, 2017). Once immersed in the relational encounter, the attempt to imagine how best to care involves a momentary loss of self, connecting with memories of care and evoking a sense of relational vulnerability. Rather than being limiting, this feeling of vulnerability creates an openness to understanding the self as capable in relation to the other, thus contributing to a positive sense of self. This reflective process enables deeper immersion in the experience and facilitates mutual becoming. The intersecting forces of structural and relational vulnerabilities affecting both humans and animals create an "invitation to connect," which—whilst challenging in a neoliberal capitalist world—remains central to fostering a mutually flourishing society.

The practices of caring for animals are pivotal to the therapeutic relationships in the context of AAI. Whilst structural forces help define the roles of caregiver and care-receiver, the practice of caring offers experiences of relational vulnerability that reveals the subtleties of caregiving, and the inevitability of vulnerability in relationships (Harrison, 2008). A loving connection with chosen kin demands a heightened level of attentiveness, especially given the animals' inability to speak (Sanders, 2003). Wiles (2011:579) suggests that this affective experience of vulnerability can be reframed as a sense of "openness, susceptibility, and receptiveness." The heightened emotionality within the encounter sparks this openness, which in turn triggers the process of "becoming-with", influencing self-perception. Attentiveness to these relational encounters brings new stories to life, helping to challenge the "science fictions" that perpetuate established ideas and help us to attend to significant otherness (Haraway, 2016:10). Knowledge and identity are reshaped as participants become more attuned to the genetic and cultural positionality of animals, whose own experiences of privilege or discrimination generate allegiances that lead to response-ability.

Having explored how human-animal relationships support those experiencing mental health difficulties, I will now turn to the significance of gender, particularly in the context of care.

## “Animaladies” and Gendered Marginalisation

Whilst mental health initially served as the primary lens through which to explore shared experiences of marginalisation in this research, the intersection of mental health and gender, particularly the experiences of women, became increasingly central as the project progressed. This shift aims to acknowledge the complexity of intersectional marginalisation. Taking the focus on marginalisation of women, their biological predisposition for childbearing is a “science fact”, which has also become the foundation for many “science fictions”—narratives that continue to shape societal structures and expectations (Haraway, 2016:10). The early “mothers” of care ethics sought to expose the patriarchal oppression of women by centring women’s stories and highlighting their contributions to society through their care work (Lynch, 2022:6). Whilst some critics argue that this early work reinforced traditional gender roles by emphasising women's caregiving (Davion, 1993), much contemporary scholarship continues to explore how discourses around women’s caring are adopted in organisational contexts, often maintaining oppressions that are pivotal to the success of neoliberalism (Jackson, 2024; Seymour, 2024). I will pick up on this in the context of human-animal organisations studies in Chapter 3.

In this section, I will examine how the comparison of women to animals, due to their biological capacity for care, has shaped societal discourses that position caregiving as central to women’s identity (Lloyd, 1993; Fraser and Taylor, 2019). These discourses reinforce the idea that women are naturally suited for care work, limiting their autonomy by making caregiving seem inherent to their moral and social worth. As discussed earlier, societal narratives of animal vulnerability can influence how individuals perceive themselves as responsible caregivers. This dynamic presents both challenges and possibilities. On one hand, engaging in animal care can perpetuate gendered oppression by reinforcing traditional roles that view women as natural caregivers. On the other hand, when caregiving becomes a kinship of choice, it can strengthen women's sense of capability in care, reshaping their self-conceptions. This enhanced sense of agency can also open opportunities to challenge societal

narratives around caregiving, offering resistance to the gender norms often associated with care work.

As mentioned earlier, the organisational context shapes the discourses surrounding human-animal relationships, often with gendered implications. Pertinent to the study of AAI is the work of Charles and Wolkowitz (2019), who explored canine therapy in the neoliberal context of higher education. The increasingly popular practice of offering puppy play sessions at universities as a mental health support initiative (Williams *et al*., 2024) highlights this trend. Parbery-Clark *et al*., (2021) reviewed these university-based interventions, noting a gender bias, with women more likely to participate. Whilst women's affiliation with animals has been widely acknowledged and often pathologised, the focus on using animals—especially puppies—appears to target women (Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019), reinforcing the stereotype of women as anxious "animaladies" (Probyn-Rapsey, 2019:1). Thus, the organisational context can reinforce women's roles as anxious caregivers. AAI fosters memory and storytelling, with interactions during these sessions often evoking personal stories about relationships with pets at home, reconnecting women with their relational roles (Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019). In this way, the university's initiative, whether intentional or not, reinforces gendered societal roles, portraying women as both anxious and caring, and ultimately sustaining the gendered subjectivity that fuels neoliberal patriarchy.

Animaladies is a neologism coined by Probyn-Rapsey (2016), combining 'animal' with 'ladies' or 'animal malady' (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019). It intentionally highlights the dis-eased relationships between humans and animals whilst acknowledging how feminists exposing these issues are often deemed mad or crazy. In their work, Fraser and Taylor (2019:158) explore how women's relationships with pets contribute to discourses of women's madness, aligned with emotional dispositions like "nervous maladies." They argue that women who choose animals over children, either by refusal or inability to reproduce, are viewed with suspicion, leading to a lesser societal status (Letherby, 2002). Malson (1997) suggests that

women's madness is controlled through reproduction, reinforcing oppressive societal discourses that pathologise women as natural caregivers. This expectation can lead to anxiety for women, which is often medicalised and treated through patriarchal practices, further perpetuating oppression (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019).

Fraser and Taylor (2019) also argue that women's desire to care and be cared for often manifests in pet ownership. However, the private home space can turn pet care into another form of oppression. Drobnič (2011) explains how women experience anxiety over balancing employment, caring responsibilities, and their impact on pets. Cudworth (2023) outlines how women typically take on the bulk of responsibilities, such as dog walking, feeding, cleaning, and playing with pets, drawing parallels between animal care and childcare. Caring for pets can offer a socially acceptable narrative of self as a capable caregiver (Wisdom *et al*., 2009). Yet, because such care occurs in the private sphere, it often remains invisible. Whilst societal expectations drive women to care, pathologising them if they do not, the isolation of home care reduces opportunities to build relationships with others who share similar experiences, thus exacerbating their oppression. It is through these external relationships that women can begin to rethink categories of marginalisation and oppression, highlighting the importance of organisational contexts in breaking these cycles (Winance, 2010).

Whilst community engagement can foster relationships, it is crucial to remain alert to the potential for care work in such organisations, particularly when unpaid and performed by women, to reinforce oppression. Engaging in care work could be seen as perpetuating inequality, yet Weaver (2013) suggests that the shared marginalisation of humans and animals, along with the mutual need to care and be cared for, can create an environment that fosters mutual flourishing. Human-animal care work often attracts workers from marginalised groups, who are perceived as vulnerable (Dashper, 2020). However, as Rautio *et al.,* (2017) point out, vulnerabilities are not equally distributed between humans and animals, which can sometimes lead to harm. Victor and Barnard (2016) highlight how shared experiences of

marginalisation in high-stress environments like slaughterhouses have led to cruelty. Fitzgerald *et al.,* (2009), however, attribute this more to the lack of care, training, and the traumatic nature of the work, stressing the importance of strong organisational infrastructures of care. To address these issues, Tallberg and Hamilton (2023b:2) call for a critical awareness of power-laden relationships within human-animal organisations, whilst also emphasising the importance of recognising the "subtle, nuanced relationships that operate along collegiate, companionable lines."

In this section, I have explored how, just as perceptions of animal vulnerability prompt a sense of human capability, societal perceptions of women's capacity for care shape their sense of self. It is the result of an interplay between intersectional and socially constructed notions of gender and care (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 1993). Societal narratives continue to reinforce the role of women as mothers and caregivers, and for those who cannot or choose not to become mothers, there is often suspicion and pathologisation, with women being labelled as mad or deviant for not adhering to this norm. This framing of madness as a method of controlling women contributes to mental health difficulties and reinforces societal constraints on women. As a result, whilst caring roles have historically contributed to women's oppression, not caring also perpetuates a sense of lack or failure. Whilst pet ownership can be beneficial in terms of improving mental health and wellbeing, community experiences of caring, such as AAI organisations, can foster activism and provide opportunities to challenge oppressive discourses around gender and mental health and contribute to mutual flourishing. I will consider the context of AAI in more detail in Chapter 3. Now, I will offer a synthesis of literature which develops further the importance of storying in AAI, particularly in the context of human-animal organisations.

## Storying as a Path to Mutual Flourishing

I have outlined above how societal stories of animals, gender, and mental illness shape self-perception and identity. The opportunity to tell new stories of the self provides a critical tool for intervening in these narratives. Labatut *et al.*, (2016) suggest that animal stories elaborate on the practices of animal exploitation and the structures that perpetuate it. Haraway (2016) argues that storying benefits both humans and animals, proposing that stories offer a way to reframe how we know and experience the world, establishing the self as interconnected. This act of storying is particularly important for people experiencing mental health difficulties; creating a safe space where they are truly heard is vital for supporting wellbeing improvements (Honey *et al*,. 2023). Storying offers an opportunity to reimagine the self, challenging the oppressive narratives shaped by societal expectations around gender and mental health.

As discussed in Chapter 1, storying is central to Haraway's work (2003; 2016), as she argues that stories frame subjectivity, shaping how knowledge and experience of the world are understood. Gorman (2017) adds that the practice of caring for animals, through its repetitive nature, deeply impacts human subjectivity, whilst the opportunity to story these experiences is key to framing the self. Power and Bartlett (2018:336) highlight the importance of recurring experiences in specific spaces that evoke stories and memories, referring to these spaces as "safe havens". Stories are also central to AAI (VanFleet *et al.*, 2015) and improving mental health and wellbeing (White and Epston, 1990). A focus on the animals provides a shared topic of conversation, and although animals cannot speak, their ability to evoke memories and spark conversations is crucial to fostering a mutually flourishing therapeutic relationship (Jau and Hodgson, 2018; Fine, 2015; Gorman, 2017). However, as Power and Bartlett explain, people need to feel safe to share their stories, highlighting the significance of organisational culture in creating a sense of safety. The embodied experiences of human-animal interaction help to generate this sense of safety, which is equally significant in how these stories contribute to mutual flourishing (Hamington, 2017). Platt (2024) adds an interesting layer to

the embodied experience of storying by employing Haraway's concept of worlding. Her work illustrates how embodied experiences, such as stroking animals whilst telling stories contribute to the emergent, embodied, and relational nature of identity formation, particularly, for Platt, in understanding mothering. In this way, stroking animals whilst sharing stories becomes a therapeutic practice that fosters self-understanding, relationality, and emotional care. Whilst animals can evoke stories of the self, they also provide an opportunity to write stories of their being, contributing to a deeper understanding of the specificity of animals' existence (Despret, 2008). This highlights the importance of organisations in fostering an environment of care that encourages the sharing of memories and the co-construction of stories (Greenhough *et al*., 2023).

Haraway (2016:29) refers to storying as a form of "aerobic exercise" that strengthens responsibility within multispecies networks. In AAI, relationships often serve as the therapeutic intervention, but Gorman (2017) suggests that *green care* also incorporates physical exercise as therapy. As mentioned earlier, AAI is sometimes considered part of green care provision (Galardi *et al.,* 2021). Gorman (2017) further explains that, like all forms of exercise, relationships develop over time. In mental health contexts, Jau and Hodgson (2018) emphasise that the sustained nature of relational experiences is foundational. However, in TSO, limitations in funding and time frames for intervention projects can restrict the development of these relationships (Baxter *et al.,* 2022). This could offer an explanation as to why volunteering has become central to third-sector care provision. I will pick up on this theme in Chapter 3.

## Summary

At the outset of this chapter, I situated the context of this study within the literature base. I then established the relevance of Haraway's notion of "becoming-with", looking to how her conceptual and philosophical ideas, together with others have influenced scholars across

disciplines particularly in the context of human-animal studies (e.g. Hunold, 2023; Silva, 2023), and eco-feminist writings (e.g. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this thesis, I draw on Haraway's concept of "becoming-with" (Haraway, 2008), which is central to understanding the relational dynamics between humans and animals. As this concept forms a key part of the theoretical framework for the analysis, I will refer to "becoming-with" throughout the thesis without citing the source each time, except when directly discussing its origins or specific theoretical nuances. Similarly, whilst I recognise and appreciate Haraway's emphasis on vulnerabilities – ontological, relational and structural— as intertwined, for the purpose of elucidating how practices of caring can contribute to mutual flourishing I look to unravel the twines of different forms of vulnerability, referring to these as relational or structural. Increasingly scholars are employing Haraway's work in the context of empirical research (e.g. Gorman, 2019; Redmalm *et al.,* 2023; O'Doherty, 2023). I have highlighted how the practice of caring and storying these recurring experiences are significant to human subjectivity. I consider how the AAI organisation facilitates these opportunities providing an alternative to pet companionship which establishes human responsibility for their interspecies relatedness opening up other relationships. Whilst Haraway provides a philosophical commitment and her disciples have begun to provide further expositions of this in empirical contexts her biological roots, together with her philosophical appetite and commitment to rich and beautiful storying can make application of her ideas in practical contexts more challenging. In the next chapter I will go on to resuscitate the practices of caring outlined in the original feminist care literature suggesting the symbiosis of these elements with Haraway's work provides a means of elaborating upon the specificity of interspecies care in an AAI organisation.

# Chapter 3
# Literature: Co-constituted Interspecies Caring

## Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I explore the organisational context of care, examining how caring practices in human-animal organisations are shaped by local values, societal ideologies, and economic structures. I analyse how this framework positions animals and their caregivers as 'care workers', and the practical and ideological risks and benefits that come with this status specifically in the context of an Animal Assisted Intervention organisation (AAI). I examine the costs of care for both organisations and individuals, and how regulatory frameworks influence but do not guarantee genuine care. In the second part, I focus on interspecies care practices, beginning with an overview of the complexities of care, transitioning from traditional human-centred practices to those involving human-animal relationships. I then explore the embodied nature of affective touch and its role in interspecies care, followed by an examination of multisensorial interspecies communication which focuses attention to the significance of speech sounds and structure of talk. Finally, in the third section, I consider empathy as a core practice in interspecies care. I discuss its connection to anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism and emphasise the importance of attentiveness to organisational and ideological values when evaluating the role and effectiveness of empathy in these contexts.

## Interspecies Care: Organising and Working Together

As introduced in the previous chapter, human-animal organisation studies critically examine the interconnectedness of humans and animals in the "commercial exchange and organisation of human activities" (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023b:2). In Chapter 7, I will specifically explore how animals are organised within an AAI organisation and how they, in turn, shape organisational practices. These practices are influenced by broader societal

understandings of animals and their roles (Kandel *et al.,* 2023). In the field of human-animal-organisation studies, Wadiwel (2023) argues that maintaining the animal as "other" is critical in food production. Pachirat (2011) explored the mechanics of slaughter, identifying the spatial layout and the significance of distance in maintaining separateness between humans and animals. He suggests that the capacity of operatives to refuse to kill is paralleled by the animals' capacity to resist being killed (Kandel *et al*., 2023). This highlights how the objectification of animals in organisations is a result of their entanglement in neoliberal economic systems. However, alternative approaches to farming exist. Porcher and Schmitt (2012) propose that, given the appropriate spatial conditions, cows collaborate with farmers in milk production—suggesting that animals possess agency. Similarly, Rees (2023) argues that the invisible boundaries in zoos give the illusion of choice for animals. Whilst these examples highlight different values, they are still embedded in broader economic and ideological structures, which deeply impact the underlying intentions. In tourism, for example, horses must suppress their natural responses to accommodate inexperienced riders (Dashper, 2020). Likewise, therapy dogs in educational institutions are expected to perform a controlled version of *dog* to meet organisational needs (Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019). These examples suggest that despite the diversity of organisational values or beliefs, neoliberal anthropomorphism—rooted in ideals of choice and freedom—still shapes how organisations interact with animals. Practices that claim to *listen* to animals can be merely performative, reflecting neoliberal subjectivity back to the human subject and reinforcing human dominance. Truly altering human subjectivity would challenge the capitalist systems in place (Dashper and Wadham, 2024). In interspecies caring organisations, it is crucial to examine how neoliberal narratives influence both human and animal experiences of care. Whilst these practices can be seen to be driven by relational values, there are significant questions about how economic and ideological structures shape these practices and what this means for the animals involved.

Continuing with the forces of neoliberalism, attentiveness to the agency of animals carries financial implications for organisations. Sage *et al*., (2016) examine the spatial and temporal challenges that arise when organisations, such as those in the construction industry, attend to the needs of animals. They argue that responsiveness to animals can disrupt organisational plans, leading to increased costs. Similarly, Dashper (2020) highlights how animals can influence and even disrupt organisations, suggesting that to care—particularly in the context of neoliberalism—is inherently disruptive. Hoppania and Vaittinen (2015:78) extend this by arguing that the "latent forces of disruption that are imbued in the corporeal character of care relations [can] challenge the logics of the present order." Lynch (2022:77) reinforces that "decisions about time are decisions about values," noting that making time for others through care, "compassionate time" (pp.81) often comes at the expense of productivity, power, and financial resources which are governed by "capitalist time" (pp.82). In third sector organisations (TSO), a commitment to care for both humans and animals involves recognising the incompatibility of capitalist time and compassionate time. Whilst the capacity to develop caring relationships can disrupt neoliberal logics these disruptions come at a cost, economically for the organisation (Tallberg and Jordan, 2023) leading to psychological burnout for those involved (Lynch, 2022). As such, whilst interspecies care work holds the potential to challenge neoliberal ideologies, organisations prioritising care over profit must also attend to the significant psychological and economic costs associated with this approach.

Whilst the complexities of interspecies care offer opportunities to challenge neoliberal structures, the practical realities of working within these frameworks cannot be overlooked. Regulatory frameworks and policy interventions are key systems of governance that shape organisational practices (Koralesky *et al.,* 2023; Vogel, 2023). In human-animal organisations, these regulations govern the practices of care and establish accountability measures. For instance, farming regulations determine the required space, feed, transportation, and medication for animals, along with mandatory logging of births and deaths—non-compliance can directly affect a business's viability (Vogel, 2023). In tourism, rules are put in place to

ensure both the animal's wellbeing and the tourist's safety (Aijälä, 2019). Whilst these frameworks organise and ensure compliance, they do not guarantee that relational care practices are truly enacted (Lynch, 2022; García-Rosell, 2023). Instead, they often serve neoliberal interests, focusing on efficiency, productivity, and accountability, which can unintentionally – or perhaps, intentionally—impede the development of affective, relational care (Koralesky *et al.,* 2023; Law, 2010; McKie *et al*., 2002; Greenhough *et al.*, 2023). Neoliberal versions of care, driven by these systems, risk being detrimental to both human and animal wellbeing, reinforcing separateness and eroding emotional engagement. As such, they should be critically examined within the organisational architecture of interspecies care relations.

## Collaborative Care: Rethinking Labour in Human–Animal Relationships

In the previous section, I explored the complexity of caring in organisational contexts. Now, I turn to the concept of care work, emphasising its commercial and organisational significance in human-animal relationships (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023b). Coulter (2016:199) defines care work as "tasks, interactions, labour processes, and occupations involved in taking care of others physically, psychologically, and emotionally." AAI is one such form of care work. Whilst it is widely accepted that animals provide therapeutic benefits for human wellbeing, the animal experience itself remains under-researched (Coulter, 2016; Glenk, 2017), with some notable exceptions (e.g., Berns *et al.,* 2017; Hatch, 2007; Gorman, 2019). Scientific studies, such as those by Berns *et al.,* (2017) often require that dogs be trained to enter imaging units, which could influence their responses. Similarly, qualitative studies face perennial questions about the capacity to understand the animal's perspective. Coulter (2016) highlights the importance of considering context, human intervention, and environment, as well as the animal's position within both the community and ecosystem, to fully understand their experiences in care work. Historically, animals have contributed significantly to people's lives within the private sphere—often idealised as "the family," a concept widely critiqued for concealing the gendered and speciesed dimensions of care

(Charles and Davies, 2008). Within this space, animals' roles and labours have frequently been overlooked or undervalued as forms of work (Coulter, 2016). Fox and Gee (2019) point to foundational studies that establish animals' roles as workers. Today, animals are increasingly involved in care work across various organisational settings, such as schools, care homes, and hospitals (Coulter, 2016). However, with few exceptions (e.g., Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019; Gorman, 2017; 2019), research on animals involved in therapeutic care work rarely addresses how the human-animal relationships are shaped by the broader organisational, social, and political contexts in which they exist.

In light of the complexities of care work discussed earlier, the specific dynamics within an AAI organisation highlight how both humans and animals are involved in care practices. Hannah and Robertson (2016) explain that the characteristics and value placed on the animal influence how humans work with them. Coulter (2016) suggests that assigning animals the role of care worker acknowledges the value of their contribution and is significant in determining the animal's position in the organisational context. In contrast, Dashper (2020) argues that when animals are considered as workers, they are usually deemed low in status and controlled by humans. Attributing animals as *care* workers may seek to further devalue their contribution, given the low status of care in society (Lynch, 2022), but Coulter asserts it is a political statement that focuses attention on relational power dynamics. Kandel *et al*., (2023) suggest that in therapy contexts, recognising animals as co-workers grants them an active role in co-constructing the therapeutic experience; the animal is not a non-human tool (Gorman, 2019) or a commodity, but rather a partner in relational experiences. The term "co-worker" more genuinely reflects the notion of "becoming therapeutic together," which Gorman (2019:314) advocates is the practice that occurs in care farming contexts. These varying perspectives highlight the need for further empirical work to explore how interspecies care work is co-constructed and how organisational architecture shapes these experiences. Using an ethics of care framework seeks to recognise and critically address the relational

power dynamics in human-animal care practices whilst exploring the broader organisational cultures in which these practices are rooted.

The context influences how the human-animal relationship is conceptualised, which is influenced by the disciplinary context. In Chapter 1, I outlined the psychological foundations upon which AAI work is built. In its early days, there was limited evidence of its benefits (Fine and Beck, 2015) but there has since been a surge in work which aims to provide scientific evidence of the benefits of such interventions for specific groups in specific contexts (Lundqvist *et al.,* 2017; Brelsford *et al.,* 2017). Dogs' attunement to humans has an extensive history influencing their care work over a number of years (DeMello, 2012). Wells (2009a) suggests that the domestic dog provides physical and psychological health benefits. They have become the most popular animal chosen for therapy (Lee, *et al.,* 2023) believed to have the capacity to sense human emotions (Fine *et al*., 2019). Hare (2007) argues that dogs understand human behaviour and Horwoitz (2009) suggests this is derived through their attentiveness to human facial exposition and reactions, dogs have implicit knowledge of human interactional capacity (Simonen and Lohi, 2021). They participate in therapeutic work across a range of settings including court rooms (Phillips, 2015), hospitals (Bert *et al.,* 2016), universities (Williams *et al.,* 2024) prisons (Mercer *et al*., 2015), and schools (O'Haire, *et al.,* 2013). The emphasis on dogs is tied to sociocultural perceptions of the animal's value which is influenced by time, place and culture (Haraway, 2008; Smith *et al.,* 2021). In a recent review of quantitative and qualitative evidence of canine assisted therapy, Pandey *et al.,* (2024:1) concludes that it "shows promise as an effective intervention in promoting wellbeing among diverse populations". But the lack of regulatory frameworks and guidance on measurable outcomes restricts conclusiveness of the review. Equally, the focus remains primarily on the benefits of canine therapy. Fine *et al.,* (2019) suggest that the popularity of AAI has given rise to a paradigm shift in the field whereby more attention to practice can inform the evidence base, in turn contributing to public policy. Whilst this provides an important opportunity for empirical research in a range of therapeutic human–animal contexts, the focus on practice,

as advocated by Fine et al. (2019), is often framed as a means of generating understanding of intervention, intensity, and dosage. However, such terminology raises concerns within a neoliberal context, as it reinstates a separatist assessment rather than recognising the mutuality of benefits. From a psychological perspective, an understanding of the practices that work should help to maximise impact of human benefit and ensure the best welfare for animals. But, starting with the practice, as Fine *et al.,* (2019) suggest, means focussing on the practices of relational care as being at the core of AAI (Kandel *et al.,* 2023). This provides an opportunity to consider both the practices and values of caring within current organisational and sociopolitical contexts to appraise opportunities for mutually beneficial practices.

Building on the discussion of relational care in AAI, it is crucial to examine the broader organisational context, particularly who performs this care and the implications of this work. As, I touched on in Chapter 2, care work has often been deemed 'dirty work', a term that reflects its perceived lower status, and consequently, it is largely carried out by marginalised individuals (Tronto, 1993; Lynch, 2022). This is amplified in human-animal organisations (Dashper, 2020). Increasing recognition of animals' capacity to care has led to their greater involvement in care work, but this has also exposed them to exploitation through objectification, marginalisation, and commodification (Coulter, 2015). In human-animal organisation studies, Tallberg and Jordan (2023) build on the work of Lopina *et al.,* (2012) on the physical, social, moral, and emotional taints associated with work in animal shelters. Morally, the work of animal shelters may be seen to be of "dubious nature" thus the people working in animal shelters are tainted by the nature of the work and the position of the animals as marginalised (Tallberg and Jordan, 2023:385). There is a distinct divergence of opinion in respect of the morality of AAI work (Zamir, 2006). Arguably the work of AAI is questionable in nature in that it is placing animals, who may have already experienced neglect or abandonment in close proximity with marginalised individuals, sometimes for monetary exchange (Zamir, 2006). In contrast, choosing to volunteer in dirty work in human-animal organisations has been proffered as an empowering experience for humans (Bekkers and

Ingen, 2016) that can elevate moral standing (Taylor, 2007; Hamilton and Taylor, 2012). Yet volunteering can also be considered yet another form of care labour and thus a form of oppression (Dowling, 2021). Animal shelter volunteers cite their love of animals and not being people oriented as reasons for engaging (Neumann, 2010). This reinforces the view that in interspecies care environments human and animal share an experience of marginalisation.

The ethics of animals performing care work in human-animal organisations raises several concerns. Dashper (2020) critiques the commercialisation of emotional labour, arguing that animals are often required to suppress their natural responses to meet business interests, as seen in tourism where animals like trail horses are disciplined by organisational needs. In therapy contexts, as discussed by Charles and Wolkowitz (2019), Dashper (2020:28) notes that whilst dogs are valued for their "dogginess", they are still subjected to institutional control. Coulter (2016) offers a contrasting perspective, suggesting that animals may derive satisfaction from caring. What remains crucial, according to Donaldson and Kymlicka (2012), is finding the right ways for animals to contribute to their communities in a way that fosters mutual flourishing. Donati (2019), however, cautions that romanticising animals' enjoyment of work often serves human economic interests, rather than truly benefitting the animals. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2012) further argue that recognising animals as active participants in co-constructing the community is an act of care. They emphasise the importance of fostering circumstances and building trusting relationships that allow animals to exercise agency and interpreting the signals animals give regarding their subjective preferences and choices. In a later publication, they suggest that in "domesticated interspecies contexts," it is possible to nurture animals in ways that help both humans and animals foster "new ways of being" (2015:62). In Chapter 8, I explore how the values and practices of care within an AAI organisation enable animals to exhibit their natural behaviours in ways that contribute to understandings of animals' care work in therapeutic settings.

As mentioned earlier, care farms provide valuable insights into how organisational frameworks can support mutual flourishing. Gorman (2019) and Murray *et al.,* (2019) highlight how these settings enable sustained, meaningful relationships between humans and animals. Murray *et al.,* (2019) suggest that participating in care work in farming contexts offers numerous benefits, including a sense of value, social interaction, achievement, fulfilment, and belonging. Care farms also contribute to increased self-confidence and enhanced self-perception, as noted by Gorman (2017), demonstrating the significant human benefits of these experiences. Gorman (2017; 2019) employs an ethics of care to examine care farms, proposing a mutually beneficial model of human-animal interactions. He calls for further empirical research into "how care for humans and nonhumans might be brought together, in ways that open up potentialities for mutual and more-than-human benefit" (2019:321). Similarly, Murray's literature advocates for the multi-layered relational experiences of giving and receiving care, which contribute to shifts in self-understanding and capability. However, the longevity of exposure to these experiences is crucial, and the limited funding available to TSO can reduce the number of sessions offered, based on perceived need (Bragg *et al*., 2014). Colebrooke *et al*., (2023:99) argue that the political and economic precarity of TSO interacts with the precarious subjectivities of people in need of care, generating care practices that challenge commodified neoliberal outcomes and emphasise "affective competencies" such as self-confidence. This suggests a need to examine TSO, their organisational practices, and broader governance systems to understand how care experiences—both human and animal—can intervene in neoliberal agendas of care and reassert relationality as the foundation for a mutually beneficial interspecies world.

Having explored the benefits of sustained, relational care in care farms, it is important to consider how other organisational contexts, particularly those influenced by neoliberalism, approach interspecies care. The impact of neoliberalism on care work is evident in how different organisations approach interspecies relationships. In university contexts, therapy dogs are used to reduce student stress during examination periods (Cooke *et al*., 2023),

providing a quick, commodified form of care which has a measurable impact for the university. This stands in contrast to the sustained, relational care seen in care farms. This illustrates how different discourses of care are enacted in different organisational contexts which has implications for how the animal is perceived. Dashper (2020) notes that organisational spaces impose scripts on how animals and humans interact, and in neoliberal settings, these relationships often reinforce capitalist ideals of individualism and productivity. Thus, in the context of the neoliberal university the relationship being fostered through the experience with the therapy dogs reinforces the organisational ideologies of neoliberal subjectivity and the gendered role of caring in society, highlighting the importance of an organisational approach to understanding interspecies relationships in contexts which take account of the gendered narratives of care which continually recirculate.

In this section, I have explored how organisational drivers shape human and animal care work, and how these are influenced by the broader context of neoliberalism. Whilst animals are increasingly recognised for their capacity to care, this comes with risks of exploitation and objectification, particularly in neoliberal settings where care is commodified and emotional labour is undervalued. Understanding these systems is crucial to fostering ethical, mutual flourishing for both humans and animals.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I have chosen to resuscitate the practices of caring alongside working with Haraway's theoretical ideas as a means of providing clear insight into how care is co-constituted in interspecies relationships. I will now move on to examine *interspecies care practices* specifically, focusing on how the relational and embodied dimensions of care unfold between humans and animals. This will help further understand how the practices themselves—beyond mere labour—help to reshape experiences of marginalisation and provide a platform for mutual flourishing.

## Interspecies Care Practices: The Texture of Relationality

Schuurman (2021) provides a definition of interspecies care, which offers further exposition of what specifically constitutes interspecies caring. She suggests that "interspecies care is a complex process comprising relational encounters and communication between humans and animals, interpretations of animality in different spatial and temporal contexts, as well as situational practices" (2021:688). Whilst recognising the importance of situational and organisational practices, she also incorporates the spatial and temporal dimensions which influence the practices of caring, thus reaffirming Greenhough *et al.,* (2023:1), argument that the "capacity to care is generated and shared through the intertwining of architectural and systems of governance and discourse in socio-material infrastructures of care." As set out in the introduction, Lynch (2022:133) suggests that there is a need to "resuscitate" affective relationality as a means of resisting neoliberalism and mobilising alternative subjectivity that offers opportunities for a more sustainable future for people, animals and the planet. For the "founding mothers of care theory" (Lynch, 2022:6) caring relationships are built on practices of attentiveness, empathy, responsibility, and reciprocity (Tronto, 1993; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2013). There is broad consensus that attentiveness is the catalyst for all caring relationships, across artificially imposed species divide which depends upon a relational "obligation of curiosity" (Haraway, 2008:36) "arts of noticing" (Haraway and Tsing, 2015, np), or "passionate immersion" (Tsing, 2010:201). It can be considered as a form of care practice which takes significant effort to engender (Tronto, 1993), more so in the context of technologically absorbed contemporary cultures, a human condition often referred to as digital disengagement (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2019). de Merich (2015) suggests that if attentiveness is the stimulus for caring, then empathy is the method which leads to responsibility and a need to respond morally to the other (Blum, 1994). Haraway (2008:36) suggests that caring is a touching, affective encounter with the other that "ramifies and shapes accountability" harnessing responsibility. Huopalainen (2023:96) suggests it is necessary "to get in the body" of the other in order to co-construct the relational experiences. Bozalek (2021:144) proposes that "response-ability leads to an active making together, a

collective knowing, being and doing, “becoming-with” each other by rendering each other capable to create flourishing worlds.” Unlike the regulatory frameworks of governance which structure care practices organisationally, this notion of accountability refers to the non-commodifiable practices of relational caring (Lynch, 2022).

Building on Schuurman's (2021) definition of interspecies care and the relational aspects it entails, it becomes clear that care is deeply influenced by both the spatial and temporal contexts, as well as affective, embodied encounters. These encounters, whether they foster positive or negative emotions, play a crucial role in shaping human-animal relationships. Touch plays a crucial role in care, as Haraway (2008) suggests, it is an affective, embodied encounter that fosters attentiveness, empathy, and responsibility in human-animal relationships. Pets are commonplace in western homes (Brooks *et al.*, 2018). Affective connections to animals often drive the desire for companionship, with dogs, for example, frequently offering “affection without strings” (Cudworth, 2023:117) that can feel more rewarding than other familial relationships. These connections often evoke happiness, as seen in the laughter and smiles of people describing their experiences with pets (Cudworth, 2023). However, these touching encounters are not universally positive or shared across species. Whilst some animals, like dogs or exotic creatures, can foster feelings of connectedness or fascination (Hausmann *et al*., 2023), others evoke fear or disgust. Snakes, spiders, and parasites are noted for eliciting intense fear (Polák *et al.,* 2020), and cultural perceptions often play a role in shaping these responses (DeMello, 2012). For instance, in western societies, rats are associated with disease and filth (Aivelo, 2022), yet in other cultures, they are viewed more positively (Noble *et al.,* 2011). These affective responses to animals are not only driven by individual experiences but also shaped by broader cultural discourses and societal norms, illustrating that being touched can provoke both connection and repulsion. But what matters is that these affective experiences demonstrate relational connectedness, whether they evoke joy or fear, they are affective encounters that prompt a sense of responsibility and reflection on the self. The nature of these relationships is not fixed;

it is shaped by experience and broader cultural discourses. Thus, the human-animal encounter, even when difficult, has the potential to reshape relational understandings and responsibilities. I unravel this process in relation to my fear of rats in Chapter 4.

Affective touch is significant in the human-animal relationships, yet this is accompanied by the capacity to engage with animals through physical touch which demonstrates a human desire to share and be part of a relationship that "opens us to a story we have not yet heard, to an unworked work, a narrative without a beginning and an end" (Manning, 2007:13). Participating in settings that offer AAI reflects a need to touch and be touched, a desire to feel (Paterson, 2006). Bekoff and Goodall (2007:70) suggests that "preferring close company of another individual, seeking them out, and if necessary, protecting and caring for them" reflects a loving relational attachment. This combination of physical, affective, and emotional elements of touch sparks the process of "becoming-with", creating glimmers of a new narrative of the self (Manning, 2007), which becomes "impossible to forget" (Maurette, 2018:x). Touch is central to the practices of caring. Hamington (2017) views touch with animals as a habitual, embodied practice of caring that opens individuals to new ways of being. It is multisensorial (Paterson, 2006), connecting the mind and body (Haraway, 2008), and oscillates between external stimuli and intimate internal experiences (Maurette, 2018). Touch, touching, and being touched, as an embodied and affective phenomenon (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), fosters an appreciation of relationality (Noddings, 2013) and "the very feeling of being alive" (Maurette, 2018:x). Dowling (2021:70) notes that in a society increasingly dominated by digital technology, a lack of real-life touch has given rise to the "cuddle industry". Dumm (2008:159) warns that losing touch leads to "a flight into the futility of total thought". Touch brings us into relationships with what matters (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007), emphasising the corporeal, mind-body experience of being alive. For both humans and animals, the absence of physical touch can be detrimental (Harlow, 1958) and affectively challenging (Radcliffe, 2008). Hamington (2004) asserts that human bodies are designed to care, and care can only be fully understood when the centrality of embodied experiences is

recognised. However, it is important to note that Hamington neglects to consider the sexed and gendered bodies and the societal implications of embodied care work for men and women (Clement, 2006), which is particularly significant in the context of this study.

Whilst acknowledging the omission of gendered and societal aspects in Hamington's work, his contribution to care ethics remains significant, particularly his emphasis on embodied experiences in human-animal care relations. Referencing de Waal, Hamington (2017) suggests that human relationships with companion animals provide a moral foundation for care practices, as care is often learned through these interactions. The absence of language in human-animal relationships encourages attentiveness to non-verbal forms of communication—watching, listening, and touching—to understand the perspective of the other (Sanders, 2003). These multisensorial and repetitive practices of caring not only resuscitate the practices of caring itself but also foster an embodied experience that can be applied across different contexts, contributing to a deeper understanding of both self and others (Hamington, 2017). Mol (2008) highlights that caring is an intricate and experimental process, where the capacity to enact and reflect upon care leads to an ontological shift, enhancing the ability to care for oneself and others. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017:95) furthers this by examining "touching visions," suggesting that touch offers a multisensorial way of knowing that fosters interconnectedness. She critiques the primacy of sight in understanding, arguing that touch allows for a deeper reciprocity, creating a more engaged form of relationality. But she emphasises that touch is not always innocent or desirable, but it is central to care in both its physical and affective dimensions.

In the context of AAI, significant emphasis is placed on the benefits of touch in human-animal relationships (McCarldle *et al.,* 2011; Wilson and Barker, 2003). As mentioned in the introduction (Ch.1), oxytocin production is often cited as scientific evidence of the mutual benefits of positive touch for both humans and animals (Olmert, 2009). Oxytocin, a chemical response triggered by nurturing relational experiences, is commonly associated with parent-

child bonding (Julius *et al.,* 2013), but evidence has extended this to cross-species interactions, particularly with dogs (Carter *et al.,* 2008) and horses (Beetz *et al.,* 2012). Research has even explored the benefits of human interaction with agricultural animals (Lürzel, 2020). However, measuring oxytocin levels consistently in therapeutic contexts is neither possible nor ethical, and scientific data alone cannot fully capture the complexity of these interactions (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This highlights the importance of continuous attention to animals' responses to touch in AAI work. Animals in these environments often face frequent touch and perform significant emotional labour, which can place stress on them (MacNamara *et al.*, 2015). Whilst touch can foster positive, affective relationships, its ethical implications are not always straightforward. For example, Murphy (2020) describes how nurturing a pig appeared beneficial, but when this care was intended to ease the animal's path to slaughter, an ethical dilemma emerged. Thus, touch is not inherently positive; its value depends on the broader intentions and the systems within which it occurs. In some cases, electronic animals have been considered as alternatives to live animals in therapy contexts (Redmalm, *et al.,* 2023). Whilst they may have a place, they cannot replace the practice of relational care (Bellet, 2023), and such interventions may devalue the subject's relational experience, potentially generating anxiety and stress rather than reducing it.

Whilst touch plays a crucial role in fostering affective relationships in AAI, it is only one aspect of the broader relational dynamic. The absence of verbal language in human-animal interactions places greater emphasis on non-verbal communication—such as gestures, body language, and attentiveness—as a means of understanding and responding to animals. In the next section, I explore the significance of communication, particularly how humans interpret and respond to animals' cues, and the ways in which these forms of communication shape both caring practices and organisational structures in AAI settings.

## From Touch to Talk: Communicating Interspecies Care

Communication is central to developing organisational cultures of care (Nuyts and Friese, 2021). Multisensorial forms of communication are critical in the practices of co-constituted interspecies care within human-animal organisations. Whilst touch is imperative for generating connectedness and practices of caring, it is the multiple and simultaneous forms of multisensorial communication that influence decision-making in care practices (Bellet, 2023). Coulter (2018:64) suggests in interspecies organisations care "involves an intricate form of communication work" where people and animals "develop shared interspecies languages that involve touch, sound, and both cognitive and emotional skills and interpretation." Focusing on human relations of care, Moser (2010:282) highlights the significance of the body, including "posture, gesture, physical touch, manual guidance, eye contact, facial expression, and turn-taking." Such practices are not dissimilar to relational practices in human-animal relations; Bekoff and Goodall (2007:15) suggest that "animals talk to us using a myriad of behaviour patterns—postures, gestures, and gaits—along with their mouths, tails, eyes, ears, and noses." Gruen (2013) suggests that acknowledging similarities between humans and animals creates a more mindful approach to co-existence, but asserting sameness can also be problematic. She goes on to say that human ability to empathise is dependent upon the process of listening, watching, talking, thinking, and reflecting. Connolly (2023) explains that speaking these thoughts out loud is a means of ensuring animals' contribution is not silenced. In an organisational context, taking responsibility for what is communicated is critical (Rees, 2023). The extent to which this is practised depends on the ability to attend to the other and the degree to which animals are enabled and encouraged to participate in the organisational context (Beaujolin *et al.,* 2021).

Communication is more than just verbal; it is a multisensorial experience that involves sound, movement, and sensation. In a human-animal organisation it is difficult to get away from human talk, particularly in the context of health and social care services. Whilst talk is the form of communication between a speaker and one or more listeners, speech focuses

attention on the use of sounds (OED, 2024). In human-animal organisational settings, both talk, and speech is significant in co-constituting the relational environment. Ethology highlights how animals, including mice and dogs, have heightened sensory capacities, particularly in their responsiveness to sound (Balcombe, 2006). This sensitivity necessitates a careful consideration of the soundscapes within care organisations. Research on human soundscapes suggests that the noise humans create can influence the evolution of species (Shannon *et al.,* 2016), and therefore it is important to ask how soundscapes affect animals in organisational contexts like AAI. The sounds of human voices may have subtle, and often overlooked, effects on animals' behaviour, emotional states, and responses to care. Given some animals' heightened sensitivity to sound, this auditory environment becomes part of the care experience for both species.

This multisensorial experience is especially relevant in human-animal organisations, where the combination of sound, touch, and proximity can significantly impact animal wellbeing and human-animal relationships. Wells (2009b) suggests that the benefits of human contact for dogs in shelters are linked to the olfactory and auditory stimulation it provides, suggesting that it is the combination of proximity and talk which has the most positive benefits. Playing human voices to animals is seen to have less positive impact on animal health and that reading without proximal contact can be more stress-inducing for some animals (Hall *et al.,* 2016). This supports Wells' suggestion that animals benefit most from a multi-sensorial experience. Gourkow *et al.,* (2014) suggest that it is physical touch, combined with the "high-pitched, gentle tone" of the human voice, which can reduce stress and positively affect immunity in cats. In human-animal relationships, a specific form of communication often used is motherese or pet-directed speech (PDS). Originating from mother-child interactions, this high-pitched language is characterised by exaggerated emotional expression and is commonly employed by pet owners, particularly dog owners (Hirsch-Pasek and Treiman, 1982). Typically, it features a high-pitched voice with increased pitch variation, short utterances, and word repetitions. Coren (2001) suggests that PDS is usually situated in the present tense,

which may suggest that humans are absorbed in the present moment. Research shows that PDS increases animal responsiveness to human cues (Burnham *et al.*, 2024). It is commonly described as talk using “happy voices” (Jeannin *et al.,* 2017:1). All talk has different prosody and registers, and prosody plays a significant role in structuring interspecies interaction and establishing reciprocity (Harjunpää, 2021). As Moser (2010) highlights, communication practices are based on turn-taking, and human talk is central to developing this interactive pattern. These types of speech—PDS and infant-directed speech—share prosodic and syntactic features distinct from typical adult-directed speech. PDS not only increases animal responsiveness to human cues but also deepens the emotional connection for humans, making them feel more engaged and attuned to their companion animals. This reciprocal communication strengthens the caregiving role for humans, offering emotional fulfilment and reinforcing their bond with the animal.

Beyond the immediate emotional and cognitive effects of PDS, talk plays a broader role within human-animal organisations, not only as a form of communication but also as a tool that shapes organisational practices and relational dynamics. Talk is a significant component within the organisational architecture of a community mental health facility. It functions as both a practical tool and a political force, conveying perceptions of animals' value and shaping the responsibility to care. In human relationships talking establishes connectedness and partnership (Burke, 1950) essential to the practice of talk is the centrality of turn taking, a skill that animals, particularly dogs, have honed (Simonen and Lohi, 2021). Despret (2008), focusing on the relationship between a farmer and his cow, highlights how a human speaking to an animal opens up a space for the animal to respond — actively making way for their voice to emerge. In healthcare, talk orients care work and relationships (Ragan, 2000). Vogel (2023) suggests that a significant component of veterinary care work involves social tinkering, akin to *small talk,* which attempts to lubricate power differences and build trusting and mutually respectful relationships (Ragan, 2000). Slote (2007) argues that voicing the embodied experience of human-animal relationality creates an understanding of the practices of caring,

which helps develop skills of empathy. In the early work on care Noddings (2013), emphasised the importance of discussing practices of caring as means of providing explanations for care-based decisions that help develop a moral awareness of relationality and interdependency. In interspecies relationships, talk takes on different forms and serves various purposes. In human-animal relationships, how the animal is talked about reflects perceptions of their value (Connolly and Cullen, 2018). The form and content of what is said is significant in determining the nature of the relationship and the responsibility to care (Connolly, 2023). For instance, Haraway (2016:130) suggests that "to strike up conversations to pose and respond to interesting questions with animals is about cultivating interspecies response-ability." Despret (2016) is renowned for her philosophical and feminist approach to science, advocating that asking animals different questions provokes different responses — a method that helps interrogate relational power dynamics.

For Haraway (2016) and Despret (2005) asking questions suggests an openness to "becoming-with". Considering the context of talk, Connolly (2023) explores the significance of pronouns in stories of human-horse relations, emphasising how caring is formulated interactively, oscillating between the self and other within the relationship, I provide an illustration of this and explain its relevance in Chapter 6. In a business setting, O'Doherty examines how talking to the airport cat provided insights into perceptions and experiences of organisational and societal discourses. In relationships with companion animals, talk provides mutual benefits (Taylor and Fraser, 2015). In therapy contexts, dog owners engage in conversation with their dogs to assess their attitudes towards their work (Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019). However, asking questions to animals or engaging in conversations with them is often met with anthropomorphic scepticism (Gruen, 2015). I will return to discuss this in detail later in this chapter.

There is still the issue of the political significance of care talk in interspecies contexts. Talking about care is a critical form of resistance in neoliberal systems (Lynch, 2022). Whilst

attentiveness to the embodied experience of relationality is essential in human-animal contexts, enabling the exhibition of “primary agency,” animals' lack of language and their ability to assess their circumstances means they do not have “corporate agency”—the ability to affect political change regarding their conditions (Carter and Charles, 2013:321). Thus, it is a human responsibility to become the animal’s “representative” (Porcher, 2014:1), using their agentic capacity for language. As Mol (2008:10) explains in relation to human care experiences, her aim is to “make the specificity of care practices travel.” She further suggests that

> she seeks a local, fragile, and yet pertinent coherence. This coherence is not necessarily obvious to the people involved. It need not even be verbally available to them. It may be implicit: embedded in practices, buildings, habits, and machines. And yet, if we want to talk about it, we need to translate a logic into language. This, then, is what I am after. I will make words for, and out of, practices' (Mol, 2008:8).

In this context, Mol’s focus on translating the often implicit logic of care into language highlights the importance of articulating care practices—particularly in settings where the subjects, such as animals, lack the ability to speak for themselves. By making care “travel” through language, humans take on the responsibility for communicating the political and ethical dimensions of care that are otherwise embedded in the materiality and practices of human-animal interactions. In doing so, the practice of interspecies caring serves both a practical and political purpose, aiming to contribute to cultural change (Greenhough *et al*., 2023).

Thus far, I have explored how touch and talk create embodied, multisensorial experiences that foster relationality and connectedness in human-animal relationships. Both forms of communication—whether through physical contact or spoken interaction—help to co-construct care, offering opportunities for mutual engagement, understanding, and responsiveness. However, beyond the immediate sensory and verbal exchanges, there is a deeper emotional and cognitive process that shapes these interactions: empathy. To this

juncture, I have touched upon the importance of empathy in the original care work literature, moving on to consider how affective, embodied experiences in human-animal care help attune individuals to the emotions, needs, and states of the other. Drawing on Hamington's (2017) work, I suggest that caring for animals plays a crucial role in developing empathy, instilling a profound sense of responsibility that can contribute to interspecies flourishing. As de Merich (2015) proposed, empathy serves as the bridge to moral responsibility in care practices. In the next section, I will explore how empathy operates in interspecies relationships, examining how it is cultivated and why it is crucial for creating meaningful, ethical bonds in human-animal care contexts. Understanding empathy provides further insight into how relationality is built and sustained across species boundaries, deepening the practices of care.

## Emotional Attunement and Relational Care

Within the context of human-animal relationships, the concept of empathy comes under significant scrutiny. Referred to in various ways including “feeling with” (Noddings, 2013:30), “emotional attunement” (Gruen, 2015:50), and “imagination” (Hamington, 2004:4), Slote (2007) argues that empathy is at the heart of caring. Taking this forward, de Merich (2015) explains that a better understanding of the process of empathy can develop caring relationships across boundaries, which Coulter (2016) refers to as interspecies solidarity. However, empathy in human and animal relationships is often associated with the practice of projection (Mead, 1956). Gruen (2007) discusses projection in human and animal relationships, explaining how human anxiety and concern for animals can easily become placed onto the animal. She suggests that to avoid falling into this habit, there needs to be an openness and commitment to learning. She proposes the notion of entangled empathy, which involves emotion and cognition in the process of establishing interconnectedness that leads to responsibility and responsiveness with mutual benefits. Whilst these elements of caring are significant, this notion of empathy can obscure the force of affective engagement—the process of “feeling with” that triggers other processes (Jenni, 2017). Stein (1989) suggests

that we feel the emotions of others through somatic similarities. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the affective engrossment in the other is significant in the practice of caring, sparking a momentary loss of self (Shapiro, 1997). This affective moment evokes a sense of vulnerability (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), which may invoke responsibility and responsiveness, though this is not guaranteed. An openness to learning could also highlight empathetic behaviours in animals. Bekoff and Goodall (2007:87) explains that animals play by following the universal Golden Rule: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". This rule relies on empathy and reciprocity, further demonstrating that some animals possess a moral sense of right and wrong, as well as a capacity for conscious thought.

This notion of empathy—particularly in the context of human-animal relationships—raises important questions about how projection and anthropomorphism influence the ways humans understand and respond to animals. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2015) explored how rescued animals were intended to foster empathy and act as ambassadors for others in the agricultural industry. However, they argue that the lack of ongoing embodied and affective connection limited the potential of this empathetic relationship, highlighting the importance of sustained relational proximity over time. Empathy, as Hamington (2004) suggests, is a mind-body experience rooted in embodied relationality. When working with animals, it is essential that humans are capable of looking through their eyes and getting inside their bodies (Huopalainen, 2023). Connolly's (2023) research into equines further explores how listening to animal voices can deepen empathetic practices. Although such practices often face critiques of anthropomorphic projection (Irvine, 2008), which can lead to animal exploitation, Connolly (2023:146), referencing Suen (2015), argues that "*speaking for"* animals is "necessary for both animal liberation and reducing exploitation" (Suen, 2015:14). This echoes the earlier point that humans help provide animals with "corporate agency" (Carter and Charles, 2013:321). Bekoff and Goodall (2007:128) suggest that anthropomorphism is an affective, rather than rational, process born out of empathy. Bekoff notes, "As I watch an animal, I am not reaching for the closest word to describe the behaviour I am seeing; I am

feeling the emotion directly, without words or even a full, conscious understanding of the animal's action". He emphasises that humans' emotional templates are a reliable guide for assessing the emotional wellbeing of animal companions. I will discuss anthropomorphism in more detail shortly.

Building on the importance of empathy and relationality in human-animal interactions, it is essential to consider how these proximal experiences with animals shape not only care practices but also self-perception and social dynamics. Proximal experiences with animals provide insight into ourselves and others (Haraway, 2003). Gruen (2015:46) suggests dogs are "emotional sponges" which suggests they feel the relationships they are engaged within which has implications for their care in therapy work. Whilst animals are often considered a resource that can provide wellbeing benefits for people experiencing mental health difficulties, concerns have been raised about the impact of mental illness on the capacity for empathy and thus the capacity to care for the animal (Guhn *et al.,* 2020). Whilst this is a valid concern from an animal welfare perspective, it overlooks how experiences of marginalisation may be the underlying cause of a reduction in empathetic capacity. Within neoliberalism maintaining oppressions is pivotal. This connects to earlier discussions (Ch.2) on how categories of marginalisation are often determined based on how closely or distantly humans are associated with the animal (Taylor, 2024). The association between mental illness and a perceived lack of empathy places those with mental illness closer to animals, who are often thought to lack empathy. However, this assumption is flawed. Ethologists suggests that animals are indeed capable of empathy, both within their species and across species boundaries (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007; Balcombe, 2006). Thus, whilst concerns about animal welfare in therapy work are important, "empathy is not something imposed; it has to be nurtured" (Drew, 2016:212), which implies that such concerns may, in part, serve to reinforce marginalisation and oppression. There is a moral obligation to facilitate care. AAI organisations can provide practical experiences that evoke empathy in a relational context

which ensures care and protection for the animal whilst enhancing human capacity for empathy and intervening in marginalisation (VanFleet *et al.,* 2015).

Having established the significance of empathy in shaping human-animal interactions, it is crucial to explore how empathy itself operates within interspecies relationships. Starting with a general exposition of empathy, Aaltola (2013:81) suggests that "we can loosely define empathy as an experienced insight into the experience of others. When I empathize, I grasp (or rather I feel that I grasp) in an embodied, affective sense the mental state of another being - however I do not need to feel those experiences as they originally occurred." What matters is that within that moment the self becomes absorbed in the other and a new subjective reality is constructed. Moving into interspecies relationships, she refers to Stein (1989) and summarises:

> species differences need not be miraculously collapsed and the human morphed into the non-human mind, for the latter remains distinct, breathtakingly different and in many ways unknowable being even when we experience empathy toward her. The catch is to perceive of insight as something other than simulation or complete familiarity and rather to understand it as a vision of something one may be unable to explain or fully depict, but which nonetheless appears real, tangible and immediately present (Aaltola, 2013:81)

Staying with Stein's work, Aaltola suggests that if something is relationally affective then this cannot be denied. "Empathy cannot be questioned, for it is the very method through which we comprehend the world and our experiences" (2013:83). Thus, like Noddings' (2013) notion of *feeling with*, affective knowing enables engrossment in what the other might be thinking or feeling, given that the human has no experience of feeling or understanding the world from the perspective of an animal, what is essential for care, is engrossment in the other, the receptiveness to being in a relationship and the acceptance that their external reality is different from ours. Aaltola's work suggests that concerns over anthropomorphism are quite frankly concerns over the possibility that how people feel when in relation to animals could

unsettle the status quo. de Waal (2012) maintains that humans and animals are naturally connected and caring, “empathy is the social “glue” that binds communities together” (van Dijke *et al*., 2019:1283). Thus, relationality evokes affective responses which can generate better caring. Yet, there is a possibility that more attentive and affective care for animals could challenge dominant moral frameworks — particularly those that justify the use of animals as objects, tools, or commodities within human systems. As Aaltola (2013) suggests, such care may unsettle the status quo by exposing the emotional and ethical contradictions embedded in human–animal hierarchies.

Like Aaltola, Despret’s (2013) contribution to thinking about empathy challenges the conventional notion of empathy as simply ‘feeling what another feels’ or imagining oneself in the place of the other. Instead, she reframes empathy as a situated, embodied, and responsive process—one in which both human and animal bodies are actively involved in co-creating knowledge and relationships. Drawing on the work of scientists like Smuts and Strum, Despret highlights how their long-term fieldwork practices involved learning to *act with* rather than merely observe animals, creating what she calls partial affinities through bodily attunement and ‘acting as if.’ This kind of empathy is not about merging perspectives, but about staying with difference whilst still being available to respond. Empathy, in Despret’s account, becomes a scientific tool—not a contamination of objectivity, but a methodological practice that demands vulnerability, care, and responsiveness. It is through this dance of embodied communication that humans and animals become-with one another, enacting relationships that generate not only knowledge, but mutual transformation. Importantly, this reframing of empathy helps to dissolve rigid boundaries between mind and body, subject and object, human and animal, whilst also sidestepping accusations of naïve anthropomorphism by foregrounding the careful, embodied, and often risky nature of these interspecies encounters.

In this subsection, I have explored the complexities of empathy in human-animal relationships, highlighting its crucial role in fostering care and relational connections. By illustrating the nuances of empathy, I emphasise the importance of practising care to refine understandings of this process, as Drew (2016:212) notes, "empathy is not something imposed; it has to be nurtured." Empathy in human-animal interactions is not merely about understanding or projecting emotions onto animals; it involves an embodied, affective responsiveness that fosters ethical engagement and mutual transformation. As Despret's (2013) work shows, empathy can be understood as a co-creative process enacted through bodily attunement, one that resists rigid boundaries between subject and object or mind and body. This, in turn, reinforces the importance of proximity and sustained relationality. Interspecies care practices, such as those found in AAI contexts, provide a structured environment to practice these forms of embodied empathy, which not only enhance human-animal relationships but also offer a pathway to addressing the marginalisation of individuals with mental health difficulties. These practices play a crucial role in nurturing empathy, helping to disrupt the social structures that contribute to oppression and exclusion—central themes of this thesis. I will now conclude this chapter with a detailed discussion of anthropomorphism, a significant concern in human-animal relationships.

## Anthropomorphism and Empathy: A Pathway to Ethical Interspecies Relationships?

Often criticised as the projection of human traits onto animals, anthropomorphism can either lead to exploitation or, as Bekoff and Goodall (2007) suggests, arise from empathetic engagement. The following section will explore the impact of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in shaping these relationships, questioning whether these practices reinforce harmful power dynamics or open pathways for deeper, more ethical connections. Kennedy (1992) and Wynne (2007) suggests that interspecies empathy is an anthropomorphic mistake. There has been extensive criticism exercised in relation to the capacity of humans to

assess and understand emotional responses in animals (Donati, 2019). Anthropocentrism and its ally anthropomorphism help to illustrate the concerns. There are various competing definitions of these terms which vary in respect of disciplinary context. Firstly, anthropocentrism positions the human being as the normative measure of morality (Goralnik and Nelson, 2012). The human being that anthropocentrism holds in esteem is rooted in Cartesian philosophy, the human is objective, rational and logical (Hurn, 2012). Secondly, anthropocentrism refers to the unavoidable condition that humans see the world through human eyes, thus what they think and feel, is biased towards the human condition (Probyn-Rapsey, 2018). Leading from this, anthropomorphism looks towards how, through language, human's apply human based characteristics onto animals, specifically in relation to how the animal might be thinking or feeling, a technique widely used in fiction and film (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007).

Bekoff and Goodall (2007) argue that anthropomorphism should not solely serve human interests. Humans are inherently biased toward their own condition, meaning that perceptions of what animals think and feel are inevitably influenced by human experiences (Irvine, 2008). However, dismissing anthropomorphism entirely risks overlooking the animal's perspective and emotional experience, thereby reinforcing anthropocentric assumptions that only humans possess complex inner lives (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007). This dismissal can also reproduce patriarchal logics, which have historically devalued emotion, empathy, and relational knowledge — qualities often associated with care and feminised ways of knowing (Karlsson, 2012). When used with care, anthropomorphism can become a means of being "responsive and responsible… attuned to the needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes and sensitivities" of the other (Gruen, 2015: 3). For example, Serpell (1986) explains how attributing the capacity for love and care to pets enhances human–animal relationships, facilitating better care. Bekoff (2002: 48) advocates for "biocentric anthropomorphism," suggesting that careful anthropomorphism can form the basis of mutually respectful human–animal relationships. This approach highlights how thoughtful anthropomorphism can

encourage reflection on aspects of human–animal lives that might otherwise be overlooked. By using anthropomorphism in a considered way, it is possible to foster more ethical and compassionate interactions, moving beyond the limitations of anthropocentrism.

As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, the role of language in care practices is crucial, which inevitably makes anthropomorphism unavoidable (Irvine, 2004). But not all anthropomorphism is problematic; Keeley (2004) argues that it can be justified, especially when it focuses on animals' basic needs and upholds the values and beliefs of care practices (Karlsson, 2012). Hamington (2017), referencing Horowitz and Bekoff (2007), adds that anthropomorphism is a habitual practice that can hone people's capacity for care. Imaginative narratives about an animal's experience help ensure relationships are not only satisfying but also caring. Similarly, Midgley (2002) claims that anthropomorphism is justified in familiar relationships, as it allows humans to perceive animal emotions more fully. Gruen (2015) suggests that using language to express perceived animal emotions fosters openness to learning and promotes further dialogue. Thus, when the practice is rooted in care, and the value is care, anthropomorphism becomes a justified and essential part of interspecies relationships.

Moving on to consider the broader political context, it is interesting to reflect upon the widespread criticisms which anthropomorphism sparks. If anthropomorphism can help to critically construct the moral position of animals within society, as Karlsson (2012) suggests, then perhaps the ongoing criticism reflects a resistance to accepting their subjectivity. Karlsson (2012) claims that anthropomorphic assumptions based on physiological needs such as food choice are fairly acceptable. Assuming a need for water or food can be proved to be correct through the subsequent consumption of the item. Midgley (2002) furthers this, suggesting that observable evidence of a feeling is required to warrant the attribution of a specific feeling or need. This chimes with the rational, scientific view of knowing, which acknowledges a moral obligation to respond to the needs of animals. But establishing

sentience and relationality, as I have argued for above, switches the construction of the animal from object to subject which has significant consequences for neoliberal capitalism (Coulter, 2023).

What is clear here is that anthropomorphism can be utilised in different ways to serve different agendas. In discussing empathy, Gruen (2015) proposes the importance of human capacity for reflection. The reflective practice described in relation to empathy can be adopted in human-animal relationships to interrogate the intentions behind the anthropomorphic judgements questioning the moral, political and economic perspective that may be driving such assertions. However, in neoliberal times, developing the capacity to reflect critically on such factors does not align with the practices of neoliberal educational institutions (Lynch, 2022). TSO provide a "platform for change, by mobilising new languages and narratives around care, social justice and affective equality" (Lynch, 2022:9). Human-animal organisations provide a relational interspecies context which generates relational knowledge that encourages new languages and narratives around care (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2015; Gorman, 2017;2019). Anthropomorphic assessments of animals' needs and wants are a cognitive interpretation of an affective experience which can be discussed and reflected upon. The focus is on the animal, but this is also fostering other forms of relational connectivity with others (Gorman, 2019). Talking about the animals' feelings encourages a critical interrogation of the feelings attributed and models a different way of generating knowledge and understanding (Karlsson, 2012).

## Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the intricate structures that underpin interspecies care, highlighting how organisational values operate within a broader neoliberal context. I propose that interspecies care relations can serve as a "residual political space," offering avenues for resistance against neoliberal concepts of care. However, I also emphasise the considerable

challenges and costs—both organisationally and individually—particularly in TSO (Lynch, 2022:133). Focusing on AAI, I argue that whilst the costs of organisational care practices are significant, they yield mutual benefits for both humans and animals, providing an alternative to pet relationships which have the potential to foster relationships that address marginalisation. I critically reflect on the possibility of oppression arising from care work but assert that a lack of opportunities to care is itself an act of oppression. In later sections, I delve into the complexity of relational encounters and communication between humans and animals, influenced by spatial, temporal, and organisational contexts. I contend that the affective experience of touch, though not always positive, can transform self-understanding in relation to others, a theme that will be further explored in Chapter 6. I also address the significance of communication—both spoken and non-verbal—in shaping the soundscape of interspecies care, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 7. Finally, I consider the roles of empathy and attunement in interspecies relations, underscoring their importance throughout my data analysis, with deeper exploration in Chapter 9. The chapter concludes by discussing anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, suggesting that careful anthropomorphism can cultivate deeper, more ethical interspecies connections, a theme I will expand upon in the next chapter in relation to the research practices employed in this study.

# Chapter 4
# Methodology

## Introduction

Undertaking research requires significant consideration of the relationship between the research problem and the methodology and methods perceived appropriate to investigate this problem (Crotty, 2015). This decision-making process needs to be justified with consideration of the underlying beliefs about the nature of reality and what constitutes knowledge (Crotty, 2015). Within this thesis I am exploring how care is co-constituted in an interspecies organisation and considering how interspecies care might offer opportunities for mutual flourishing. The focus on interspecies care provides some insight into the ontological and epistemological underpinnings which steer this research project, which will be elaborated on in this chapter.

Research is situated in time and place. There is an urgent need to take responsibility for our interspecies interconnectedness (Haraway, 2008). Noddings' (2013) assertion that we can choose whether or not to include animals as part of our moral responsibility holds no resonance when held up against the current environmental crisis. The pandemic was an unplanned social experiment that provided stories and images that highlighted the mutually entangled, permanently interdependent worlds of human and animal (Clarke *et al.,* 2023). Research that attends to the interdependency of human-animal lives provides hope for mutually sustainable futures (Coulter, 2016). Talking about qualitative research, Denzin and Giardiana (2019) suggest we are at a crossroads, there is urgency to rethink who is included in research and how they are included in order to counter political and economic forces of capitalism and far right politics. Research has a responsibility to tackle intersectional inequalities, re-creating methods and questioning staid versions of ethics in doing so creating debates in academia and speaking within public forums to provoke change (Denzin and

Giardiana, 2019). This PhD research project offers a meaningful contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities of interspecies interconnectedness in organisational contexts.

In the first section of this chapter, I justify the decision to frame the research as an Interspecies Ethnography (IE), moving on to explain how the focus on emancipation of both human and animal within the research organisation makes ethnographic inquiry an appropriate methodology. The various critiques of ethnography are explored, particularly considering the centrality of affective engagement and the issues of voice, power, and partiality, which some argue undermines the research's ethical rigour. I consider the inherent issues of anthropocentric bias in interspecies work and justify how the research aims to advocate for animals' agentic capacity locally, which has political significance. Finally, this first section explains how I drew on different disciplinary knowledges as a means of addressing tunnel vision and conclude with the necessity of reflection and reflexivity throughout the research processes. In subsequent sections, I provide details of care-full procedures adopted as data collection practices, including observations and fieldnotes, interviews and photographs which culminate in my research journal. From here, my practice of story-as-method explains the process of working with extensive fieldnotes, images and interviews to formulate data stories and how this informed the analysis. Finally, I review some ethical points that have not been addressed. This chapter is supported by documents in the Appendix which detail elements of the research process (e.g. process of storying) and provide examples of supporting documentation (e.g. Participant Information Sheets).

## Methodology: Framing an Interspecies Ethnography

In this section, I will outline how I have designed an interspecies ethnography (IE) to explore the research aims. I begin by explaining my decision to refer to this work as an IE, followed by a justification of the methodology in relation to the research aims and the organisational

contexts. I will then address the challenges and opportunities that ethnographic research presents and discuss how I have responded to these through the philosophical and practical design of the project. In doing so, I revisit the concepts of anthropocentrism and the challenges of language and voice in interspecies relationships, emphasising the centrality of "becoming-with" as the foundation of the research's ontology and epistemology.

In this project, I have assembled an IE to examine how care is co-constituted within a complex network of relations in an interspecies organisation based in Greater Manchester. I introduced my preference for the term inter- in the opening sections of the thesis. In terms of methodology, I have chosen an "interspecies ethnography" rather than the more commonly used term "multispecies ethnography" to emphasise the interconnectedness of humans and animals, whilst also attempting to carry forward the significance of intersectionality, a concept Weaver (2021) highlights as crucial in understanding the layered and interconnected identities within and across species. I suggest the entanglement of intersectional experience of othering, fosters a sense of shared marginalisation which plays a significant role in developing relational connectedness. By using "interspecies," I aim to illustrate how intersectional identities of both human and animals have been critical in the process of the research. I will now move on to justify the methodology in relation to the research aims and the organisational context.

An IE provides a valuable framework for exploring how care is co-constituted within an Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation. Relationality is at the heart of third sector organisations (TSO), which aim to promote empowerment and social justice, but there has been limited research on how these values translate into practices (Blake, 2016). In AAI, the relational experience between humans and animals is the catalyst for therapeutic benefits, making the animal-human bond crucial to successful wellbeing interventions (Fine, 2015). However, research often focuses on human benefit or animal welfare which then overlooks the role of animals as active participants in these encounters (Fine *et al.,* 2019). To address

anthropocentrism and genuinely attune to the specific participation of animals in human and animal organisations requires, what Hamilton and Taylor (2017:8) suggest is “ethnography done differently”. Ethnography has been traditionally used to explore diverse cultures (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019) and is increasingly applied in human-animal organisation studies to engage with the messiness of interspecies interactions (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017). This approach recognises the significance of sentient beings, texts, and material artefacts in shaping relational practices in organisational contexts (see Gorman, 2019; Tallberg and Jordan, 2023; Cudworth, 2023; García-Rosell, 2023). As demand for mental health and wellbeing services grows, so too does the number of organisations offering AAI services (IAHAIO, 2024). Recent research underscores the impact of organisational context on the experience of human-animal therapies (Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019). With challenges around animal travel (Fine *et al*., 2019) and the importance of sustained relationality in successful AAI services (Jau and Hodgson, 2018) more organisations are providing onsite, weekly AAI sessions integrated with other therapeutic interventions. This ethnographic project specifically examines the multi-layered and networked interactions of care within one organisation, exploring how marginalisation can be transformed into a site for mutual flourishing.

Ethnography as a research practice is committed to promoting emancipation by immersing researchers in real-life contexts over extended periods. Ongoing investment in these relationships is critical and requires time and often involves sensitive negotiations (Jones, 2023). This intensity of immersion highlights the centrality of the researcher, their bodies and their interpretations, stressing the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process focussing specifically on power dynamics and positionality. Spending time in the research context fosters relationality through verbal and non-verbal communication, allowing researchers to learn the relevant languages of their setting (Fetterman, 2010). Ethnography has a well-developed history of focussing on how relationships are formed through verbal and non-verbal interactions which makes it appropriate for developing understanding of human-

animal contexts. Even with practice in the language of a given setting, accurately interpreting the 'voice' of others in ethnography remains a challenge (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). Whilst there is a growing call for creative approaches that better represent animals in ethnographic research (Brown, 2023), there is equally a call for "creative adaptation of existing approaches for the demands of the multi-species setting" what Taylor and Hamilton refer to as "an ecology of methods" (2017:13). Ultimately, what is critical is that the ethnographic process centres around ensuring that the voices and experiences of others are authentically accessed and presented through reflexive and attentive research practices.

Ethnographic inquiry has faced a tranche of criticisms. The replacement of objective observation with affective engagement, is considered to have negatively impacted the ethical rigour of the research. Biehl (2017) notes that such charges aim to exclude and oppress different ontological and epistemological practices. Based around looking and listening over time, ethnography is intentionally flexible, embracing the potential for new methods to develop through engagement in the research context (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017). Whilst this aims to develop practices that enable more effective and respectful engagement with animals in human and animal contexts (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023a), it can also lead to questions about lack of standardisation and generalisability. Traditional ethnographic inquiry includes methods of participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, diaries, and photographs which can produce a significant amount of data over an extended period of time. Time to collect and analyse the data becomes a cost in research contexts. A central, long-standing criticism has focused upon the researcher's capacity to truly understand the world from the perspective of the other (Masny, 2015). The anthropological roots and ethnocentrism often led to research *findings* that reinforced patriarchal and colonial perceptions of normalcy (Said, 1993). Moving into human-animal work Kirksey and Helmreich (2010) explain a perennial issue for ethnographers is the capacity to speak for the other and this becomes exacerbated when there is the absence of shared language. The validity and credibility of this form of research is further scrutinised because of its engagement with animals (Colombino and Bruckner,

2023). Critiques revolve around questions related to language. Language distinguishes humans as morally capable beings, serving as a core criterion for separating humans from animals (Pennycook, 2018). It forms the basis of human cognition (Tomasello, 2019), which underpins moral capacity and, consequently, notions of superiority. Animals' incapacity to engage in human forms of communication, such as talking and writing, constructs animals as lacking, perpetuating their objectification and permitting exploitative practices in the pursuit of human progress (Hurn, 2012). Language becomes an insurmountable difference that manifests in further concerns and criticisms (Dowling *et al*., 2017). I will respond to these, establishing my position with regards to language and anthropocentrism in the remainder of this section.

I explored anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in Chapter 3. Here, I consider their relevance in relation to research methodology. Critiques of human-animal research often centre on anthropocentrism, a term that lacks a definitive meaning but typically implies human wrongdoings (Probyn-Rapsey, 2018). In research contexts, it generally refers to perceiving the world through human eyes, which biases interpretation towards maximising human flourishing or, more candidly, human supremacy (Probyn-Rapsey, 2018). Criticisms from this perspective seek to undermine research in this domain and may close off alternative knowledges that could challenge the status quo (Aaltola, 2013; Alger and Alger, 1999). There is a paradox in anthropocentric critique. For centuries, the well-established Cartesian notion of separateness between humans and animals framed animal activities within cultures as a means of enhancing human flourishing. Cartesian views of animals as unfeeling and unthinking perpetuated exploitation at a low cost. This focus on human flourishing has often led to human-animal relationships grounded in domination and exploitation (Carter and Charles, 2013). Whilst the philosophers who originated this view are long gone, the consequences for animals remain; these experiences are ever-present within the economic realms of capitalism and the rise of far-right politics. In neoliberal capitalist regimes, maintaining separateness between humans and animals has become increasingly pervasive,

as it supports patriarchal and colonial oppressions, serving political and economic interests (Lynch, 2022). These critiques set the stage for a re-evaluation of moral frameworks in research, particularly regarding human-animal relationships.

For feminist scholars of the late 20th century, a morality based on justice perpetuated inequalities and oppression. In opposition to these forces, feminists sought to develop knowledge emphasising the centrality of relationality as the basis of morality (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993). Whilst the initial focus was on human flourishing, this has now been extended to human-animal relationships, necessitating research methodologies that foster an understanding of the process of "becoming-with" in these contexts, thereby challenging traditional anthropocentric and patriarchal structures in research (Haraway, 2008). Starting from affective connectivity is a means of tackling anthropocentrism; it helps to mobilise research that does "not essentialise, fix, or capture the world…" and instead opens "up novel ways of becoming" (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023:7). Viewing morality as contextual, relational, and driven by care practices offers a distinctly different approach to moral decision-making. Whilst early work primarily centred on humans, there is now a well-established multidisciplinary body of research exploring human-animal relationships, with care as a moral foundation for decision-making (Connolly, 2023; Gorman, 2019; Tallberg and Jordan, 2023; Cudworth, 2023, García-Rosell, 2023). Tackling anthropocentrism is central to most qualitative research in human–animal studies. However, merely recognising this issue is insufficient; it is crucial to examine how anthropocentrism infiltrates research practices, given that the discipline itself has been shaped by the doctrines of objective, rational patriarchy. Relational research in human–animal contexts draws on ethnographic traditions but also develops experimental, multisensory practices that aim to incorporate the 'voice' or presence of the animal — advocating for animals in ways that carry both local and political significance. This approach rests on the fundamental premise of inherent relationality; our actions affect one another, and humans and animals are perpetually in a process of co-becoming. This

relational understanding has significant implications for all aspects of research design and delivery.

IE seeks to include the 'voice' of the animal in different ways. For instance, Coulter (2016) argues that drawing on disciplines such as ethology — the scientific study of animal behaviour in natural settings — can help avoid anthropocentrism by shifting attention toward animals' own ways of being, sensing, and responding. Ethology provides tools for observing and interpreting behaviour without relying solely on human-based categories or assumptions. In the preparatory phase of the project, I worked with writings from ethology, to develop my knowledge of animal sentience and emotionality (e.g. Bekoff, 2002; Bekoff and Goodall, 2007; Balcombe, 2006). As the project developed, I sought to delve into human-animal studies in other disciplines including geography and linguistics, to ensure that my field work opened up new thinking helping to avoid "tunnel vision" (Taylor and Hamilton, 2017:8). Wels (2020:356) provides some wise words stating that "becoming-with" non-human animals is not only an imaginary or intellectual process, but it also requires physical adaptations to wild physical circumstances". Whilst ethology provides some intellectual resources that evidence animals' capacity to communicate in different ways, their capacity to demonstrate their agency is driven by the "wild physical circumstances", in this instance, the wilderness of the neoliberal organisation. An animal's position is socially constructed within organisational contexts (Lindgren and Öhman, 2019). Organisations can organise to limit or enhance animals' agentic capacity (Kandel *et al.*, 2023). Thus, how animal agencies are enabled and interpreted is influenced by context, locally and socio-politically. Wels (2020:356) goes on to recommend that "before getting into a position to start 'collecting' empirical data on non-human animals in the wild, you obviously need to habituate yourself physically to the field". Based on research with children, Barley and Bath (2014:193) advocate for a familiarisation period in ethnographic research suggesting it is particularly helpful in supporting research with "so-called hard to reach groups". This provides time to understand the "norms, beliefs, rules, rituals and 'language' of the field location; learning how to locate and build relationships"

(Barley and Bath, 2014:185). In human-animal organisations, Irvine (2003) and Hatch (2007) have both conducted interspecies ethnographic research which started from an experience as a volunteer and moved into a "complete membership role" (Adler and Adler, 1987:67). With this in mind, I agreed with the organisation to undertake a familiarisation period (Barley and Bath, 2014). This meant I spent a day a week as a volunteer which provided me with the opportunity to build relationships (Frankham and Howes, 2006) and develop a holistic understanding of interspecies languages and the routines and practices of the organisation (Barley and Bath, 2014). Volunteering also provided a means of ensuring that the research relationship is reciprocal (Leavy and Harris, 2019), whilst I had access to the organisation and the opportunity to learn, I also provided a labour resource. I will discuss the challenges of the dual role in later sections in this chapter.

Staying with the centrality of 'voice', I consider issues of voice, power, and partiality in the context of interspecies ethnographic practices. Ethnographic research has generated a critical awareness of power relations in research. Interspecies ethnographic work overtly rejects rigid power binaries such as nature/culture and human/animal, aiming to illuminate "how humans and animals co-constitute the world", whilst remaining critically conscious of the potential for exploitation (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017:2; Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023b). Managing these tensions is challenging – thus I return to the focus on care and the significance of language. In my ethnographic work, I focus on relational experiences between humans and animals, both of whom are marginalised and struggle to be heard. In caring relationships, all partners are both capable and vulnerable (Noddings, 2013). In the context of AAI, therapeutic experiences are embodied and often do not incorporate language (MacNamara *et al.,* 2015). Whilst humans have the capacity for language, much of human experience exceeds verbal communication, and spoken words only provide partial insight into how individuals wish to present themselves (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023:11). By focusing on multisensorial experiences of both humans and animals, attention is less on language and more on embodied interactions. Research, like social life, can only ever provide a partial story

(Colombino and Bruckner, 2023:11). As I became attuned to the multisensorial means by which different species of animals communicate, I became more attentive to their agentic capacities and the subtle ways agency is expressed through bodily interaction. Haraway (1988) suggests that human-animal research has often provided an opportunity to reflect upon the implications for human beings, which became a means of maintaining supremacy. Self-reflection remains crucial, as ethical interspecies ethnographic work requires reflexivity. Recognising the centrality of myself as the researcher and considering how various personal and intellectual aspects of myself infiltrate and influence the research at all stages is essential (Doucet, 2008).

Having established becoming-with as the underpinning framework for the IE approach adopted in this research, this chapter now turns to my intersectional identity and personal and professional histories in the construction and enactment of the research process. This illustrates the processes and practices involved in reflective and reflexive interspecies research.

## Positionality and Reflexivity

As I have discussed, embodied knowledge is situated, providing only a partial story (Haraway, 1988). This partial story is influenced by our positionality. Madison (2005:7) notes that "positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects." Acknowledging our positionality relies on reflexivity. Leigh and Brown (2021:34) suggest that "in order to be aware of our positionality, we need to be reflexive…to be reflexive, we need to be consciously self-aware, and…to be consciously self-aware, we need to reflect on who we are and what our assumptions are. In this section, I provide extracts from my story not to reposition the centrality of the human, but to illustrate my understanding of self—navigating between past and present. This exploration unravels how my experiences have influenced the

conceptualisation of the research, reflecting issues of power, privilege, and bias, and situating their relevance within the research process.

Starting from the point I embarked on a journey of "becoming-with" the PhD, I recall seeing this advertisement whilst on our annual family holiday to North Wales (Appendix 2). I chose to apply for the PhD Scholarship because it tugged at my heartstrings, reflecting my passionate commitment to care and belief in human-animal relationships. It spoke to me on many levels, feeling as if it had been written for me at a near-perfect time. Central to the requirements was an interest in both human-animal relations and social care. At that very point in my life, I felt rudderless; I had just left my academic career of 15 years in the field of education and early childhood to pursue new opportunities. My background in early childhood, combined with extensive teaching and management experience in higher education (HE) helped hone my skills in dialogic pedagogy and the affective practices of teaching in the HE classroom. In my home life, parenting adopted neurodiverse children and seeking companion animals to support this work has been a priceless experience. As a family, we became increasingly reliant on the role of TSO for support in parenting neurodiverse young people. My knowledge of and engagement with the research site was sparked by a desperate search to find opportunities for my child that would provide supportive practical experiences to grow their confidence and encourage them to leave their bedroom. The lack of understanding of their specific needs in the realms of employment had led them into isolation, initiating episodes of depression and anxiety. Their passion for animals and desire to care provided an access point for growth. Although their active engagement with the field organisation, Noah's A.R.T., had ceased prior to the start of this research, the experiences they had there sparked a new story of self that has led them into employment. My personal experience of this journey ignited a sense of wonder and a desire to learn more about the nature of such work. The PhD Scholarship provided an opportunity to pursue this sense of wonder further.

As I have explained, the connection to the research site was fostered through a familial relationship; however, my connections to the notion of care, and more specifically interspecies care, date back much further. In the context of affective research, it is important to explore reflexively the personal experiences which consciously and subconsciously inform our sense of being and can be residually sparked in relational encounters (Lury, 2021). As Held (2006) explains every human being has experiences of being cared for. In researching care, it felt important to explore these experiences. Of course, however, there is a pragmatic and an ethical need to self-edit; as a researcher, I question how far to go and what to reveal (Horton, 2021). Starting with my interspecies care relations, I step back to early childhood. This image (Fig.6) was taken in 1980. It is a picture of me in a playpen, with our family dog at that time, Lady. The picture is taken in the family-owned off-licence and greengrocers. I include this image as an attempt to encapsulate the significance of "becoming-with" dogs throughout my life course to date. I have a passionate belief in their capacity to support, challenge and enable (Fox and Gee, 2019; Cudworth; 2023). Prior to my experiences at Noah's A.R.T. I have had limited experience with other animals. I was thus conscious of my bias and prejudice towards the canine companion species. Later in this chapter, I will go on to offer a brief account of how I worked through some of my own biases and how I allowed the agentic capacity of other animals to affect changes in my story of self.

*Fig.6. Childhood Photograph: Lady, a collie dog in a playpen*

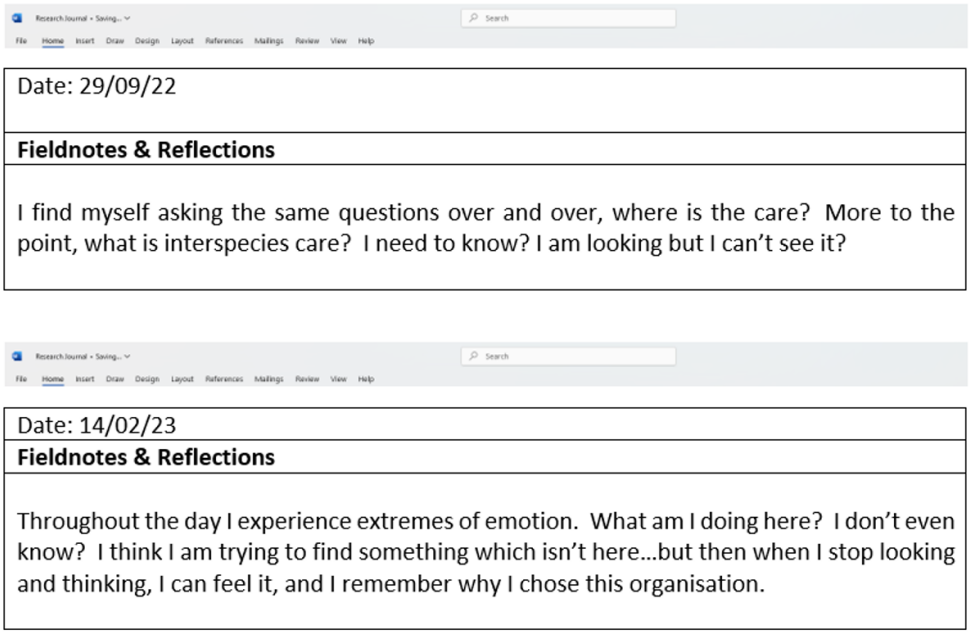
Thinking more broadly about care experiences in childhood, I turn to theory to elucidate my reflexive understandings of my own care experiences. Knowledge of care is rooted in our early experiences (Noddings, 2013). From an early age, I recognised the importance of being caring and presenting myself to others as caring, but as Held (2006:49) suggests it is possible for women to present as caring without the "appropriate motive of consciously and reflectively recognising the value of care". Miller (1986:83) who suggests that "women's sense of self becomes very much organised around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships". In organisational contexts, the practices of caring for others can become central to one's' identity, Gilligan (2003) suggests that in organisations women can get stuck in relational patterns of behaviour that restrict them in terms of hierarchical progression. From childhood into adulthood, care has defined my personal and professional identity, whereby "the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self." (Miller, 1986:83). Whilst employed as a Principal Lecturer in HE, caring for students and staff was integral to my identity. Equally, care work in the home, often idealised as private or familial duty, encompassed children, dogs, and an ageing parent and placed significant emotional and temporal demands on me, which together restricted my time to complete my initial doctoral project. More recently, I have, like many women in the academy, sought therapy and begun to recognise that "In order to be able to care for another, one must first be able to care responsibly for oneself" (Gilligan, 2003:76). So perhaps whilst the suggestion above that I left academia to pursue new opportunities, was true, I also recognise that I had reached a point of burnout (Jayman *et al.,* 2022).

Leaving academia was partly a decision based on the reduced time and resources available to care in the HE context, yet I recognised the importance of relationality within my sense of self. The PhD scholarship presented an opportunity to contribute differently. Having always been constrained by full-time employment and family responsibilities, I saw this period as a chance to give back and engage with a cause I was passionate about. I wanted to step outside

grand institutions and explore the TSO, immersing myself in an organisation that prioritised relationality. I sought to connect with the people, the animals, and the operational dynamics of the organisation, whilst also gaining new insights into myself (Somekh *et al*., 2011). My experiences in HE had provided a powerful insight into the immense mental health challenges people face, particularly post-COVID (DHSC, 2023). Whilst I could have pursued this research in a context more familiar to me, such as schools, I felt that returning to the familiar could also lessen the sense of "culture shock" which is seen to be beneficial in the process of ethnographic research (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007:81). I wanted to experience a context that would feel strange, whilst becoming increasingly familiar. My aim was to learn more and offer my *caring skills* in exchange for a research project that would deepen understanding of the costs and benefits of caring in an interspecies organisation.

I now turn to the experience of culture shock in the practice of ethnography and illustrate how this evokes self-reflection and reflexivity.

*Fig.7. Fieldnotes: Where is Care?*



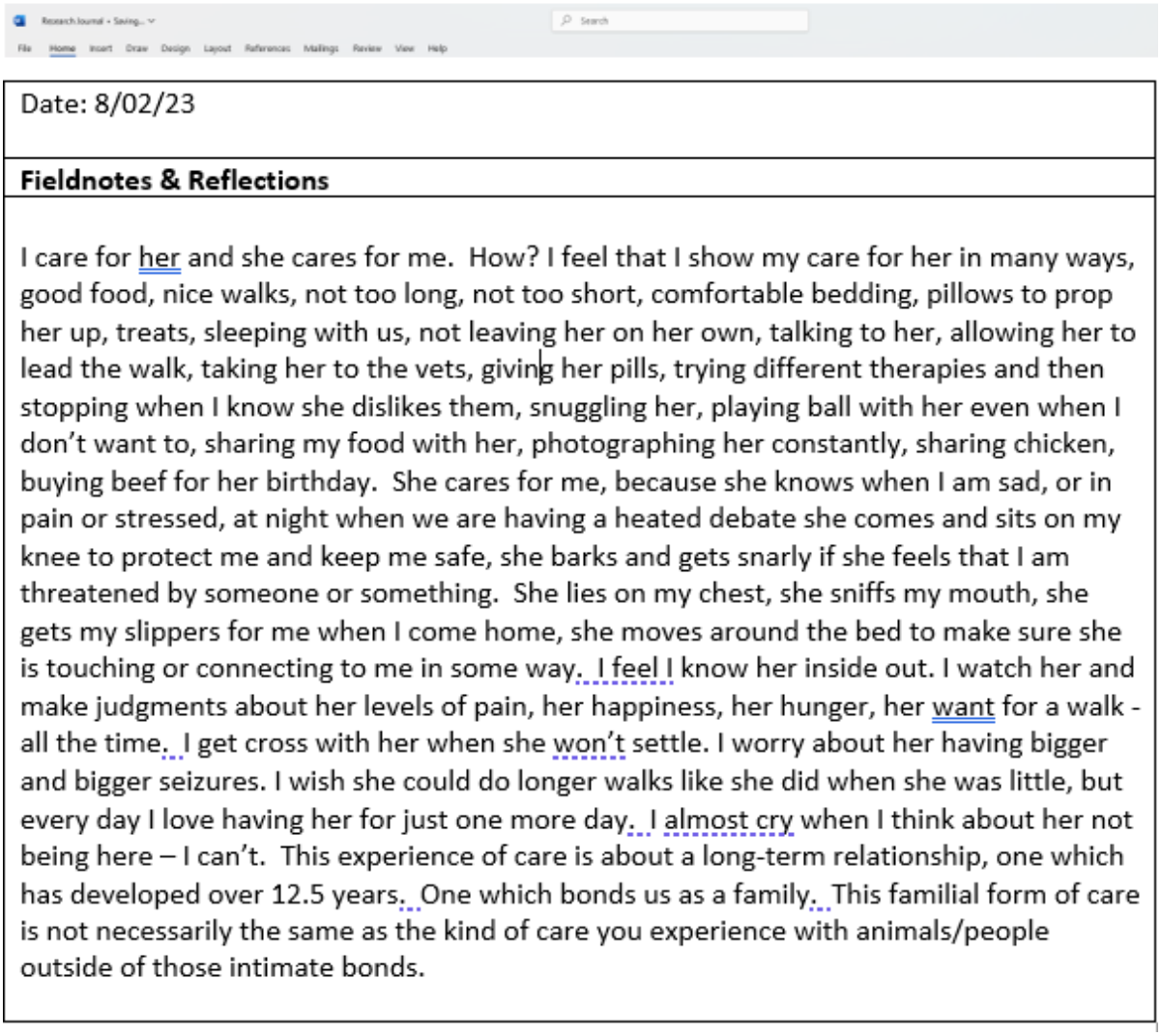
| Date: 29/09/22 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| I find myself asking the same questions over and over, where is the care? More to the point, what is interspecies care? I need to know? I am looking but I can't see it? |

| Date: 14/02/23 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| Throughout the day I experience extremes of emotion. What am I doing here? I don't even know? I think I am trying to find something which isn't here…but then when I stop looking and thinking, I can feel it, and I remember why I chose this organisation. |

There is an imperative for a reflective and reflexive process of undertaking interspecies ethnographic field work (Hamilton and Taylor, 2012). In these extracts from my journal, I outline how my initial encounters in the field were burdened by residual understandings of objectivity and self-doubt together with preconceived ideas of what interspecies care is. They contain symbolic realisations of the ways in which I have unintentionally become part of a world where I have been baptised into thinking that knowledge is derived from what we see and a fear of not seeing. To study interspecies care focuses attention on the sensorial experiences of the world experienced by animals and humans. Interspecies ethnographic research requires the researcher to let go, allowing themselves to be carried by the multisensorial encounters, learning to be affected (Despret, 2004), being open to something new and being carried affectively into feeling, being and thinking differently. To produce authentic research, I needed to allow myself to become passionately immersed in the day-to-day practices of animal-human interactions, in order to genuinely connect with the practices of caring. This meant allowing myself to be vulnerable and evoked further reflection on my own experiences of caring; whilst I had been brought up to present as caring, I was unable, upon first encounters, to consciously see or feel the genuine and messy practices of caring (Held, 2006).

Moving away from the personal introspection, this process sparked further reflexive consideration of how my own experiences of human-animal relationships were also urging me to look for what I know. Here is an extract from my journal where I am working through what I think care is, based on my relationship with my dog Maggie.

*Fig.8. Fieldnotes: Maggie's Care*



Date: 8/02/23

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

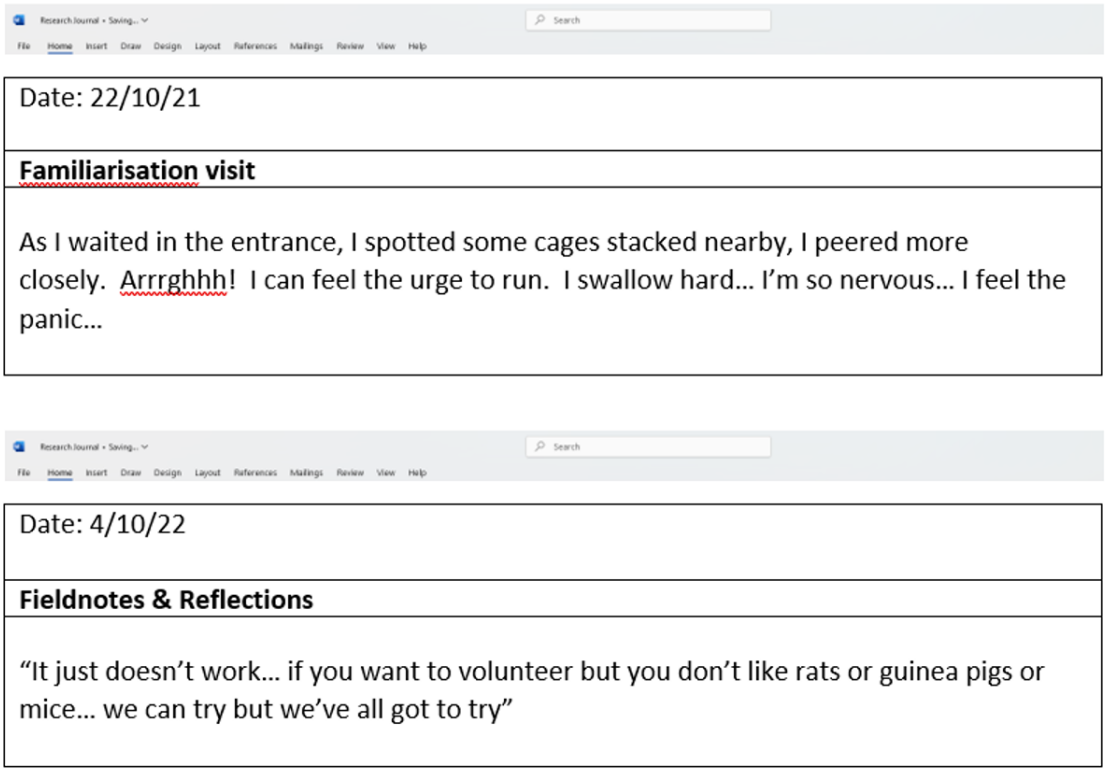
I care for her and she cares for me. How? I feel that I show my care for her in many ways, good food, nice walks, not too long, not too short, comfortable bedding, pillows to prop her up, treats, sleeping with us, not leaving her on her own, talking to her, allowing her to lead the walk, taking her to the vets, giving her pills, trying different therapies and then stopping when I know she dislikes them, snuggling her, playing ball with her even when I don't want to, sharing my food with her, photographing her constantly, sharing chicken, buying beef for her birthday. She cares for me, because she knows when I am sad, or in pain or stressed, at night when we are having a heated debate she comes and sits on my knee to protect me and keep me safe, she barks and gets snarly if she feels that I am threatened by someone or something. She lies on my chest, she sniffs my mouth, she gets my slippers for me when I come home, she moves around the bed to make sure she is touching or connecting to me in some way. I feel I know her inside out. I watch her and make judgments about her levels of pain, her happiness, her hunger, her want for a walk - all the time. I get cross with her when she won't settle. I worry about her having bigger and bigger seizures. I wish she could do longer walks like she did when she was little, but every day I love having her for just one more day. I almost cry when I think about her not being here – I can't. This experience of care is about a long-term relationship, one which has developed over 12.5 years. One which bonds us as a family. This familial form of care is not necessarily the same as the kind of care you experience with animals/people outside of those intimate bonds.

Here, I come to accept that my understanding of interspecies care in my relationship with my pet dog may not align with what I observe (or feel) in this organisational context. Importantly, this does not imply that what I am witnessing is of lesser value or dysfunctional (Probyn-Rapsey, 2019). Rather, the spaces, objects, people, and animals involved differ, which co-constructs distinct experiences of interspecies care (Gorman, 2017). Contributing to care practices renders both humans and animals capable, which can profoundly impact how care is practiced and, over the long term, the experiences of both. Whilst my initial reflections prompted the need for vulnerability, my relationship with my dog also highlighted the

capability of both humans and animals in a caring relationship. This means that making myself vulnerable can create opportunities for me to feel capable. I will explore this theme further in the next example, where I examine my relationships with the rats.

Moving on, as mentioned, above, I was keen to embrace and respond proactively to my bias towards canine companions. I was aware of my connection with dogs and also how much dogs feature in therapy work. But I also wanted to learn from my experiences, thus I needed to allow myself to be open to the process of "becoming-with" other species. I was conscious of my prejudice towards rats and felt it was important to allow myself to be affected by them. Here, I briefly trace some moments which illustrate how openness to being affected by animals can enable a rewriting of the self.

*Fig.9. Fieldnotes: Mice and Rats – part 1*



Date: 22/10/21

**Familiarisation visit**

As I waited in the entrance, I spotted some cages stacked nearby, I peered more closely. Arrrghhh! I can feel the urge to run. I swallow hard… I'm so nervous… I feel the panic…

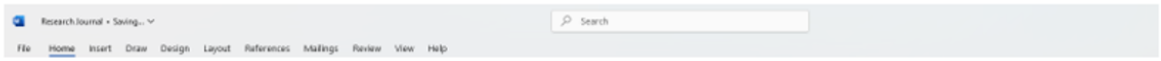
Date: 4/10/22

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

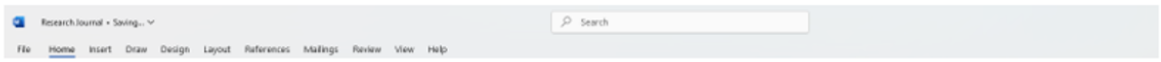
"It just doesn't work… if you want to volunteer but you don't like rats or guinea pigs or mice… we can try but we've all got to try"

As mentioned above, reciprocity was critical in terms of the values of the research. I wanted to be able to provide my labour in exchange for the learning opportunity. When I overheard this sentiment, I felt that I had a responsibility to *try* to get to know the rats differently. In another session, a few weeks later, when the organisation were short staffed, Anya asks me to take charge of the mice.

*Fig.10. Fieldnotes: Mice and Rats – part 2*



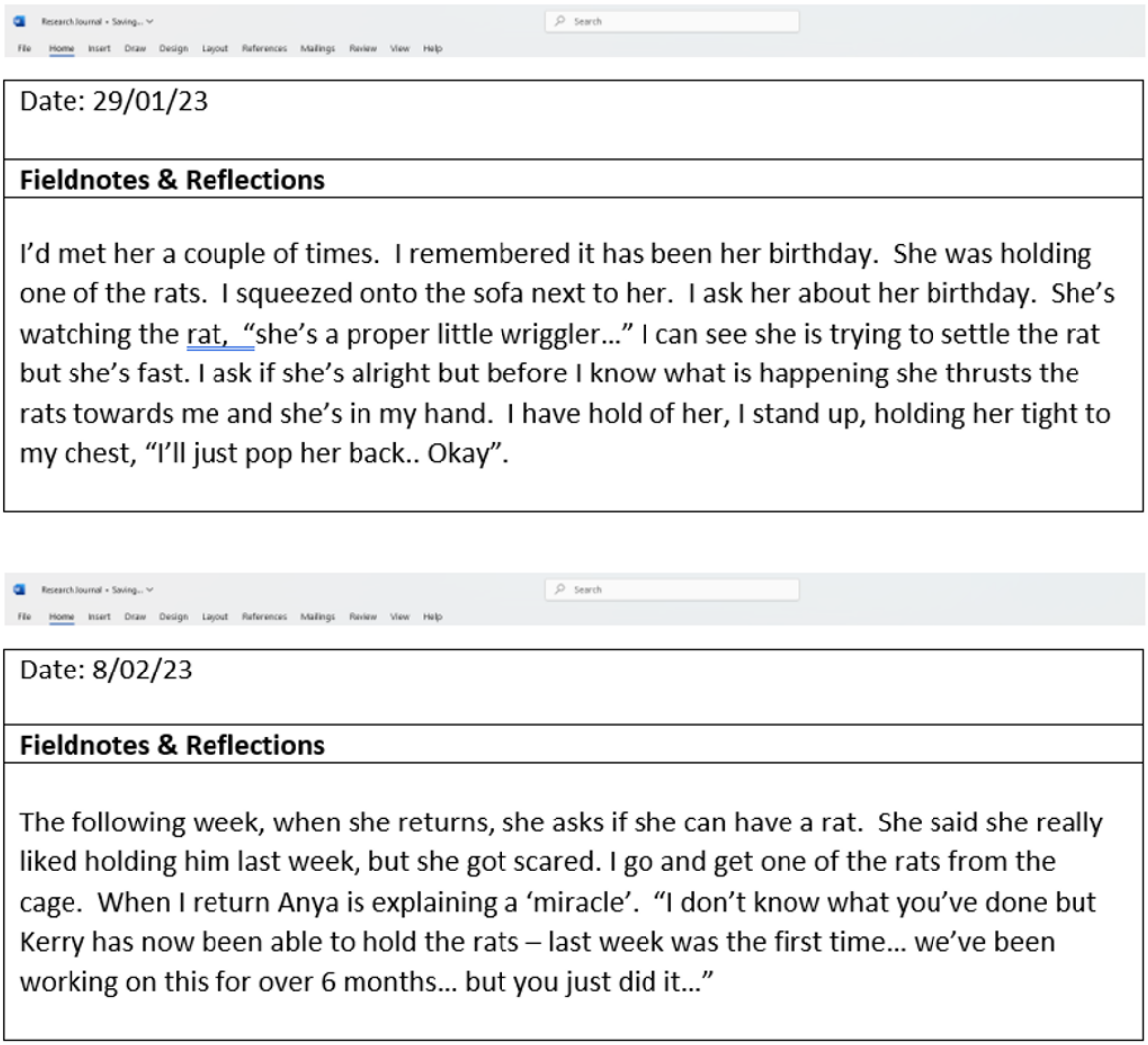
| Date: 15/11/22 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "Are you going to be okay with the mice…?" Anya asked. "Yeah, I can do the mice. I am growing quite fond of them now" |



| Date: 13/12/22 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| I've been working closely with Norah, so I sit next to her, she's got one of the rats, I explain… "I'm really nervous… I'm going to try and sit here calmly…" I checked if that was okay and asked "do you like the rats?" "I love them, watch how she nibbles on the treats… she wants you to look at her, look she's looking at you" I watch, Norah let the rat meander around her shoulders, into her hair, onto the sofa. I concede, if only to myself, that she is actually a little bit sweet. But I can see she's heading over the sofa, and I'm panicking, I should really help to get her, that's my job. Anya is beside me not sure how? "It's okay Kerry, I'll get her. You did really well then." |

Affective embodied experiences are visceral and despite my desire to get over my fear, the embodied experience stopped me from taking control of the escaping rat. But interestingly, Anya's recognition that this process was challenging for me sparked a sense of capability. I felt that my struggles were recognised and my attempts to move beyond them were acknowledged. Moving forwards, I record two instances in close succession where my embodied experiences of rats shifted.

*Fig.11. Fieldnotes: Mice and Rats – part 3*



Date: 29/01/23

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

I'd met her a couple of times. I remembered it has been her birthday. She was holding one of the rats. I squeezed onto the sofa next to her. I ask her about her birthday. She's watching the rat, "she's a proper little wriggler…" I can see she is trying to settle the rat but she's fast. I ask if she's alright but before I know what is happening she thrusts the rats towards me and she's in my hand. I have hold of her, I stand up, holding her tight to my chest, "I'll just pop her back.. Okay".

Date: 8/02/23

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

The following week, when she returns, she asks if she can have a rat. She said she really liked holding him last week, but she got scared. I go and get one of the rats from the cage. When I return Anya is explaining a 'miracle'. "I don't know what you've done but Kerry has now been able to hold the rats – last week was the first time… we've been working on this for over 6 months… but you just did it…"

Fig. 9-11 provide a narrative that exemplifies the centrality of care in organisational practices. They also illustrate how affective engagement fosters changes that support the animals directly involved in the research. Whilst I am not suggesting that I have overcome my fear of rats, these experiences have opened my mind to reconceptualising preconceived biases and prejudices (Valtonen, 2023). Moreover, these extracts highlight the importance of reflective and reflexive work in ethnographic inquiry (Leigh and Brown, 2021). In research terms, familiarity with the field site and the participants over prolonged engagement can alter the researcher's perspective, which is often considered to have a detrimental impact on the objectivity of the research (Hegelund, 2005). However, objectivity also provides a justification for science fiction stories to perpetuate (Haraway, 2016:10). From a relational ontological position, research that is genuinely committed to "becoming-with" cannot occur without the researcher experiencing significant changes during their engagement in the field and beyond. Failing to shift would raise questions about the extent to which I, as a researcher, was genuinely engaging with the voices of others in the research

In this section, I considered how my personal and professional histories have impacted my desire for and approach to this research, illustrating the significance of researcher reflexivity in interspecies ethnographic studies. I account for my gender, my position as an adoptive mother, my career path, my connections with animals, and how my early experiences have shaped my perspectives on care. I provide examples of how I worked reflexively throughout the project and how I recognised the influence of these experiences on the research direction. I will now turn to the methods I employed as part of my interspecies ethnography, reflecting on the affordances and challenges specifically within interspecies research contexts.

## Data Collection – Care-full Methods: Theory and Practice

Having explored the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research and unravelled their implications, I now outline the methods of data collection that constituted

the IE and consider how they shape the story being told (Pink, 2015). “Inquiry practices are not ready-made or habits of shorthand” (Kuby and Murris, 2021:45); they are also practices of “becoming-with” in a field site. This is particularly important in the context of interspecies research (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023). As Taylor and Hamilton (2017) suggest, methods of research should be adapted and developed in response to the specifics of the interspecies context, working to improve how the voices and experiences of those positioned on the margins are authentically accessed and presented through reflective and attentive research practices.

In summary, my approach to IE incorporates participant observation, fieldnotes, photographs, and interviews. All data was stored in my research journal, which is a digital composition based on fieldnotes that incorporate observations and reflections. In this text file, there are links to other data sources, including photographs, interview transcripts, and audio recordings. All data is securely stored on the university platform. This approach to data storage is an intentional response to Knudsen and Stage's (2015) challenge to consider how affective data continues to resonate, thus sparking new connections, eliciting different thoughts, and evoking further reflections. The research journal became significant in the process of storying, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

## Care-full Observation

Ethnographic studies centre around immersion in the lived experiences and cultural dynamics of a given context or situation that is the focus of the project (Leigh and Brown, 2021). I became ‘passionately immersed’ in the interspecies organisational context (Tsing, 2010). As with traditional ethnographic approaches, I conducted participant observations, which were recorded as fieldnotes. I focused on the sensorial and affective encounters, using all my senses to attend to what was happening. As van Dooren *et al.,* (2016) explains, interspecies research is typically provoked by non-human ways of life, which encourages attention to the sensorial and affective elements of encounters with other species, thereby helping to adjust and adapt methods for interspecies research. Care denies capture and is continuously in

motion (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). What is seen, felt, or experienced as a moment of care occurs through the interaction of an infinite array of forces, objects, subjects, materials, spaces, and discourses. This coming together is momentary, but research holds an ethical responsibility to ponder these encounters and speculate on how "things could be" and how that might be transformational (Coulter, 2023:19).

Starting with participant observations and taking on board Castelló's (2024) position that in ethnographic research, care is method, I carried out care-full observations in the research organisation. Whilst I recognise the trouble encompassed in the notion of observation (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), I preface the method with 'care-full' to emphasise the centrality of relationality and the fullness of embodied immersion in the practice of research. Care-full observations are carried out respectfully, building on the centrality of relational and mutually beneficial research which is open and willing to embrace the messiness of real-lived experiences and take active responsibility for ongoing reflexivity.

I will now discuss how the weekly experiences were translated into 'care-full' fieldnotes.

## Care-full Fieldnotes

Adopting a participatory role in the field site can make recording fieldnotes more challenging. Whilst immersion in affective experiences is pivotal to the ethnographic process, accurately recording these experiences is critical to the rigour and ethics of the research. Emerson *et al*., (2011) suggest that there are four stages of recording fieldnotes: jottings, description, analysis, and reflection. Whilst I recognise the significance of all stages, I believe that "writing itself is an affect-laden process…" (Gibbs, 2015:223). Therefore, I consciously incorporate description, analysis, and reflection to ensure that moments of wonder or interest are captured and considered in the moment. I use the process of field site jottings and reflective writing to record detailed descriptions, analyses, and reflections. Using a mobile phone on-site was commonplace for staff and clients, so I used my encrypted mobile phone to record

written or verbal notes of conversations, observations, or reflections. These notes informed the more detailed reflective writing I would complete after a day in the field. The reflective writing included detailed written stories of the day, starting with what might be considered peripheral notes about my feelings and thoughts, and then moving into what happened and how I made sense of these events. The write-up incorporated the jottings and transcriptions of the voice notes.

## Care-full Photographs

Visual methods have become increasingly popular in ethnographic inquiry. Ironically, images of animals have been documented over many centuries using various media, but they were often considered peripheral to the project (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017). Today, mobile devices provide an instant, easily accessible means to record moment-by-moment encounters (Pink, 2021). Photographs serve as a valuable tool in ethnographic research, especially within studies of animal organisations (e.g., García-Rosell, 2023; Charles and Wolkowitz, 2019). They capture the "sensory and affective dimensions" of an encounter (Pink, 2011:272) and can function as a visual aide-memoire, helping to engage critically with recorded events and conversations (García-Rosell, 2023). This recontextualisation process fosters critical reflexivity, which is essential in interspecies research (Äijälä, 2021). I will now explain this process further.

During fieldwork, an affective experience would often lead me to take a photograph, not necessarily knowing why. This practice assisted in writing up fieldnotes later that day, as the images would "invoke memories of embodied experiences" (Pink, 2021:1), enabling a more detailed elaboration of specific moments and their context. Many interspecies encounters do not involve language and could easily go unnoticed. Taking photographs provided an opportunity to record the centrality of animals, helping to address anthropocentric biases inherent in written methods (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023). The ability to capture a series of images allows for the documentation of micro-moments of relational practices, fostering

greater attentiveness to the specifics of each encounter in my written fieldnotes. Whilst digital video would have offered a more dynamic representation of these encounters, my ethical commitment to ensure the anonymity of clients within the setting made this more challenging. I sought ethical consent for photographs that did not include human faces given the issues of marginalisation that can affect people experiencing mental health difficulties (Pink, 2021). Although this restriction sometimes limited the representation of genuine connections between human and animal—often visible through bodily and facial expressions—focusing on the animals in the photographs led to a deeper interrogation of how they contributed to those affective moments. Like the process of recording ethnographic fieldnotes, photographs began to build stories, but stories that may not have been seen without visual images. This integration of visual methods into ethnographic inquiry enhances the richness and depth of understanding interspecies interactions.

The focus of the photographs was often on interactive moments. Taking photos respectfully and sensitively was important. In the organisation, there is a standard practice for obtaining formal consent for photographs intended for use on social media. Day-to-day experiences of both people and animals are often documented through photographs. When photographs are taken in the setting, it is typical to explain the focus of the photo and emphasise that clients will not be identifiable in the image. If clients are included in the photo, it is usually shown to them for approval to ensure they are comfortable with it. During my fieldwork, I took over 650 photographs (see Appendix 3, for Overview and Timeline of Data Collection Activities). These images were linked to my journal, placed alongside the fieldnotes, and catalogued according to date. The power of the images collected were significant to the development of the data stories and as such it felt important to include these in the final thesis. I will explain this further in the section on data analysis. I will now consider the role of care-full interviews.

## Care-full Interviews

Interviews are often part of ethnographic inquiry (Frankham and McRae, 2011) and are commonplace in organisational ethnography (Neyland, 2008). Originally, I did not want to conduct interviews, as I was keen for understandings of the more-than-human world to arise through new languages, particularly given the premise that animals cannot speak. I was preoccupied by the anthropocentrism of interviews; however, Taylor and Hamilton (2017) suggest that accepting anthropocentrism as a starting point means that interviews can still provide valuable insights into human-animal cultures. As part of the project aims, I sought to generate understandings of how shared marginalisation can be grounds for mutual flourishing. Therefore, I elected to incorporate human voices through interviews to gain stories of interspecies care experiences from marginalised individuals who engage with Noah's A.R.T. As I established in Chapter 2, in this particular research context, marginalisation is experienced as a result of mental health challenges, recognising that this entangles further complex intersectional oppressions (Lynch, 2022). In qualitative research, interviews provide a means for the voices of marginalised communities to be heard (Gilligan, 1982). However, interviewing in certain contexts can be re-traumatising (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). I will now explain how I ensured that the practice of interviewing was care-full, starting from the recruitment of participants and moving into the interview and data analysis.

All participants self-identified as interviewees. Posters explaining my PhD research were placed in four communal areas at the setting (Appendix 4). Each week, I reintroduced the project and what I was doing. I allowed people to self-identify if they wished to be interviewed (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). Whilst putting the onus on clients to come forward could be seen as an obstacle to participation, I argue that the ethos of the setting is that humans and animals are competent, capable, and agentic. As outlined in the literature chapters, choice is pivotal to the values and practices of the organisation, and it was important to reflect these values in my work as a care-full researcher. Allowing self-identification also removed the possibility that I would select and invite individuals whom I felt would offer interesting and

thoughtful contributions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), thus ensuring that I remained strictly within the parameters of my ethical approval documentation.

Following a request from a client to be interviewed, I provided the project information sheet (Appendices 5 and 6), a consent form (Appendices 7 and 8), and a list of possible interview questions (Appendices 9 and 10). I briefly talked through each section of the forms, summarising what would happen if they wished to proceed with an interview. I advised each participant to take the forms home to read through them, perhaps discuss them with others, and bring them back to the session the following week, where we would have time to address any questions they had. I emphasised that they were not committed at this stage and that it was entirely their choice whether or not to participate. Asking participants to take the forms home could be seen as risky, as they may not bring them back, but this was intentional. It allowed them time to read and consider the forms and to choose not to participate if they wished. At the start of the following week's session, I would revisit the interviews and reintroduce the project, prompting the return of the forms or a request for new ones. This was also an opportunity to remain quiet.

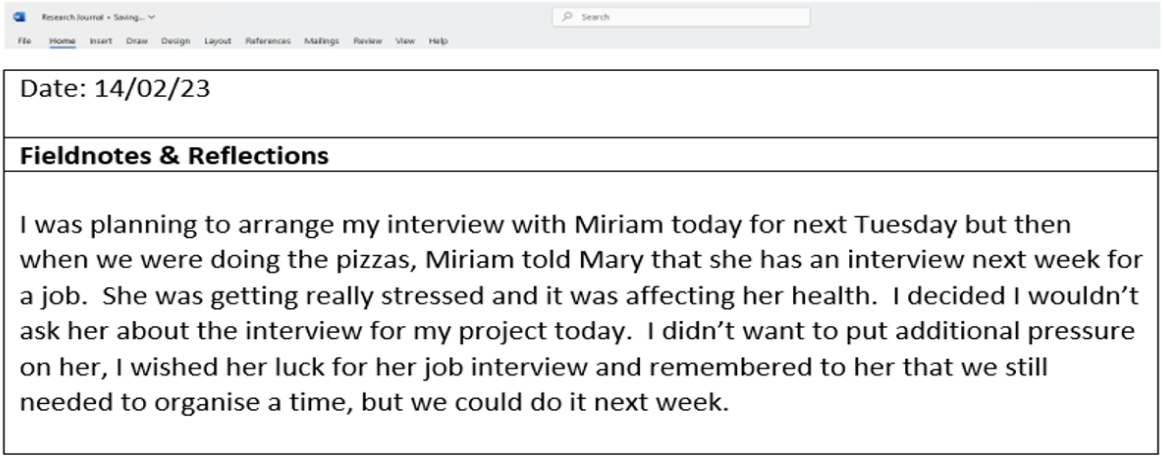
In the thesis to date, I have discussed how categorisation can lead to marginalisation. Within university ethical guidelines, participants who experience mental health difficulties may be deemed vulnerable. During the research phase, I would meet with Sarah, the organisational lead, at the start of each project to discuss participants who were scheduled to engage in the weekly sessions. In this meeting, I would receive information about clients' particular needs and difficulties based on their diagnoses and history. In accordance with the Mental Capacity Act (2005), having a disability or illness does not necessarily mean that an individual lacks the capacity to give consent for themselves. However, the information provided in the meeting helped me select the most appropriate version of the participant information sheets. I had prepared both written and visual versions. On all occasions, I chose to provide the graphic information sheets and consent forms for clients, as they were more accessible and felt more

appropriate—they were easier to explain. All participants were capable of consenting to the research, and the assent process was not required.

In this research, the interviews focused on the relationships people have with animals. Providing people the opportunity to talk about their caring encounters with pets and animals in their lives was an important part of recognising their agency. Equally, having the chance to tell their story offers validation and a sense of contribution; if researchers listen carefully, the practice of sharing can provide a form of recognition (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). However, what is discussed in the interviews reflects how people wish to present themselves, so ongoing reflection on how the methods contribute to the partiality of the research is significant (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023).

Carrying out research carefully requires reflection in action and reflection on action (Schön, 1991). One participant had provided her signed consent form at the end of the session, and I checked if she had any questions. She was feeling unwell, so I suggested that we arrange a time to do the interview the following week. She agreed. The following week, I wrote this in my research journal:

*Fig.12. Fieldnotes: Reflection in Action*



| Date: 14/02/23 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| I was planning to arrange my interview with Miriam today for next Tuesday but then when we were doing the pizzas, Miriam told Mary that she has an interview next week for a job. She was getting really stressed and it was affecting her health. I decided I wouldn't ask her about the interview for my project today. I didn't want to put additional pressure on her, I wished her luck for her job interview and remembered to her that we still needed to organise a time, but we could do it next week. |

Reflecting in the moment, means adjusting plans and reorganising research schedules. It's a practice of taking responsibility and being responsible to the needs of others (Bozalek, 2021). Operating from the principles of competence and capability I could have gone ahead and asked Miriam to do the interview next week, but her interactions with Mary had revealed a sense of potential vulnerability. For me, to not attend to this would have felt care-less.

Acting with care also occurs during the interview itself. As Haraway (1988) explains, all stories are always connected to a partial sense of self. The context influences which identities are provoked to speak. In one interview, the interviewee began talking extensively about life experiences that had contributed to her mental health difficulties. People with mental health difficulties have experiences of not being listened to or believed (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). Being heard is part of the practice of caring for the participant. Equally what I do with the data after the interview is important in practising caring research. Specific details that would make an individual identifiable were omitted from the transcript and annotated to this effect.

When planning the project, I intended to carry out a maximum of 15 semi-structured interviews: 5 with employees of the organisation, 5 with volunteers, and 5 with clients. As a baseline, I started from the number of employees. I did this because, during the familiarisation phase, all members of the core staff team had expressed a desire to be involved in the project through interviews. However, I did not want the organisational perspective to dominate the research, hence incorporating 5 interviews with clients and 5 with volunteers. In the research phase I was predominantly involved in the delivery and support of the animal welfare courses, which meant that I was in contact with fewer volunteers, and equally I also began to realise how the role of client often blurred with the role of volunteer. For example, in Chapter 9 you will hear Josie's story. Josie was a client on the animal welfare courses, and she volunteered on other days of the week. Becoming a volunteer was a central part of the service offer. Many people started at the project as clients

and moved into volunteering. Thus, I only delineate interviews as staff or client, as a client, they may or may not have experienced volunteering (see Appendix 3 for details).

In total, I carried out 13 interviews, 10 with clients, 6 of whom had also been volunteers and 3 with staff. The interviews ranged in length, from 74 minutes to 14 minutes (see Appendix 3). Of the 5 staff I had intended to interview, two were on maternity leave for a significant portion of the research phase. All participants self-selected to be interviewed. The interviews were carried out in a private space at the project, as this was a space in which participants were comfortable. Other members of the organisational team were always on-site during the interviews and were aware that they were taking place. Animals were present during all of the interviews. I recorded the interviews onto an encrypted and password-protected mobile device. After the interview, I transcribed the interview onto my computer. I saved the interview recording on my computer specifically for the background noises. I annotated the transcription with notes about the multisensorial happenings during the interview, for example the sound of the rat wheel or the smell of urine. I also recorded my thoughts and reflections about the interview in my journal. Any information that was identifiable to the individual within the audio recording was removed and a note to this effect was included in the transcript.

The majority of participants in this study were female. Tim, a member of the organisational management team, was interviewed and appears throughout, and whilst I did encounter male participants during the study, I chose to focus almost exclusively on female participants for three reasons. Firstly, the organisation had a predominantly female workforce and clientele, reflecting broader trends in the third sector. Second, adopting an ethics of care perspective, which draws heavily from feminist scholarship, led me to examine shared marginalisation. Charles and Wolkowitz (2019) have highlighted how AAI can reinforce the subordination of both animals and humans. I was interested in exploring whether this shared marginalisation within relational, care-based AAI organisations could serve as a tool for empowerment. Whilst

participants experienced mental health difficulties, gender became a significant factor due to the historical associations between women, animals, and mental health, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Third, practical considerations played a role. As outlined earlier in this chapter, participants could self-identify for interviews, and whilst the focus on care may have skewed the study toward women, this also reflects the demographic engagement typical of AAI and TSO.

I will now explain how this data source will be used in the process of analysis.

## Data analysis

The process of data analysis is often not made transparent in research articles and textbooks. Pink (2021) highlights the need for researchers to show the route to analysis more explicitly in publications. Whilst there are many textbooks explaining methods and processes the actual practice of data analysis can remain fairly illusive (Bathmaker, 2010). In this section, together with supporting documents in the appendices, I explain the theoretical justification and practical processes which I went through to interpret and analyse the various forms of data that built an interspecies ethnography.

My approach to data analysis reflects established rigour of ethnographic research (Pink, 2021). Unlike traditional views of research where an exit from the field signifies the process of data analysis, I engaged in an ongoing process of reflexive engagement with the data which is critical to care-based research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). As I have outlined above, the research produced data in the form of text and image, thus the process of analysis involved continuous to-ing and fro-ing between images and fieldnotes, making connections and formulating questions, sparking further reflections. As Pink (2021) notes, ethnographers must create meaningful narratives from their data. The theoretical underpinnings of the research helped guide this process. As Gilligan highlights, care-based research starts with

“questions about voice: who is speaking, and to whom? In what body? Telling what stories about relationships? In what societal and cultural frameworks? (2011:5). As my research aims to explore how care is co-constituted in an interspecies organisation and to consider how interspecies care might foster mutual flourishing, it was critical to consider the identity and perspective of those involved. Coulter (2023) extends this by emphasising the responsibility of interspecies researchers to use their findings to envision progressive changes that promote interspecies flourishing.

Taking on board theoretical and practical constraints of data analysis, I use the process of storying to encapsulate the ongoing reflexive encounters in the field. MacLure (2024) suggests that whilst you may think you choose a book from the library, the book itself chooses you. This has been the story of the research thus far. From the very early stages of the research, storying seemed to appear and reappear in different places, from within the texts and in the field, employing story as method did not feel like a choice. In the research field setting I was struck by the power of interspecies relationality to ignite storytelling, sparking a sense of identity and belonging. Han (2024) suggests that in capitalist society the campfire has most definitely been put out. Yet, what I experienced within the organisation was the potential to relight the fire, if the conditions were right. Thus, I felt impelled to try to rekindle the power of interspecies care stories and how they create opportunities for mutual flourishing. There are thus two components of the process of analysis, how I work with the findings and how I go on to analyse them. Taylor and Hamilton suggest that

> The artefactual nature of language as a core of the ethnographers’ art is about paying attention to and theorising the words spoken in particular contexts, but also writing up a meaningful theory of what these words might mean, symbolise or stand for when formed in social interaction (2017:20)

This quote highlights the dual role of language in shaping both the data collected and the narratives constructed in ethnography. It emphasises the need to consider not just the words themselves, but also the social interactions and contexts that give them meaning, enriching

the analysis of interspecies care stories. As a researcher, I accept responsibility for ethical research at all stages of the research process (Leavy and Harris, 2019). In this section, I will first explain how an ethics of care frames the practices of data analysis, and then I will move on to the specifics of storying-as-method in the context of interspecies care research.

There are significant ethical and methodological challenges in analysing ethnographic data in human-animal studies. As discussed thus far, whilst the justification for practices in this research is rooted in care ethics, questions of ethical validity often revert to positivist tools of measurement and morality, creating an increased expectation for acute justification of practices (Morse *et al*., 2002). According to Biehl (2017), resistance to new ways of engaging with research processes stems from a desire to suppress certain knowledge. For instance, in human-animal studies, new knowledge that fosters consideration of the subjective capabilities of animals threatens capitalism and human-centrism (Haraway, 2008). Research that relies solely on mainstream methods of data collection and analysis tends to restrain and restrict new knowledge, as these methods are inherently human-centric (Jones and Taylor, 2023). Therefore, it is essential for research processes to shift and adapt to better include the voices and experiences of non-human beings (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017). Looking back to the origins of the animal rights movement, the intention was to use story and image to evoke empathy and thus spark change (Donovan and Adams, 2007). Within the realms of human-animal studies, methods of communicating human-animal connectedness aim to re-sensitise people to the oppressions that animals experience at the hands of humans, whilst also acknowledging their agentic capacities and human-animal intersubjectivity (Colombino and Bruckner, 2023). Whilst there are increasing attempts to use technology (Brown, 2023) and arts-based methods (Smith, 2019) to achieve this, a large proportion of the work still incorporates the verbal and written word (e.g., Tammi and Hohti, 2020; Connolly, 2023; Jones and Taylor, 2023). This reliance is unsurprising, given the dominance of text in Western academic traditions and the nature of ethnographic methods, which typically involve people writing about people (Hammersley, 2015). By employing story-as-method, I am able to adhere

closely to the ethical imperatives for respectful engagement with human and animal participants, whilst ensuring that the research contributes to addressing societal inequalities associated with marginalisation and oppression (Leavy and Harris, 2019), thereby advancing a more inclusive and empathetic approach to interspecies ethnographic research.

As I have discussed above, in interspecies ethnographic work, there is increased attention to redefining and recreating methods that ensure the centrality of the animal is conveyed, helping to address charges of anthropocentrism. Haraway (2016) provides a good starting point in that she considers all knowledge as stories. Like Tammi and Hohti (2020), Haraway sees the role of story as a means of encompassing the messiness of interspecies living and caring. Haraway (2016) uses the term speculative fictions as a means of conveying the plight of the subjugated in a responsible and ethical manner. As I have explored, ethnography as a methodology has been accepted as a means of getting to know the messiness of social life, but it is still anticipated there is a process of cleaning and tidying up the data through scientifically rigorous practices, such as coding, classification, and triangulation (Leavy and Harris, 2019). As MacLure (2013:664) suggests, “one of the main functions of method is to contain, manage, or forget the bodily entanglements of language so that it can be freed to represent”. Care is omnipresent and ambivalent, Walker (1998) and Hekman (1995) suggest that the way we acquire knowledge about care and justice differs. Care relies on narrative, context, connection, and communication; it is an affective, relational experience. The affective experiences of interspecies care are the focus of this thesis. Whilst words attempt to convey the conceptual complexity of care, care is a feeling evoked through connection (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Evoking an affective connection with the data was an important part of my responsibility as an ethical researcher (Knudsen and Stage, 2015). The power of story has contributed significantly to animals' status in society (Sands, 2021). Human-animal stories have been a pivotal form of indigenous knowledge-sharing practices for centuries (Haraway, 2008). Early animal rights work focused heavily on stories as a means of generating empathy to better improve the lives of animals. In fiction and film, stories of animals have

played an important role in raising awareness of their contributions and needs for protection (Jones, 2023). Wimpenny (2021) explains how Aesop's fables have endured time; their fabulist anthropomorphic assumptions became societal truths, impacting animals' cultural positions both positively and negatively. Despite criticisms that animal stories can objectify animals or rely on anthropomorphism, their capacity to evoke empathy remains vital for mutual flourishing (Wimpenny, 2021; Sands, 2021). In the contemporary digital world, storytelling draws on various textual resources, not merely the written word, yet it retains the power to influence and evoke empathy, emphasising the importance of narrative methods in interspecies ethnographic research (Lupton, 2023).

I chose to write stories as a form of data analysis based on my fieldnotes, interviews and photographs. Mol (2008:8) explains that when focussing on care it is often necessary to "make words for, and out of, practices" to enable the practice to travel. Reviewing fieldnotes, explanations of what happened, summaries and verbatim notes of conversations, revisiting photos evoked further affective connections, sparking new thoughts and questions. How I travel through the data, worked to create new stories which needed sewing together in intricate, careful ways in an attempt to affectively communicate the forces of the experience to others. The full extent of this process is detailed in Appendix 11. An example of what the process looks like is included in Fig. 13, below. In the first instance I turned to the many photographs I had taken during the research phase, as a means of moving away from the primacy of language and attending to the affective connections sparked in the images (Pink 2021). The images evoked an affective experience, sparking a sense of wonder (MacLure, 2013). When flicking through the photographs, I became familiar with a repetitious postural silhouette that somehow conveyed an affective interspecies connectedness through the conjoined shape of a human-animal interaction. Of course, the recognition of this shape is also informed by the knowledge of AAI practices gained through reading and experience in the organisation. Whilst being overwhelmed by the number of photos that shared a similar encounter, I selected three images and arranged them alongside extracts from my fieldnotes

from the day the image was taken. The words and image together sparked movement in thinking, contextualising each other and sparking further thoughts and questions (Pink, 2021).

*Fig.13. Storying: A snapshot of the process*

| | |
|---|---|
| Image | |
| Field Notes<br><br>7/2/23 | You could see the pain and discomfort in her face. Sarah went and got her a hot water bottle. When we were in the animal room, she had been really interested in the Skinny Guineas, she was looking at them – she asked if she might be able to hold one today, she said "I feel like I just need to squeeze him sooooo soooo tight". Anya said that if there was time we would get the animals out later on in the day. |
| Thoughts/ Questions | Fetching a hot water bottle was an act of caring, something I recalled from childhood. I considered how needing to touch an animal physically was important to people in the space.<br><br>It makes me think about how cold it always is in the building. |

As shown in Appendix 11, combining the three images, their related fieldnotes, and the questions and thoughts they raised, along with relevant readings, initiated the next phase of analysis. At this juncture, I started to write, starting from whatever came into my mind, I jot down, mostly in single word form, what is evoked through the assemblage of data. MacLure (2013:175) states “things gradually grow, or glow, into greater significance than others and become the preoccupations around which thought and writing cluster”. In a more recent article, MacLure (2024) drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, explains the practices of intensive reading in which she celebrates the “glow” suggesting that “it is a kind of thinking-feeling—both embodied and abstract, affective and cognitive; and it seems to be located both “inside” me and in some uncharted outside”. This aims to evoke something more, spark new connections and foster a different rhythm. Like, in poetry the use of words in this way (see pp. 363), creates a space in which the connections are not already determined in language, they have the potential to connect differently with things that are not already written but are already part of the story. Following this, with all the words whirling around my mind, I revisit my data jotting down brief summaries of instances which link back to elements of my thinking.

This initial set of words was embryonic to the formation of the thesis. Whilst, in the process of writing down the words, I thought I was formulating the first story and the first data analysis chapter what I came to realise was that this would become the starting point for the story of the thesis as a whole. This initial process of storying defined the broad areas of the chapters. These were sufficiently broad to not confine engagement in the field, still allowing things to spark new thoughts and set me in motion to consider new things. Yet they provided a frame to think with and to begin to write from. In preparing for each data chapter, I re-engaged with the different forms of data as Leigh and Brown suggest (2021) it is important to spend ample time with your data, reading and re-reading fieldnotes, transcripts, and other materials to fully understand the context and nuances. This sparked further processes of free writing, which sparked further questions and thoughts. Throughout the process I oscillate between the data, the field, my thoughts and reflections, the process is always in motion, what matters

is ensuring that stories affectively communicate the intricacies of experiences, making the mundane feel important and interesting whilst also respectfully regarding ethical responsibility for human anonymity and reflexively engaging in my role in the construction of the narratives (Knudsen and Stage, 2015).

A central aim of the project was to explore the implications for theory and practice. Whilst it is a PhD project that must meet specific cross-institutional requirements, I am also passionate about making the research accessible to readers outside academia (Thomson and Walker, 2010). Raising awareness of the power of interspecies relationality is crucial, highlighting both the mutually beneficial experiences and the costs involved. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests that if action is required, it is vital to create stories around matters of care, not just concern. Whilst concern can spark worry and sympathy, action is necessary at various levels to ensure the sustainability of TSO. The stories aim to provide an affective experience of the research organisation, touching readers and inspiring change in diverse forms. I wanted to convey "the lyrical, the elegiac, the rhapsodic, the humorous, the parodic, the satirical" through these narratives (Gibbs, 2015:223). Throughout the fieldwork, I regularly shared snippets of stories with clients and employees, fostering a dialogic and informal environment that invited different perspectives and allowed me to check my interpretations. This approach ensured the research influenced both the present and the future. I also met regularly with the organisational lead and other staff to share stories and discuss potential lines of thought. These sharing practices reflect a rigorous process of data analysis grounded in immersion, discussion, and reflexivity, aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of relational care-based research.

## Writing up

Before moving on to the practical process of analysis and the writing up phase, I just want to briefly address the concerns in relation to story as fact or fiction. Firstly, the entire premise of

human-animal studies seeks to de-establish binary thinking, as Haraway (2016) suggests science fiction is just that, a story which we have become inclined to live by. Fiction has, as I have discussed above, played a significant role in understanding animals, some fictions are based on rigorous research, some fictions are based on autobiographical experiences, some are complete fantasy (Sands, 2021). Like Rolfe (2002), I consider that fiction has the potential to help uncover facts of life, but the stories I have written are based on rigorous processes of data collection and practices of reflection and reflexivity. Whilst on a number of occasions, the specific details of a person's medical history may be altered or adjusted to ensure anonymity, the stories are formulated through interactive encounters and experience. The stories are not necessarily reflective of a single encounter, they may congeal some of the repetitive day-to-day encounters, for example, the process of the health check, happened each week, so conversations and comments may be drawn from different fieldnotes into the story as a whole. Whilst this could be considered disingenuous, I argue that congealing these experiences emphasises the weight of their significance.

Writing up something that is meaningful is also important in qualitative research. As I have discussed previously, in the field of human-animal studies, interdisciplinary knowledges are significant in constructing meaning. There is an ethical obligation to be moved to learn and to go beyond common sense and culturally embedded knowledges of animals and extend these through a range of other sources of knowledge. Yet in doing so, recognising and reflecting upon self-histories in the practices of attraction and selection (MacLure, 2024). The centrality of language is a perennial issue in interspecies work. Thus, I elected to use a broad range of images within the thesis to interact with the stories, rather than objectifying the human and animals within the images, it is intended to create lively interactivity. The images assembled offer insight into the role of images in sparking the process of storying. The images are minimally captioned, the intention being that the image and text interact and raise questions. Haraway (2016) suggests that story sparks questions, and questioning is a means of opening the self to something new, sparking further processes of "becoming-with". Language and the

written word can seek to fix things into being however, I wanted to ensure that the stories produced are creative and dynamic, they have unrealised affective potentiality which helps to avoid fixing a knowable truth or conclusion (Ivinson and Renold, 2016). Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests that to effect change, and potentially create new ways of living well together, the storying of matters of concern, such as interspecies care, need to speak to and affect the "contact zones" (Haraway, 2008:4). Reading a text stimulates a contact zone. Without an inviting connection from within the text, the political plight for change is lessened.

In this section focused on data analysis, I have explored the reasons for choosing story-as-method and elaborated on the process of constructing the stories. Throughout the chapter, I have placed ethical considerations at the heart of the discussions, focussing upon my moral responsibility in research practice. In addition to this moral responsibility, I am also bound by University Ethical Requirements and as such feel it is important to address the role they play in the research. The next section will provide a brief discussion of ethical considerations not yet discussed.

## Ethical considerations

The university's letter of approval for this project, alongside the information sheet provided to the organisation and the organisation's consent form, can be found in the Appendix (Appendix 12, 13 and 14). These documents reflect the institutional ethical requirements that govern research procedures and practices. Whilst such formal processes aim to ensure accountability and research integrity, they are often rooted in a scientific tradition that can conflict with the relational, care-based ethics that underpin this study (Carniel *et al.,* 2022). Care ethics, which emphasise the responsibility for respectful, responsive encounters between researcher and participant, acknowledge oppression and carry a broader political imperative for emancipation (Brannelly and Barnes, 2023). This tension between institutional and care ethics highlights a significant challenge in the research process. Institutional ethics

often prioritise procedural compliance, accountability, and risk management—particularly within a neoliberal framework—whereas care ethics focus on relational engagement and the ongoing, moment-by-moment responsibility to the research participants (Taylor, 2016). Scholars have noted that this clash can be particularly problematic in social science research, where the complexity of human relationships may not always align with rigid institutional protocols (Sikes and Piper, 2010). Thus, it is essential to reflect on how these differing ethical frameworks intersect, and at times conflict, in shaping the research process.

Institutional processes provide a degree of accountability for the institution and are an important part of building and questioning the hows of research, particularly for a novice researcher (Brown, 2010). However, such processes often struggle with the social sciences; they are anthropocentric (Pedersen and Pini, 2017) and indoctrinate a version of ethics based on Cartesian morality—which reinforces separatism, prioritising human-centred, rational decision-making over relational and embodied ways of knowing. This adds a further layer of challenge for the interspecies researcher. As the animals within the research were not going to experience any changes to their daily activity during the research project, it was not necessary to gain additional ethical permissions from the University's Animal Welfare Ethics Review Board. For the university procedures, it was necessary to include in the Ethical Protocol Document an explanation of what actions I would take in the unlikely event that I suspected animals were being neglected or at risk in their daily lives. The institutional processes remain focused on protection from harm. Colombino and Bruckner (2023) suggest that increasing attention to human-animal relationality requires ethical guidelines for the social sciences, in not having such scriptures, the animal's irrelevance is perpetuated (Oliver, 2021). Whilst I acknowledge the argument presented, I am concerned that adding another layer of bureaucratic processes within university institutions could create additional obstacles to conducting research in these fields.

I have extensively explored the notion of animal voice in interspecies ethnography, particularly regarding informed consent. Animals cannot provide informed consent in conventional ways (Dashper, 2017; 2020), as they do not choose to apply for roles, such as in AAI work (Coulter, 2016). Whilst animals in various industries have limited choices, they can express agency in context (Huopalainen, 2023). For instance, police dogs do not apply for their roles but can resist training requirements (Charles *et al*., 2023). This dynamic is also evident in AAI animals within the field site. Carter and Charles (2013) noted that laboratory rats often hide to resist removal from their cages, illustrating that animal agency depends on human perceptions and the contextual factors that are politically and economically determined (Kandel *et al.,* 2023). Research focusing on agency and resistance in interspecies contexts allows for a deeper understanding of how structural factors influence animal agency, emphasising affective and embodied relational experiences. In care-based ethical research, a signed consent form is insufficient to affirm ethical consent, especially with vulnerable subjects. For example, Charles and Wolkowitz (2019) describe how volunteers observe their dogs' responses to gauge their willingness to work as therapy animals. This attentiveness continues during therapy sessions, where participants assess the dogs' body language as indicators of their desire to participate. Although we cannot directly confirm animals' interpretations, discussing assessments with others enhances ethical practices in interspecies research, emphasising the importance of recognising animals' agency and willingness to engage.

## Summary

In this chapter, I outline the research design and philosophical foundations of the thesis, emphasising interconnectedness and intersectionality in conceptualising my approach to interspecies ethnography. I detail the reflexivity process I undertook, highlighting how my positionality shaped both the research process and its outcomes. Genuine engagement in interspecies research requires a willingness to be transformed by the experience, embracing vulnerability and accepting an “invitation to connect… to become” (Huopalainen, 2023:96). I

describe the ethical and care-focused methods of data collection used in this research, emphasising the role of care in observation, fieldnotes, photography, and interviews. Reflecting on field examples, I elaborate on the application of care ethics in empirical research. Additionally, I discuss the complexities involved in interpreting and analysing data within the context of interspecies ethnography. As MacLure (2024:1652) notes, "there comes a point in the research, and in the writing of it, where the reading, writing, thinking, and seeing do not really feel like distinct activities or modes. They connect and bounce off one another in ways that seem indifferent to their inherent differences." I provide a detailed appraisal of how I used story-as-method to maintain ethical engagement with both human and animal participants whilst promoting a more inclusive and empathetic research approach. The significance of this methodology will be further explored in the analysis sections (see Ch. 6-9), and I will draw together the implications of these methodological decisions in the conclusion (Ch.10). As Haraway (1988) states, the choice of theory and methods creates a partial view of a topic. The methods I choose influence the story I tell, requiring ongoing reflection throughout the research process (Pink, 2015). Inquiry practices are not merely habits of shorthand; they are also practices of "becoming-with" in a field site.

# Chapter 5
# Research Context

## Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to the research context. Through the use of stories, I explore the values and purpose of the organisation within the framework of neoliberal capitalism, highlighting the tensions and opportunities faced by third sector human-animal organisations in the UK. The chapter builds on themes introduced in Chapter 2, focusing predominantly on stories from key human characters I encountered at Noah's A.R.T. This allows for an exploration of how the neoliberal context affects day-to-day operations whilst also revealing how the intricacies of human-animal relations resist being fully consumed by these conditions. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation and its local demographics, including an introduction to Sarah, the organisational lead who conceptualised and established Noah's A.R.T. Sarah's Story uncovers the diversity of AAI work offered within the organisation, emphasising the centrality of rescue animals in their efforts. In the spirit of interspecies connectedness, I present the first instalment of Merlin's Story, a rescued bearded dragon, to illustrate how neoliberalism has contributed to a rise in animal relinquishment. Leaving Merlin for the time being, I consider some of the salient points raised in Sarah's Story, which reveal how the reduction in welfare provision has created space for third-sector initiatives to address local needs, though such organisations remain constrained by market forces. Next, I introduce Carrie, a central character in the thesis and the Lead for Animal Welfare. Her story highlights the role of volunteers as a labour resource and the emotional costs this incurs within the organisation. Returning to Sarah's Story, I then examine the association of care with the concept of family, exploring care within the context of neoliberal notions of family. Finally, the chapter addresses the economic challenges of care in neoliberalism and how these challenges connect to emotional and psychological burnout.

## Noah's A.R.T. in the Community: Exploring the Intersections of Care

This research explores how shared marginalisation can foster mutual flourishing. Whilst the Noah's A.R.T. programme supports mental health and wellbeing among marginalised groups, understanding marginalisation's intersectional nature requires examining the broader community context. Marginalisation is intersectional and thus an exploration of the community context provides insight into this. Noah's A.R.T. is based in Tameside, a borough of Greater Manchester, ranked as 37$^{th}$ most income deprived region in England. It consists of a predominantly White community (90.9%), with 6.65% Asian; 1.4% are Mixed; 0.08% Black; and 0.2% of the population are other ethnicities. Based on this the main language is English, with Urdu, Polish and Bengali also spoken. Poverty is spread across the borough, the result of intersecting individual and societal factors including health, education and individual life events. The impact of COVID-19 and cost of living crisis further contributes to inequality in the region. 19.5% of Tameside residents aged 16 or over have identified mental health disorders, impacting on access to employment and thus affecting income (Tameside Borough Council, 2024). According to Tameside Borough Council, over 4000 children in Tameside aged between 5-17 experience mental health difficulties. The need for mental health services for both adults and children are palpable. In 2021, 9.1% of the population of Greater Manchester resided in Tameside, with the highest proportion of residents aged 50-54 (7.2%). In England, it is typical that communities have a higher proportion of 30-34 year-olds. There is a fairly equal gender split (49% Male, 51% female) with less than 0.05% identifying as non-binary. The data suggests that Tameside is a predominantly White, English-speaking community who face significant economic challenges. Mental health issues are prevalent, indicating a critical need for mental health services, especially given the socioeconomic challenges and demographic factors at play.

Noah's A.R.T. was established as a third sector organisation (TSO) with the mission to utilise the benefits of the human-animal bond to improve mental health and wellbeing. A reduction in welfare state provision of care has decimated public sector services in the UK. TSO aim to

provide community-based care services that target local needs. Operating in various legal forms, in most TSO the profits made are reinvested into their community focused mission. The organisation provides AAI services that aim to support mental health and wellbeing at all stages of recovery. Established in 2014 as an outreach facility, it is now a community hub based in former shop units in a town centre district. Mental health recovery is not linear (Leamy *et al.,* 2011), and the service aims to provide an open-door offer that enables people to return, accessing different levels of activity as and when appropriate.

I will now introduce you to Sarah's Story. Sarah is the organisational lead who established the organisation 2014.

## From Past to Present: The Evolution of Interspecies Care in the Community

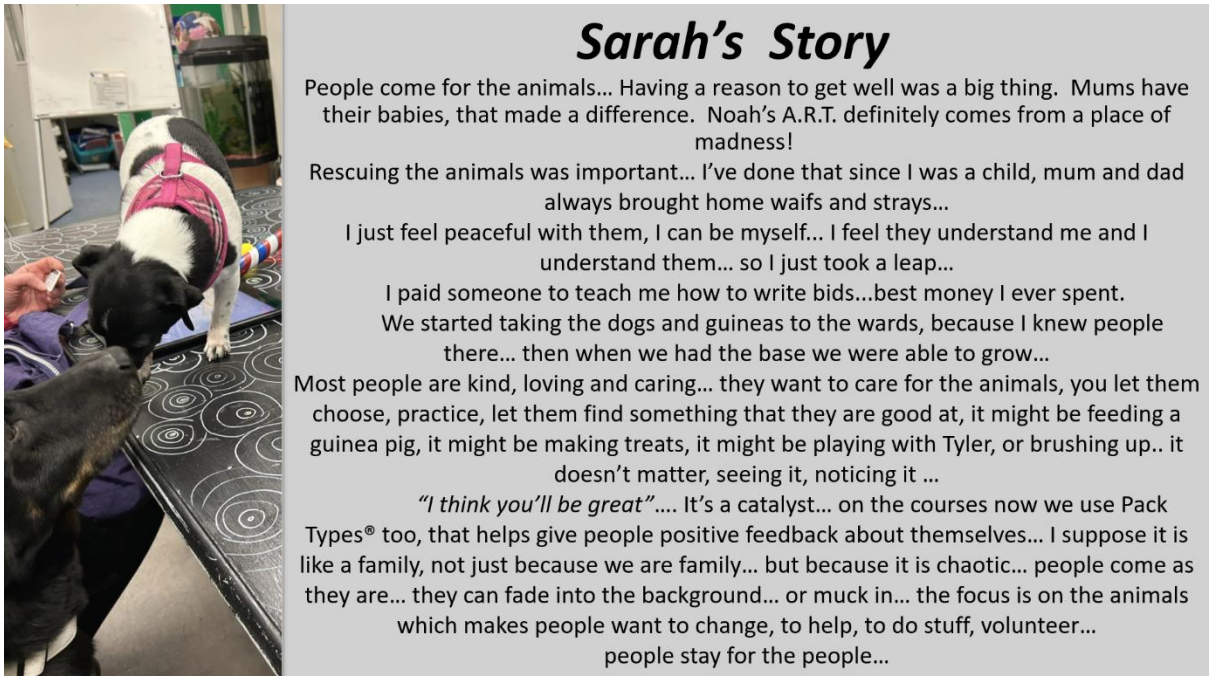


*Fig.14. Sarah's Story*

Having worked in mental health nursing for over 10 years, Sarah set up Noah's A.R.T. Reflecting over the passing of time, she recalls her childhood experiences and the importance of rescuing animals, hence A.R.T which stands for Animal Rescue Therapy. Reflections on her experiences in mental health nursing prompted her to consider the importance of a purpose for getting well and caring for others seemed to provide a source of this. Sarah is *called to* this work (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017) she places immense value on the importance of caring relationships. Like Noah's A.R.T., TSO are often value driven and aim to tackle inequalities and oppression through focussing on relationality, where there is a commitment to tackling social injustices. These organisations have become an invaluable resource in the provision of community mental health services (Newbigging *et al*., 2020). However, there has been limited empirical research on how organisational values of care translate into practice (Blake, 2016).

Sarah offers some insights into what the organisation offers. As an AAI organisation it aims to improve mental health and wellbeing for children and adults who share a desire to *"care for the animals"*. As she explains the starting point was *"taking the dogs and guineas to the wards".* This is a typical form of AAI service based around the provision of outreach that is commissioned and funded by NHS mental health commissioning groups (Rawlings, 2021). As Sarah continues, *"then when we had the base we were able to grow".* Space and building costs are significant concerns for mental health organisations in austere times (Högström, 2018), which is amplified when considering both human and animal needs. Whilst Noah's A.R.T. continues to offer commercial outreach services in schools, nursing homes, mental health wards and universities, the focus has been upon developing provision at the base. There is increased recognition of the financial and environmental costs of travel and the psychological impact of travel on animals (Provoost, 2021). In addition to outreach services, Noah's A.R.T. offer a range of provision, including 1-1 or small-group AAI sessions, funded animal welfare courses, a drop in dog-café, and an art group. They also have commercial services that support workplace wellbeing. Most recently, they have set up a new site, which provides alternative educational provision for children who are struggling in schools. This

work is either privately funded by parents or via Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) funding. In the UK, the EHCP is a legal document that identifies a child's specific educational needs and can allocate funding for appropriate alternative education providers to ensure those needs are met (Gov.uk, n.d).

As outlined in the methodology chapter, during my immersion in the field, I experienced all aspects of the work within the organisation. During the research phase, I was predominantly involved with the funded animal welfare courses. A detailed breakdown of all my field work is included in Appendix 3.

I will now consider the importance of animal rescue in the provision of services.

## Ambassadors of Change: The Role of Rescue in AAI

The organisational values of Noah's A.R.T. are vividly illustrated through Sarah's commitment to rescuing animals. This theme, explored more extensively in Chapter 9, is exemplified by Merlin, a rescued bearded dragon who serves as a powerful symbol for animal rescue efforts. As noted by Donaldson and Kymlicka (2015), animals in rescue centres often act as ambassadors for action against the injustices they face. Merlin's Story, drawn from journal entries that encompass conversations, observations, and images, not only highlights the ethos of the organisation but also invites us to reflect on the broader implications of animal rescue as an opportunity to enhance mutual flourishing.

*Fig.15. Merlin's Story*

Merlin will be lummoxing his way through the thesis shortly (see Ch.6, 8 and 9). He is one of two bearded dragons at the Noah's A.R.T., he works alongside other exotic creatures including an African fat tailed gecko, a Herman tortoise and a leopard gecko. At this juncture, I will return to how Sarah's vision for Noah's A.R.T. starts from her commitment to interspecies care through animal rescue work. Increasing numbers of animals of varying species require rehoming in the UK (RSPCA, 2023). As a "nation of animal lovers" (Fox and Gee, 2019:44) there has been a growing desire for pets and an industry which supports it. The demand fosters unethical sourcing, breeding and treatment of some animals in the pursuit of income (McMullen, 2015). The capitalist pursuit of profit through the animal trade has had a significant and detrimental impact on planetary biodiversity. Desire for pets does not necessarily mean knowledge about the specific needs of animals, this together with the costs of caring leads to more and more animals being abandoned, and animal rescue projects are struggling to accommodate the numbers requiring shelter and care (Norris, 2023). Ejlertsen (2020) emphasises that animals placed in shelters or rescues are there as a result of either or

both, their lack of conformity to human expectations or because of their burdensome care needs. Currently, the financial challenge has been the most significant factor in the decision to place animals in rescue centres which implies that many animals in this situation still have the potential to be human companions. But whilst many people desire the companionship of animals, the cost of their care is prohibitive, a UK survey suggested that 72% of people were not considering pets currently (RSPCA, 2024). Merlin's Story reveals the costs of caring. He and his fellow messmates incur significant care costs. The practical requirements of an adequately sized vivarium for each individual with sufficient warmth and shade, the need to consume live food together with other sources of nutrients lies alongside the need for knowledge of the species behaviours, supervised space to roam and human interaction (RSPCA, 2019). The increasing numbers of animals who are living in rescue centres and a lack of adopters suggests that different approaches to ensure the welfare of animals and the sustainability of animal rescue organisations needs to be considered. Coulter (2016) suggests that some of these animals may be more suitable for different forms of animal labour outside of the domestic environment. Attentiveness to Merlin's behaviour during his therapy work at Noah's A.R.T. has suggested that he enjoys being with children and adults alike and that children and young people gain a great deal from watching him move and feed.

In the context of AAI work involving rescued shelter animals is approached with considerable caution. Hatch (2007) interviewed volunteers working in an animal rescue where the animals provide AAI. She suggests that in spite of the benefits for the animal in terms of socialisation the risks to humans are too great particularly given an absence of knowledge of the animal's history and how this impacts on their temperament. In the field of AAI, the well-renowned Green Chimneys Project in the USA put in place a number of measures to enable them to incorporate rescue animals into their school practices. There was a sense that there would be value for young people in helping to train the dogs who had been rescued prior to them being rehomed in the local community (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2015). Whilst this is built upon the potential for mutual benefit for human and animal through the process of "scientifically

sound positive training methods", there are other approaches to interspecies care that can have mutual benefits (Kaufmann *et al.,* 2015:215*)*. Storytelling is often employed in AAI, originating from the psychotherapeutic practice of storying. It is used to make connections and evoke consideration of different perspectives; thus, stories of a dog's rescue and rehabilitation can provide an affective process of intervention that shifts understandings of self (VanFleet *et al.,* 2015).

As a community-led organisation, targeting local needs drives the direction of the organisation. Whilst outside the timeframe of the field work, as mentioned above, the organisation has now established a second site which provides alternative provision for children and young people who find mainstream education challenging. Tameside Borough Council suggest that approximately 250 children in Tameside were taught voluntarily at home in 22/23 summer term, over 30% cite mental health challenges as the reason for doing so. It is established that over 4000 children in Tameside aged between 5-17 experience mental health difficulties. Increasing numbers of children require alternative forms of education. The need for alternative forms of mental health provision is stark across the age phases and whilst there is increasing regard for the needs of children and young people there are increasing funding challenges in the context of adult mental health services (Gilburt and Mallorie, 2024).

## Balancing Mission and Market

I have explained how neoliberalism has enabled the proliferation of a diverse range of services within the realms of the third section. I now return to Sarah's Story…

> "It definitely comes from a place of madness!"
>
> (from Sarah's Story)

With acute awareness of the seriousness of mental health challenges, Sarah's suggestion that the Noah's A.R.T. *"comes from a place of madness*" reflects Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey's (2019:5) exposition that women's emphatic commitment to human-animal connectedness

and the power of relationality is a result of their pathologised madness, and thus setting up Noah's A.R.T. represents a crazy project that *"makes a great deal of sense*", but it is "risky". Some of the risks of rescuing animals have been considered above, but there are further significant risks facing TSO in a neoliberal context. As Tronto (2017) explains neoliberal ideologies orientate how care is understood, valued and practised both locally and societally. TSO reflect neoliberal intention to reduce welfare expenditure on care whilst creating competitive localised funding processes that force institutions to orient towards evidencing outcomes that purport value for money (NAO, 2008; Colebrooke *et al.,* 2023). Thus, to be able to provide the AAI service, which Sarah is *called* to do, she must engage in a competitive marketplace for funding. Sarah explains that in the early days when she set up the organisation "*I took a leap, I paid someone to teach me how to write bids...best money I ever spent*". This reflects the unavoidable entanglements with market driven neoliberalism. For it to constitute value for money, Sarah is implying that the educational experience enabled her to navigate the neoliberal systems whilst remaining committed to the organisation's value base. Relational TSO do not sit outside neoliberal markets and can find themselves sinking further into them. Whilst the values and passion Sarah has to drive forward the organisation is palpable there is a necessity to secure funding to remain viable. Retaining a focus on values of relational caring whilst having to evidence impact and value for money is inherently challenging. Reduced access to funding and increased demand leads TSO towards alternative funding streams that are rooted in profit-making and entrepreneurship (Colebrooke *et al.,* 2023). Drawing on Rochester (2013), Dean (2015:140) questions whether TSO are "losing their soul through increased contracting, service delivery, and the adoption of corporate tendencies". In this complex landscape, the struggle for funding forces TSO like Noah's A.R.T. to balance their foundational values of relational care with the demands of a neoliberal market, raising critical questions about the sustainability of their mission in an increasingly profit-driven environment.

Ferreira *et al.,* (2024) suggest that there is a rise in fourth sector organisations where there is a focus on values and entrepreneurism. Taking social and environmental responsibility as a baseline, evidenced through rescuing animals and welfare and environmental concerns over travel and their multiple commercial income strands such as workplace wellbeing and outreach services, suggests Noah's A.R.T. could fall within a hybrid space of the fourth sector. That being said, being positioned as a TSO remains integral to the identity and orientation of Noah's A.R.T., where income generated is ploughed back into its community mission. Whilst holding onto their values-based identity is morally appropriate, there is a significant risk facing all TSO that the original values of relationality become diluted through their interpretation within the prisms of neoliberal market logics. In human-animal work this raises questions about the risks of commodification of the animals.

As introduced in Chapter 2, the commodification of care and animal labour has long been present in the marketplace, with a wide array of self-care options—such as doggy yoga and cat cafés—catering to various desires (e.g. https://pawyoga.com/). Whilst AAI has historically emphasised the benefits to humans, growing evidence indicates that both humans and animals gain from these interactions (McCune *et al*., 2014). In this context, the relationship itself becomes the commodity rather than the individual entities involved. However, current research in AAI largely remains within a psychological framework, often focusing on outreach services where animals—typically dogs—live with their owners and volunteer to provide AAI (Fine and Ferrell, 2021). This means that care of the animal is not an additional cost. Yet, in organisations like Noah's A.R.T., where there is a broader range of animals owned by the organisation and residing on the premises, there are heightened costs of caring. Importantly, for animals to fulfil their caregiving role, they must also receive care themselves. This dual demand highlights the complexities faced by organisations like Noah's A.R.T., where the ethos of care is foundational, necessitating significant volunteer involvement to meet the increasing care work requirements. Picking up on the importance of practicing care, I return to Sarah's Story.

> "they want to care for the animals, you let them choose, practice, let them find something that they are good at, it might be feeding a guinea pig, it might be making treats, it might be playing with Tyler, or brushing up.. it doesn't matter, seeing it, noticing it … "I think you'll be great"…. It's a catalyst…"
>
> (from Sarah's Story)

Sarah explains how she encourages choice in the organisation. Individuals at the base have the flexibility to engage in various activities, whether that means "*fading into the background or mucking in"*. Sarah highlights the importance of choice from a moral standpoint, acknowledging that intersectional identities can constrain the ability to exercise that choice. However, both humans and animal possess agency; they can choose, and with choice comes a sense of responsibility. Sarah remains attentive to their decisions, providing positive feedback such as, *"I think you'll be great."* This encouragement helps "individuals realise his or her abilities" which is a fundamental role of TSO provision which often requires significant human resources to foster (WHO, 2022:np).

Choice within a neoliberal ideology is framed as a reflection of personal freedom rather than a means to address fundamental inequality (Lynch, 2022). TSO offer a catalogue of choices aimed at helping individuals manage their own health and wellbeing. Choosing services like art, music, nature, or animals can be seen as active participation in one's care (Buck and Ewbank, 2020). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Noddings (2013) argued that humans can choose whether to complicate their lives with animal relationships. Human life is already deeply interconnected with other species (Haraway, 2008), and whilst people may choose the extent of their responsibility in these relationships, it is impossible to separate the entanglement of human existence with other species. Noddings (2013) further suggests that human feelings toward animals do not fully capture the complexities of caring in human relationships. As Brooks *et al., (*2018) suggest, animals offer simple, non-judgmental relationships that contrast with the conflicts often found in human relationality. For those who engage with animals at Noah's A.R.T., they are choosing relationships that feel less

threatening and more accessible. By their very nature, domestic animals create a practical need to care, providing purpose and responsibility. Practising care in these relationships creates embodied experiences that spark new self-understandings, recognising the agentic capacity of both human and animal, and fostering a mutual responsibility to care for each other in an interspecies world. These relationships thus have the potential for mutual benefits.

In Sarah's Story, she highlights the volunteers who support the care work within the organisation. Volunteering holds significant value in neoliberal ideology, as it helps to shape what Bloom (2017:ii) refers to as "the ethical capitalist subject." Through volunteering, individuals can gain a competitive advantage in a market through exchange whilst also taking on the responsibility to care for others, thereby reducing welfare expenditure. This aligns with the concept of "hope labour" (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013:9), where the investment of time is compensated by the acquisition of skills that enhance employment prospects. By focusing on the instrumental and individual benefits of volunteering, there is a tendency to reinforce the notion that care can be performed in pursuit of self-interest. Volunteers are often considered to be "the lifeblood" of TSO (Wakeling *et al.,* 2021:3). At Noah's A.R.T., over 45 active volunteers contribute to the mission, many of whom have previously accessed AAI services as clients. Fegan and Cook (2014) suggests that transitioning into a voluntary role within a mental health organisation that has supported their recovery can enhance mental health recovery by providing valuable work experience. Whilst there is substantial evidence supporting the benefits of volunteering for the volunteers themselves, it is important to also consider the individual and organisational costs associated with this involvement. This will be the focus of the next section.

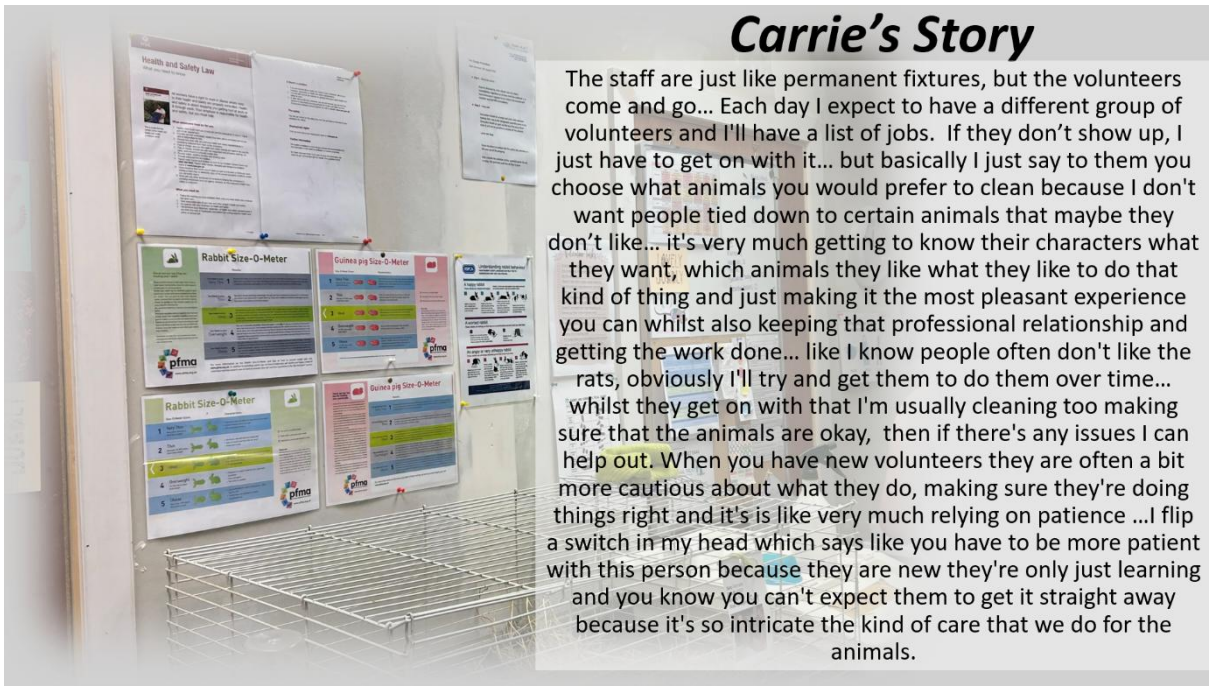
In this section, I have provided a deeper insight into the complexities and challenges faced by TSO within the context of neoliberalism. Sarah's Story highlights the tensions between relationally focused care and the market-driven notion of caring, suggesting a sense of

"madness" in "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016:2). I will now consider how the *lifeblood* of volunteers in TSO raises further questions about how these organisations can remain true to their missions whilst navigating a market-driven environment.

## Cultivating Care: The Emotional Landscape of Volunteering

This takes me to Carrie's Story. Carrie leads the animal welfare room; this includes responsibility for supervision and support for volunteers who choose to work in the animal welfare room. Carrie's caring is important in the thesis (see Ch.8 and 9). In this snippet of story, based on interview data, she explains how her day starts and how she works with the volunteers.

*Fig.16. Carrie's Story*




Choice remains central in Carrie's Story. Allowing volunteers to choose their tasks helps to get the work done effectively. Carrie's narrative also sheds light on the individual and organisational costs associated with supporting volunteers. For Carrie, there is significant

"emotional labour" (Hochschild, 1983:48) involved in maintaining a *"professional relationship"* whilst *"making it the most pleasant experience"* for the volunteers. Initially, Carrie engages with volunteers to "*get to know the animals they like and don't and the work they prefer to do."* By understanding their characters and preferences, she aims to discern their motivations for being there and how their mental and physical health may impact their abilities. The transitory nature of the volunteers means that this practice of understanding their wants and needs becomes a routine aspect of care work. This is intertwined with Carrie's primary responsibility for the welfare of the animals. Whilst the volunteers assist with animal care tasks, they also introduce additional welfare considerations. Toward the end of her story, Carrie mentions *"flipping a switch in her head"* to enable herself to support and guide the care work of others. In doing this, she puts herself in the shoes of the volunteers, acknowledging their inexperience and the skills required to meet the intricate care needs of the animals. Thus, whilst eager to care for the animals and ensure all tasks are completed during her shift, Carrie recognises her competency and her responsibility to care for and support the volunteers.

Carrie anticipates support from volunteers each day. However, she acknowledges, "*If they don't show up, I just have to get on with it*." The fluctuating nature of mental health difficulties impacts the consistency of engagement in formal work environments (Fukuura and Shigematsu, 2021; Fegan and Cook, 2014). In this organisation, volunteering is part of the AAI services and serves as a form of therapeutic intervention; therefore, absenteeism cannot be addressed using conventional workplace logic. Instead, it demands additional care work from managers and employees. Equally, whilst absenteeism poses an institutional challenge, presenteeism brings its own costs, as illustrated in Carrie's Story. In an organisation that supports individuals with mental health difficulties, it is not uncommon for people to attend *work,* as a volunteer, to gain therapeutic support (Fegan and Cook, 2012). This situation complicates the maintenance of multi-layered caring practices within a busy interspecies organisation, creating a continuous juggling act of emotional and physical labour.

Carrie's Story provides further insight into the complexity of care work in a human-animal organisation within the context of neoliberalism. Whilst volunteers are often considered the *lifeblood* of TSO, Carrie's narrative highlights the emotional demands associated with providing voluntary experiences in a therapeutic environment. I will revisit Carrie's care work within the organisation in Roland's Story in Chapter 9. Now, I will turn to the significance of family experiences in Sarah's Story which leads to an exposition of the role of care in the context of the neoliberal family.

## Familial Care in a Neoliberal Context

> "I've done that since I was a child, mum and dad always brought home waifs and strays… I just feel peaceful with them, I can be myself... I feel they understand me and I understand them… so I just took a leap"
>
> (from Sarah's Story)

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the importance of reflection and reflexivity in research work, particularly research which focuses on care. In this extract of Sarah's Story, Sarah provides some insight into how her early experiences have influenced the decision to offer AAI services. She goes on to talk about the importance of relationships for patients on a mental health ward and how her relationships in these spaces facilitated access to patients in the early days of Noah's A.R.T. She also talks significantly about family relationships, mums with babies, her parents, the family-run business, and the organisational interspecies family they have established.

> "I suppose it is like a family, not just because we are family… but because it is chaotic… people come as they are… they can fade into the background… or muck in… the focus is on the animals which makes people want to change, to help, to do stuff, volunteer… people stay for the people"
>
> (from Sarah's Story)

Sarah's Story highlights how family experiences influence perceptions and practices of care. Her upbringing, surrounded by animals, shaped her sense of peace and connection with them, ultimately contributing to the creation of a family-run, interspecies care organisation, Noah's

A.R.T. Her narrative illustrates a personal, relational approach to care that drives her work, emphasising the importance of community and shared experiences. However, such familial experiences of care do not exist in isolation. They are shaped by broader social and political forces, including neoliberalism, which influences both family life and the ways in which care is understood and enacted. In this context, 'the family' is not a fixed or neutral entity, but a socially constructed idea that carries different meanings across time and space. Under neoliberalism, it has often been co-opted as a site of privatised responsibility and gendered labour, contributing to dominant constructions of care as individualised and economically oriented. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, my aim is to explore the interplay between local and societal forces. Sarah's Story thus exemplifies how meanings of 'family' are multiple and sometimes conflicting, shaped by both personal histories and broader ideological frameworks. It is important, then, to distinguish between neoliberal constructions of family—as sites of individualised, often gendered care responsibility—and more relational, inclusive configurations that challenge these logics through mutual support and affective connection.

In a neoliberal context, the idea of 'the family' remains central to care provision and continues to shape expectations around how care should be delivered and by whom. However, it is essential to interrogate how this construct is shaped by neoliberal values—particularly those that privilege self-reliance, individualism, and economic productivity. In a competitive capitalist world, there is a pressing imperative for citizenship status to be tied to economic activity. Both men and women contribute significantly to the labour market, and to fulfil this obligation, parents frequently rely on institutional childcare provision. As a result, most children's early experiences of care involve a blend of familial and institutional practices, translating neoliberal ideology into the day-to-day rhythms of care (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). This blending can create tensions for parents, who must navigate the dual demands of nurturing their children and meeting economic responsibilities. These pressures reflect how neoliberalism not only redefines care as a form of labour, but also reshapes the

socialisation processes that begin in early childhood. Whilst Sarah's notion of care is deeply rooted in her family background, we must also recognise that contemporary family experiences are increasingly mediated by these neoliberal ideologies, often marginalising relational and collective forms of care. In this way, families are both shaped by and sometimes resistant to these logics, producing tensions in how care is understood and enacted across different contexts.

Whilst parents are socialised into ethical citizenship through their provision of labour, infants' early care experiences simultaneously socialise them into the world of neoliberalism, conveying both conscious and unconscious messages about how care is understood, valued, and practiced at local and societal levels (Tronto, 2017). In early childhood, children's participation in institutional care has increased, with the marketplace of childcare provision offering choices primarily for the financially secure. In contrast, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are often directed toward state-initiated early intervention programmes aimed at closing the attainment gap (Gowland *et al*., 2011). From infancy into childhood, institutional experiences of care are governed by neoliberal ideologies and economic decision-making, where the neoliberal 'ethical ideal'—one rooted in self-sufficiency rather than relational care—shapes human subjectivity. These institutional logics do not stand apart from familial care, but rather blend into and reshape it. As parents navigate these systems, familial experiences of care are also infused with neoliberal expectations, reinforcing ideas of productivity, independence, and self-management within the home.

Throughout the life course, individuals continue to engage with institutions shaped by neoliberalism, which provide a choreography for being that is "self-reliant, individually responsible, and entrepreneurial" (Lynch, 2022:2). These ideals are not confined to institutional settings but also shape familial experiences, particularly as parents and caregivers navigate the competing demands of employment, caregiving, and economic survival. Whilst normative understandings of family continue to position it as the primary site

of intimate care in infancy and childhood, these practices are increasingly entangled with neoliberal expectations, producing what Dowling (2021) refers to as embodied experiences of neoliberal caring. For parents, intense intergenerational care responsibilities, coupled with escalating workplace pressures, can limit time and opportunity for social connection beyond the home. Consequently, access to safe, caring relationships outside the spheres of family and work may be restricted—especially for those without the financial capital to participate in organised social or leisure activities. This limitation disproportionately affects marginalised individuals and communities (DCMS, 2022). As Dowling (2021) further argues, the neoliberal emphasis on individualism reflects a desire to reduce state involvement and public spending on care, rather than a dismissal of care's importance in human flourishing. However, institutional practices that promote self-reliance and individualism often erode opportunities for relational care, with significant consequences for mental health and wellbeing (Holt-Lunstad, 2024), as well as implications for planetary sustainability in a multispecies world.

In this brief section, I have explored how familial experiences of care are shaped by, and at times resist, the influence of neoliberal ideology. Rather than treating 'the family' as a fixed or naturalised unit, I have highlighted its socially constructed and contested nature, showing how dominant neoliberal discourses position it as a site of privatised, individualised, and gendered responsibility. At the same time, I have drawn attention to the ways in which familial and institutional experiences of care increasingly blend together, transmitting neoliberal values through both policy and practice. Despite this, the enduring human need for connection and relational care persists. As Sarah's Story demonstrates, alternative kinship structures—such as those cultivated at Noah's A.R.T.— offer a reimagining of care grounded in mutual support, co-presence, and interdependence. These forms of kinship need not be based solely on blood ties. As Haraway (2016:103) suggests, the slogan of our time should be "make kin not babies."

Following Lynch's lead, I have deliberately avoided emphasising economic factors thus far to highlight the potential for social change rooted in a "care consciousness" (2022:3). However, as Lynch points out, it would be foolhardy not to recognise and consider the influence of economic factors. To address this, I will turn to another extract from Sarah's Story.

## Challenges of Care: Burnout and the Neoliberal Landscape

*Fig.17. Sarah's Story Continued*

This continuation of Sarah's Story provides insight into the reasons that often lead to burnout in care professions (Health and Social Care Committee, 2021). It is evident that Sarah's identity is deeply intertwined within the organisation. The spark for her commitment was ignited during her previous role as a nurse in adult mental health services where she increasingly witnessed a lack of investment alongside a growing need, particularly in adult mental health. Competitive bidding processes compel organisations to seek diverse income streams, which adds pressure on Sarah to follow up on all inquiries to maintain funding. Organisationally, money is required to cover building costs, wages, utilities, animal care

expenses, veterinary fees, insurance, transportation, and more. As a result, the lives of both people and animals are closely tied to her sense of responsibility.

> "It's hard work… people have high expectations, they aren't afraid of telling us we've got it wrong… it's not that we mind feedback… it's just that I feel that we are giving our all to care for clients, staff, volunteers, animals, and when people suggest we aren't caring… it feels impossible… services like us won't last… if people's expectations don't change… there is a limit to what we can do… we are only human…"
>
> (from Sarah's Story)

People driven to care continue to do so despite the challenges, often using more of their personal resources. As Sarah says, "*there is a limit to what we can do… we are only human."* Concepts like choice, voice, and feedback have become common in the neoliberal world, initially within the service sector but now prevalent in care organisations in public institutions. Whilst co-construction is essential for forming community organisations, neoliberal, consumer-oriented notions of voice create increasing challenges for the TSO. Those who care for others also need to be acknowledged and supported; this acknowledgment is a form of care in itself. However, neoliberalism frames the institution as a service provider, where *"telling us we've got it wrong…"* is part of the consumer's rights and responsibilities. The benchmarks by which people measure their care experiences influence their perceptions of care. In a neoliberal context, societal institutions are set up as a marketplace for self-enhancement rather than fostering relationally formed community experiences. As Sarah states, "*if people's expectations don't change… services like us won't last."*

There is immense pressure on those in care professions, particularly within the context of neoliberalism, where financial constraints, high expectations, and the constant need to meet consumer demands can lead to burnout. Sarah's Story illustrates her struggle to balance her sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of clients, staff, volunteers, and animals with the harsh realities of running a service under significant financial and emotional strain.

## Summary

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the organisation within the broader context of neoliberalism. As interest in the benefits of animals for human wellbeing has grown, so too has the number of AAI organisations, forming a significant part of third-sector provision. This chapter examines the challenges and complexities faced by those who care for others—whether animals, volunteers, or clients—in a society increasingly driven by neoliberal values. The historical commodification of animals for human benefit could, in this context, result in their needs being viewed as secondary to human concerns, especially in light of accountability metrics and evidence-based funding requirements. Similarly, engaging marginalised groups in the unpaid care of animals might be perceived as exploitative. However, these views are rooted in traditional ethical positions that support neoliberal individualism (Bloom, 2017), which often frame relationships in terms of binary power dynamics where one group benefits at the expense of another. Tallberg and Hamilton (2023a:2) suggest that we should instead "seek out cases of subtle, nuanced relationships that operate along collegiate, companion lines." By placing care at the centre of our understanding of moral life, we can explore the mutual benefits of caring within such organisations, whilst still recognising the importance of the social, political, and economic context (Gorman, 2017; 2019).

# Data Analysis

## Data Analysis: An Introduction

The four analysis chapters orient themselves around multiple stories assembled from my photographs, journal entries, fieldnotes and readings. My process of story-making is explored in Chapter 4, with detailed elaboration in Appendix 11, as I feel it is important to share how I brought data sources into conversation with one another. In doing so, I created a method responsive to the problem of presenting findings and analysing the complexity and intimacy of the events in an Animal Assisted Intervention organisation (AAI). As Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford note,

> it is not possible to apply a method as if it were indifferent or external to the problem it seeks to address, but that method must rather be made specific and relevant to the problem… if methods are to be inventive, they should not leave that problem untouched (2014:2-3).

This quote highlights the significance of tailoring methodologies to the specific nuances of the research context, which has heightened significance in interspecies research which is responsive to the agentic capacity of the animals. In the case of my analysis, it emphasises the necessity of developing a responsive approach that acknowledges the intricate relationships and lived experiences within the Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) setting. By actively engaging with the data and allowing the stories to inform the analytical process, I aim to highlight the depth of meaning in each narrative, thereby ensuring that the method itself remains intimately connected to the complexities of care work and interspecies relationships.

All the stories coalesce around four themes that emerged from the intricate combination of data: Touch; Talk; Organisational Interspecies Care; and Mutual Flourishing.

# Chapter 6
# Affective Touch: The Power of Connection

## Chapter Overview

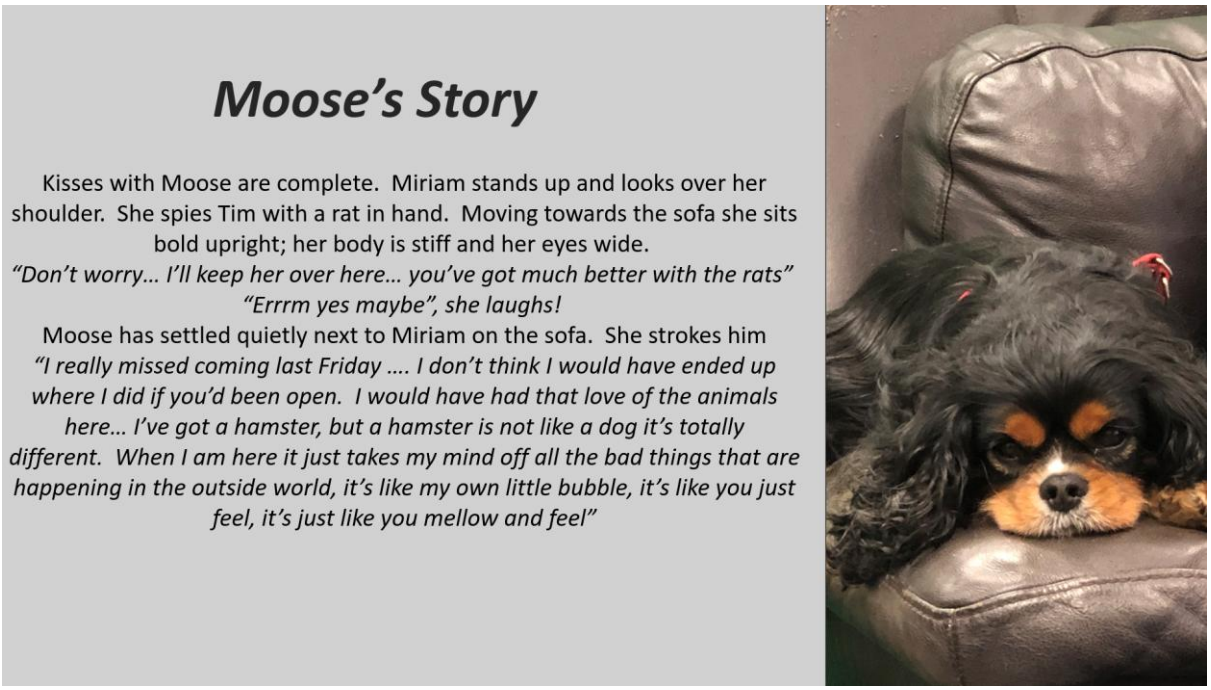
In this chapter, I focus on the touching interspecies encounters that respond to the research question: What is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation? This discussion is situated within the neoliberal organisation and begins to consider a second research question: Can interspecies care help challenge neoliberal values. In the first section, I establish how the love of animals evokes desire for proximal relationships with them. The emotional connection creates an openness to touching experiences which provides the grounding for mutual flourishing. Taking Manning's assertion that touching relationships "open us up to a story we have not heard" (2007:13), I begin with Moose's Story offering consideration of *how* touching practices of interspecies care provide a source of recognition that sparks a different story of self. Next, I move to Cuddles' Story. Whilst not directly juxtaposed with Moose's Story, it highlights how practising interspecies care in organisational contexts can offer a critical societal resource that helps to intervene in neoliberal versions of care and enhance prospects of multispecies flourishing. Having illustrated how enactments of relational care conflict with neoliberal framing of interspecies care, I then focus specifically on the daily care practices that unfold in an Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation. Considering notions of empathy, vulnerability, and capability, this section outlines how repetitive interspecies caring practices provide an affective and embodied experience that establishes relational interdependency. The experience of touching and being touched by Herman the tortoise highlights the organisational practices of interspecies care, suggesting that such interactions create a space to slow down and become absorbed in the relationship, allowing memories of a relational self to emerge. At this juncture, I attend to anthropomorphism and consider how memories of being cared for by animals incorporate anthropomorphic persuasions which can help to ensure ethical organisational practices. Before concluding the chapter, the final exploration focuses on the transformational impact of animals' agency in sparking the agentic capacity of

humans. In this section, I offer personal reflections on how neoliberalism can evoke a sense of vulnerability in caring, suggesting the importance of relational experiences throughout the life course that extend beyond parental care.

I begin this initial data analysis chapter with a story about Moose and Miriam, opening out into a focus on human relationality that provides the ontological basis of human-being (Noddings, 2013).

## Embracing Connection: Touch in Interspecies Relationships

*Fig.18. Moose's Story*




Drawing from authors discussed in Chapter 3, I consider how touching encounters, physical and affective, are essential in the practice of caring (Hamington, 2004). But, in a neoliberal world there are reduced opportunities for relationality starting in infancy spanning into adulthood. Societal changes have meant a reduction in opportunities to practise proximal caring and promotes, perhaps intentionally, a reliance on the self (Lynch, 2022). In

contemporary society, there is a sense of disengagement, partially as a result of technological absorption (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2019). But there is an imperative to care, as Noddings (2013:46) suggested "as I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself". Thus, for neoliberal ideology of self-care to be a possibility, having relationships that provide an experience of mutual care is critical. As outlined in the literature, pets have become a significant care resource in contemporary western homes (Brooks *et al.,* 2018), offering a relational experience of mutual care, but this is not an option for all. Restrictions in some accommodations (Power, 2017) and the costs of pet ownership limits access to these relationships particularly for marginalised individuals (Bond and D'arcy, 2020). AAI in organisational contexts provides an opportunity to practise caring in human-animal relationships which has broader implications for mutual flourishing (Gorman, 2019). I will highlight some of the broader implications and pursue these in more detail in Chapter 8.

The affective, embodied interaction with Moose ignites a different story of self for Miriam. Her living arrangements place restrictions that affect the make-up of her multispecies family (Power, 2017). She does have a pet hamster, but she is not permitted to have dogs. Yet, she explains how relationships with dogs provide something different. In AAI dogs are the most common therapy animal (Lee *et al*., 2023), their desire for human interaction fosters an interactive relationality (Cirulli *et al.,* 2011) which sparks an "invitation to connect…to become" (Huopalainen, 2023:96). When Miriam says "*There is nothing like the love of a dog"* she articulates the importance of reciprocity in caring. Moose has noticed Miriam, and she showers him with interspecies kisses. Being acknowledged and attended to is a form of caring (Noddings, 2013). This nurturing behaviour is a common sign of loving care associated with parenting, of children and of dogs, (Carter *et al.,* 2008) suggesting the affective encounter sparks memories of being cared for, which evokes a vulnerability that makes Miriam open and receptive to the experience. The capacity to engage physically, through kissing and touching Moose is a successful experience of caring and being cared for which leaves traces

of affective and embodied relationality. Miriam's interactions with Moose instil a positive sense of her capability to care, which is significant to the perception of herself.

For humans and animals an absence of physical touch can be detrimental (Harlow, 1958) affectively challenging (Radcliffe, 2008), contributing to mental health difficulties (Holt-Lunstad, 2024). Animals provide a touching encounter that can be mutually beneficial (Hamington, 2004). The practice of stroking Moose on the sofa, creates an experience of reciprocal caring, which allows Miriam to open up and talk about what happened to her last week when the organisation was closed (Fine, 2015; Gorman, 2017). She explains how being with the animals takes her *"mind off all the bad things that are happening in the outside world"*. When she was unable to immerse herself in the relational space, she found herself in a difficult place. For people experiencing mental health difficulties, recovery is not linear (Leamy *et al*., 2011). Therapeutic interventions are a form of exercise which establish health and wellbeing benefits over time (Gorman, 2017). Exercise becomes part of a routine. For Miriam the removal of the routine as a result of Noah's A.R.T. being closed for Good Friday, together with the lack of relational encounters that Miriam experiences each week when she visits, may have contributed to a lapse in her mental health, as Dumm (2008:159) would suggest deviation "into the futility of total thought". The relational experience of being with the animals, allows Miriam to experience herself differently making her open to other forms of relationality. Whilst in this instance, the organisation was closed for a public holiday the prerequisite for the sustained nature of these experiences creates a challenge for third sector organisations (TSO). I will return to this in Chapter 8.

At this juncture, I have briefly considered how the AAI organisation provides an experience of caring and being cared for which contributes positively to Miriam's sense of self. I have touched upon the centrality of the affective, touching encounter which sparks an openness to the experience. I will build on these elements later in the chapter. Staying with Miriam, but turning to Cuddles' Story, I now move on to consider how the practice of caring for animals

evokes memories of care experiences which reveal how neoliberal discourses of care influence human subjectivity.

## Embodied Care: Revealing Neoliberal Ideologies

In Chapter 5, I explore in detail the ways in which the neoliberal emphasis on individualism chafes against human relationality (Lynch, 2022). Opportunities for affective connectivity—the fleshy visceral experience of relationality—which is embryonic to human existence are increasingly limited (Dowling, 2021). This is amplified for people who are marginalised as a result of mental health difficulties (DCMS, 2022). Relationality is a critical form of resistance to neoliberalism fostering understandings of the self that help to intervene in structural oppression (Lynch, 2022). In this next extract of story, Miriam is working alongside Tina, they are bathing Merlin;

*Fig.19. Cuddles' Story*

### *Cuddles' Story*

Miriam explains how she looks after her hamster, Cuddles. She shows Tina a picture of her hamster on her phone.
"She's got cork base for her nails, a wooden wheel, cost more than £20, two hammocks and potties! She is toilet trained!"
Tina is focussed on brushing Merlin's back gently with a toothbrush. "Like this?" she asks.
Miriam continues, in full flow, "I have a routine, with Cuddles, each day, she has filtered water, fresh bedding every day and if I forget her treat, she stands on her bridge till I get it… once a week she gets a mousse bath. It's from Pets at Home, it's therapeutic for her - obviously, I wear gloves".
She flashes her hands in front of her, donned with blue plastic gloves.
"I am very funny like that, even with my own…she's got a little brush like that one but special for hamsters….and I brush her with it… the mousse makes sure that nothing sticks to her back end… people don't think about that, do they?"

Caring triggers feelings of vulnerability and capability (Noddings, 2013). Bathing Merlin, places Tina and Miriam in an affective caring encounter which they respond to differently. Tina responds to her uncertainty about how to clean Merlin, by asking for help, rendering herself more vulnerable, whereas Miriam is struck by affective embodied memories of caring for her hamster (Gorman, 2017) which provide a means of getting away from a sense of vulnerability and demonstrating her competence in caring. She unveils her commitment to the provision of the best possible care for her hamster Cuddles through sharing her story. Story helps frame knowing and being in the world (Haraway, 2003; 2016). Miriam clearly takes her responsibility for Cuddles seriously; she is attentive to her needs for space and cleanliness. Whilst there is a sense of relationality between Miriam and her hamster, the affective relationship in the story she recounts is fairly illusive, aside from her name being 'Cuddles', perhaps.

The practice of bathing Merlin has triggered a sense of vulnerability for Miriam. This vulnerability causes her to turn away from caring for the unknown other – Merlin – and instead seek to quell her discomfort by sharing stories of her capacity to care, knowledge derived from her experiences. In this context, Despret (2015) suggests that stories are vital for unravelling the entanglements of social, cultural, and political factors, generating alternative narratives that envision a future richer in possibilities. The story continues to expose how neoliberalism impacts Miriam's understanding and practice of caring. What dominates the narrative is a detached and sterile provision of care as a commodity. Filtered water, as a better source of nourishment, and the right habitat are facilitated through the purchase of a cork base. Enrichment is provided by a *"£20 wheel"* and two wooden hammocks, and importantly, the hamster has been trained to toilet herself in the provided facilities, suggesting that Cuddles has the capacity for self-care, which ensures a clean living environment. Whilst the mousse bath has therapeutic powers for the hamster, and the repetitive practice of brushing may also provide therapeutic benefits for Miriam, what matters in terms of being capable of caring is that the mousse ensures the cleanliness of *"her back end,"* which others "*don't think about."*

The story Miriam tells is one of herself as the neoliberal ideal citizen. She espouses her independence, autonomy, and entrepreneurialism (Lynch, 2022). This is perhaps most acute when she explains the importance of the mousse for cleaning Cuddles' *"back end,"* which *"people don't think about, do they?"* Pitching herself in comparison to others is indicative of her understanding of competitiveness and comparison in neoliberal society (Lynch, 2022). Her experiences of mental health difficulties have led to continual comparisons with a normative mode of being, of which she is seen to fall short (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019). The fear of being judged as inadequate because she did not know how to bathe Merlin is entangled with a recognition of her structurally ascribed position as vulnerable due to her intersectionality. By asserting that she has thought of something that others perhaps wouldn't, she illustrates how her choices mirror her values – the values of neoliberal competitiveness and individualism. The question at the end of her story could suggest openness to self-reflection as part of redefining responsibility for a better self, whilst equally it could be seen to expose a sense of vulnerability (Lynch, 2022). Layte (2012:509) explains that competition has "a corrosive effect on social relationships." In setting out this comparison, Miriam creates an imaginary boundary between herself and others, a form of self-protection against the vulnerability that relationships evoke. This form of self-story can be detrimental to mental health and wellbeing. Whilst competition itself leads to mistrust in relationships and thus an avoidance of them, the pursuit of the market as a means of gaining competitive advantage could lead to addictive purchasing and debts, contributing to spiralling mental health difficulties (Lynch, 2022). This highlights how neoliberal ideology becomes ingrained within human subjectivity, contributing to further marginalisation.

There is a strong sense in the story that Miriam's expenditure on care provides a measure of her commitment to love whilst also potentially contributing to economic precarity. Whilst caring for her hamster will inevitably involve engagement in the market, the longer-term environmental impact of market-driven relations can be detrimental to mutual flourishing. Miriam's desire to affirm her neoliberal subjectivity through the provision of care for her

hamster, suggests ongoing pursuit of what the market has to offer in search of competitive advantage. The pet care industry is based around priorities of economic efficiency and profitability, whilst there is increasing attention to sustainability in business, the practices of the market continue to have significant impact on biodiversity (Han, 2023).

Learning to care involves experiencing an embodied form of knowledge (Hamington, 2004). The two stories set out here, Moose's and Cuddles', illustrate how the affective and touching experiences of caring relationships are intertwined with neoliberal notions of care. These stories provide linguistic and affective insight into Miriam's understanding of care. For instance, her engagement with Moose reveals a palpable affective connection that sparks reflective introspection regarding her feelings and sense of self. This engagement creates an embodied experience of caring, generating new memories about the practice of caring and being cared for (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Similarly, whilst bathing Merlin triggers memories of caring for her hamster, it also brings to light other significant experiences of care. Miriam's account of her care for Cuddles intertwines multiple affective memories from her own lived experiences. However, her experiences of mental illness complicate this narrative. Cuddles is somewhat objectified, perceived as having lesser status due to her incapacity to care for herself. The physical touch involved in care practices is often limited; for instance, gloves serve as a metaphorical barrier to the stigma associated with mental health. Additionally, neoliberal markets dictate the resources available to support self-care practices. In this context, what is valued—and what allows individuals to be seen as capable by others—is their ability to engage in self-care (Lynch, 2022).

To practise caring for others and for the self, it is important to feel cared for (Noddings, 2013). Acknowledgement of subjectivity provides the embryo for such experiences. Whilst Miriam holds embodied memories of being objectified as a result of her mental health difficulties, her capacity to care for herself depends on her capacity to recognise her own subjectivity. In the AAI organisation Miriam feels acknowledged by Moose which was reinforced by

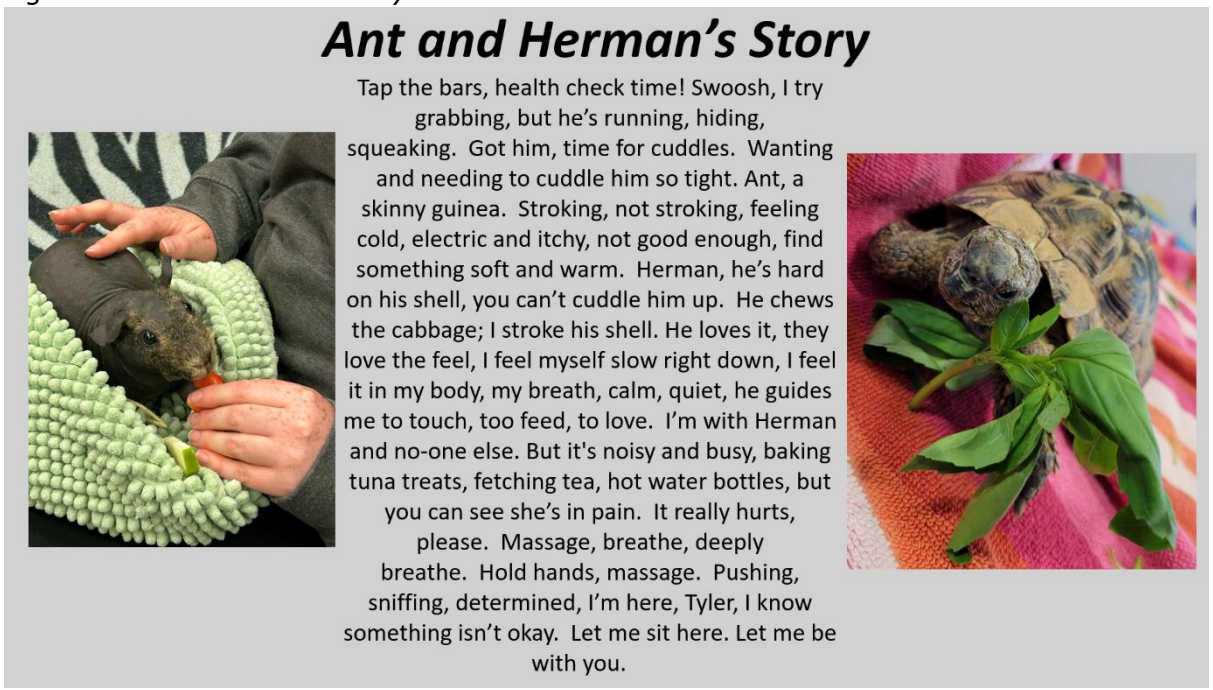
acknowledgement by others, she was seen to kiss and stroke Moose and her ability to tolerate the rats was noticed by Tim. This experience provides a sense of being cared for. The love of animals provides an "invitation to connect…to become" (Huopalainen, 2023:96), but the organisational experience means that the animals are accompanied by other people. The affective vulnerability evoked in the relational encounters with Moose provides an affective opening to community relationality which has transformative potential for the sense of self and the understandings of what care means (Gorman, 2019). The practice of caring and being cared for through human-animal interaction has the potential to unravel and intervene in neoliberal discourses of care which privilege individualism as opposed to relationality. The affective connectivity between human and animal provides the fertile ground upon which to prosper mutually beneficial organisational practices of caring.

I now turn to Ant and Herman's Story to elaborate upon the specificity of interspecies relationality in the AAI organisation.

## Intertwining Narratives: Vulnerability and Capability in Interspecies Care

As I outlined in the orientation to storying in the introduction (Ch.1), this section begins with a busy story that aims to immerse you in the multiple practices of care occurring simultaneously in the AAI organisation. It intentionally seeks to evoke questions for the reader, sparking an openness to "becoming-with" the unfolding story. Ant and Herman's Story provides a platform to resuscitate the intricate elements of caring within the context of interspecies relationships. Beginning with attentiveness, I then consider the process of empathy and how relational engagement prompts questions that lead to a sense of responsibility. I suggest that practicing interspecies caring in organisations can be mutually beneficial for both humans and animals.

*Fig.20. Ant and Herman's Story*




This story provides insight into the simultaneous and multifaceted practices of caring that occur moment-by-moment in a human-animal care organisation (Gorman, 2019). The immersive and multisensorial nature of these practices evokes a sense of chaos and sparks many questions. Multiple care activities contribute to a busyness that contrasts with the idea of *"slowing right down… calm, quiet"*. Based on ethnographic fieldnotes documenting weekly routine practices, this narrative emphasises the affective capacity of touch, capturing the messiness of embodied, affective, and cognitive strands of care that interweave in each moment (Mol *et al.,* 2010). Starting with the routine health check, the reluctant recipient is Ant, a skinny guinea pig, whose aversion evokes a desire to cuddle him and keep him warm and close. Meanwhile, a client is enjoying some animal therapy time with Herman, a 26-year-old tortoise, who is devouring the cabbage. Though Herman cannot be cuddled, the practice of stroking him provides mutual benefits (Hamington, 2004). Another client is experiencing pain, and is asking for help, leading to the intimate touching practice of holding hands and massage. Whilst pain is alleviated through the practice of massage, Tyler an Alsatian cross-

bred dog insists on being in on the action, choosing to sit close by, in spite of the tempting smell of tuna treats cooking in the kitchen. These relational practices are immersed within a variety of care work activities in the organisation. The smells of treats cooking, the embodied practices of making tea, and fetching hot water bottles, combined with the sounds of chatter and conversation, the story provides a multisensorial experience of the layers of care.

Touch lies at the heart of Ant and Herman's Story, an interspecies story of caring. In this section, I aim to provide an account of the intricate multisensorial enactments of care in interspecies relationships. It is difficult to see the complexity of the practice of caring whilst immersed within it (Mol *et al*., 2010). The story encapsulates multisensorial forms of attentiveness necessary for interspecies care (Sanders, 2003). Attentiveness is the catalyst for caring and empathy is the method which leads to responsibility (de Merich, 2015). Seeing the guinea pig running, hiding, hearing him squeaking, sparks an affective embodied relationship. The attentiveness evokes a desire to better understand what the animal wants or needs, sparking an attempt to "to get in the body" of the other (Huopalainen, 2023:95). This is the point at which there is a momentary loss of self, sparking an affective sense of vulnerability. In the story, there is a sense of to-ing and fro-ing which attempts to interrogate what is needed and how best to address this need. Questions are posed suggesting an openness to "becoming-with" (Haraway, 2016). For instance, does a guinea pig want to be stroked? How is it best to stroke a tortoise? Does his lack of fur mean he is cold? What does an animal prefer to eat, is it cabbage or tuna treats? In the practice of caring, the capacity to assume the perspective of the other is critical. This attentiveness to and questioning of their needs evokes a responsibility to care. What is critical about this form of responsibility is that it "leads to an active making together, a collective knowing, being and doing, becoming-with each other by rendering each other capable to create flourishing worlds" (Bozalek, 2021:144).

The practice of attentiveness and empathy provides a means of connecting with Ant's sentience, recognising his subjectivity and agentic capacity, and igniting the spark for mutual

flourishing. Interspecies empathy has come under significant scrutiny; in human and animal relationships, empathy is often associated with the practice of projection (Mead, 1956). Gruen (2007) suggests that to avoid this habit, there needs to be an openness and commitment to learning. Ant, a skinny guinea pig, sparks affective and cognitive processes that allows his human companions to imagine how he might be thinking and feeling, learning that some materials make him itchy or create static electricity. In addition, an attempt to grab him from his cage and his urgency to escape suggests fear, leading to the caring practice of cuddling. Seeing his lack of fur and feeling his cool skin evokes a desire to warm him up, sparking further processes of tinkering with fabrics that will suit Ant best. Stein (1989) suggests that we feel the emotions of another through somatic similarities, which evokes affective empathy. The human companion imagines and reflects upon their emotional templates for fear, feeling cold, and feeling uncomfortable, thus empathising with Ant and driving practices of care. Whilst interspecies empathy mobilises caring in the moment, connecting with Ant's sentience is recognition of his subjectivity and agentic capacity. This ignites the spark for mutual interspecies flourishing. As Haraway suggests, relational encounters bring different stories to life intervening in the "science fictions" that help to sustain otherness (2016:10). In this instance scientific preoccupation of objectivity and separateness between human and animal are unsettled, establishing both as interconnected, agentic, and capable, which evokes a sense of the self as relational and leads to a sense of responsibility. In the quote below, Barad refers to "matter," resurrecting scientific discourses; her suggestion emphasises the importance of touching encounters in the constitution of interspecies responsibility. She states

> In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations or response-ability: Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability: Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other (Barad, 2012:215)

Barad's insight underlines that care is not merely an act but a fundamental relational practice that shapes responsibilities towards one another, blurring the lines between human and

animal agency. As outlined in Chapter 5, in Noah's A.R.T., organisational practices are premised on this sense of responsibility, which interweaves neoliberal notions of care with relational practices of care. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 8; here, I will focus on the intricacies of the daily care practices in Ant and Herman's Story, where we meet Holly, a volunteer who is being supported to carry out an Animal Health Check.

*Fig.21. Ant's Story*

From this story, I will now consider notions of vulnerability and capability in the context of caring. In the previous section, I discussed how Miriam responded to feelings of vulnerability by narrating her capability to care for her hamster, Cuddles. Here, I will explore how immersion in the practices of interspecies caring can spark an invitation to "becoming-with" creating an affective experience that shifts between vulnerability and capability (Huopalainen, 2023). Ant's experience during the health check prompts a deeper consideration of the intricate dynamics of empathy, vulnerability, and care. I will first focus on the immediate, tangible actions that Holly takes to reassure Ant, as well as the subsequent

embodied vulnerability she experiences, including moments of rejection and shifting vulnerability.

Empathy evokes a sense of vulnerability (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). There is immense risk in attempting to feel and respond to the emotions of another. Timeto (2021) explains that animals' genetic and cultural positions, together with experiences of marginalisation, generate allegiances that foster relational responsibility. Care relations with animals provide an affective experience of the inevitability of vulnerability and capability in relationships (Harrison, 2008). Scooping Ant from his cage against his will makes him vulnerable so Holly attempts to reassure him with an intimate embrace cradling him close to her chest which sparks an affective embodied vulnerability in her. She is simultaneously vulnerable and capable. Holly knows that the health check is a procedure which Ant has little desire to be involved in, as not all touch is pleasurable (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), so in recognition of his vulnerability she tries to make him as comfortable and as settled as possible, allowing him to explore and eat in preparation for the intrusive process. Feeling pleased that Ant is eating and seems calmer, provides a sense of her capability to care, leading her to stroke him. The fleshy connection is Holly's attempt to reassure Ant whilst also seeking reassurance from him that her attempts to care have been sufficient, as she seeks care from Ant she evokes a further experience of vulnerability. Holly's practice of stroking is rejected. Ant shows his vulnerability by running away. The practice of interspecies care evokes an affective experience of shifting vulnerability in relational encounters.

Holly's practices of caring illustrate how vulnerability and capability are in flow (Gasper and Truong, 2010). The explanation of the process appears to demarcate a clarity in affective shifts of capability and vulnerability, but in reality, these happen in micro moments, generating an affective immersion in the process of caring. A human's grab simultaneously renders a guinea pig vulnerable and capable, as it physically resists by running, hiding, and squeaking (Carter and Charles, 2013). In the process, the human companion is also rendered powerful through

the act of being able to provide cuddles, yet simultaneously vulnerable as they await a positive response to their attempts to care. The animal is powerfully communicating its needs whilst remaining vulnerable to the human responses and capacity to meet that need. This moves the human companion, who is practising care through affective and embodied touching, leaving them vulnerable whilst also seeing themselves as powerful and capable in catering to the needs of the other. Holly's actions reflect her capability in attempting to care for Ant but also her vulnerability as she navigates the uncertainties and risks of the relational encounter. Such experiences create affective memories of caring that instil the uncertainties of relationality whilst establishing a sense of responsibility and capacity.

These moments of interaction between Holly and Ant, where vulnerability and capability are in flow, highlight the deeply intertwined nature of reciprocity in caring practices. Affective immersion in the practices of caring establishes relational reciprocity. For Noddings (2013: 139), "our obligation to summon the caring attitude is limited by the possibility of reciprocity". In interspecies care, touch is reciprocity (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The proximal and affective experience of cradling Ant close to her chest is a mutually beneficial act of caring. Holly is able to provide a safe embrace that reassures Ant, and being able to do this is nurturing for her. Similarly, Ant's acceptance and enjoyment from gnawing at a large piece of red pepper, is received and interpreted as his acknowledgement of appropriateness of her care. Ant's responsiveness to Holly's practices of care, produces "a recognition of fulfilment of relatedness – that induces joy" (Noddings, 2013:128). Thus, the practice of caring for Ant, is also nurturing their human companion. Holly is touched physically, psychologically and emotionally through the practices of caring which creates a memory of relationality that has lasting resonance.

The practice of interspecies caring has the hallmarks of a mutually beneficial relationship in an organisational context. Whilst the need to undertake health checks on working animals is part of a moral obligation to protect the vulnerable, attentiveness to their multisensorial

means of communication forms the basis of their agency and establishes a moral and ethical experience of interspecies caring. The affective emotionality of the encounters with the animal together with the embodied practices of caring formulate memories, at the heart of which lies the interdependency of being. In contrast with human relationality, a sense of safety is afforded within the human-animal relationship, making it the ideal environment for people to rebuild trust, establish new identities and reconnect with old habits of care that have become residual (Hamington, 2017). Most importantly, it provides an experience of mutual capabilities, whilst animals have been notoriously considered vulnerable, they are capable in influencing their care experiences, equally, whilst caring evoked a sense of vulnerability in their human companion, they also have the capacity to provide care experiences.

## The Slow Dance of Interspecies Care

Returning to Ant and Herman's Story above (Fig.20), I now consider the different experiences of touching interspecies encounters, focusing on Herman, a tortoise.

> "But he's hard on his shell, you can't cuddle him up. He chews the cabbage; I stroke his shell. He loves it, they love the feel, I feel myself slow right down, I feel it in my body, my breath, calm, quiet, he guides me to touch, too feed, to love. I'm with Herman and no-one else."
>
> (from Ant and Herman's Story)

Interspecies care is an affective, embodied, co-constituted experience. The physical sensation of soft skin against the hardness of Herman's shell is an "epidermal sensation" that connects the mind and body in the human companion (Maurette, 2018:x). Feeling his texture and temperature, along with other senses—such as seeing and interpreting Herman's physical size and watching his movements—changes how she strokes him, slowing down and stroking gently. This helps to calm her body and breath, creating a sense of immersion in "compassionate time" (Lynch, 2022:81). This multisensorial experience influences the

position and motion of the human body in relation to Herman the tortoise, experienced as *"slow[ing] right down."* A back-and-forth relational process of sense-making, incorporating the multisensorial, allows in-the-moment knowledge to become entangled with other affective and embodied knowledges of care. The sensorial experience of *"he's hard on his shell"* sparks consideration of what this means for the necessary practices of care —*"you can't cuddle him up."* The response to his sensorial being becomes mediated through reflective knowledge of how to care. The phrase *"you can't cuddle him up"* reflects a visceral connection with the inner self and the residual, affective knowledges of embodied care practices. Whilst these affective memories might offer insight into personal experiences of caring, they are also mediated by social choreographies of caring and their contextual appropriateness.

The encounter with Herman the tortoise shows the movement from affective experience to emotional response and feeling. Bekoff and Goodall (2007) explains the relationship between emotion and feeling. They suggest that an experience stimulates an emotional response which influences the body which is then interpreted and reflected upon in the brain and an emotional perspective is adopted. Touching Herman impacts the body and the breath, which becomes interpreted in the story as love. Despret (2004) suggests that expressing the feeling of love reflects an acceptance of the process of mutual becoming—a process that allows the self to be transformed by the agency of the other (Haraway, 2008). This affective mutuality is revealed linguistically, as seen in the way the human shifts pronouns when speaking about Herman. As Connolly (2023) explains in the context of human–horse relations, the use of pronouns illustrates this sense of mutuality, shifting back and forth between consideration of Herman's needs and wants, and what this means for their human companion. This movement highlights empathy in action. For instance, *"Herman, he's hard on his shell; you can't cuddle him up."* Here, the human acknowledges Herman's physicality, reflecting on how it affects their interaction. *"He chews the cabbage; I stroke his shell."* This interplay demonstrates the reciprocity of care: as Herman engages in an activity that brings him pleasure, the human responds with gentle touch. "*He loves it, they love the feel; I feel myself slow right down.*" The

human's experience of touch is not merely a response but an embodied interaction that fosters a deeper connection. "*I feel it in my body, my breath, calm, quiet; he guides me to touch, to feed, to love.*" This line encapsulates the profound emotional exchange, where Herman's presence calms the human and prompts an instinctive response of care. *"I'm with Herman and no-one else."* This final statement emphasises the intimacy of the moment, revealing how their relationship transcends the surrounding chaos, allowing both the human and animal to inhabit a shared space of vulnerability and relationality.

As the narrative unfolds, the importance of recognising and attending to Herman's agency becomes evident. This reflects an appreciation of their entangled subjectivity; who they are individually is the product of relational interactions. This has important resonance beyond the physical encounter. Acknowledging their intersubjective relationality provides the essential grounding for ensuring ethical and moral relationality. Whilst the assertion that Herman 'loves' being stroked might be questioned as a sentiment used to justify human practices, the mutual entanglement of subjectivity means that maintaining the interactive relationship is critical to a sense of self. Caring for the relationship necessitates taking responsibility to ensure that practices of care are attuned to the specific needs of their companion.

The multisensorial experience of caring for Herman forces the body to slow down. A relational immersion forces a responsibility to provide the best possible care. In interspecies relationships, such as with Herman, caring interrupts and interferes with the body. The modern-day dance of being in its hurried, busyness is halted as it becomes absorbed in the moment (Biehl, 2017). This makes way for an improvisational, compassionate, slow dance of interspecies caring. To slow down and attend to the affective experience of relationality is problematic for neoliberalism. Not only does the pace of neoliberal living reduce relationality and affective connectivity, but it is also enabling practices of injustice to prosper which has a disproportionate impact on those deemed to be vulnerable (Lynch, 2022). The human-animal organisation provides the affective experience of caring for Herman which slows the body

down, masking the complexities of fast-paced human relationality. This creates momentary immersion in the affective experience "*I'm with Herman and no-one else"*. The human companion attunes to their affective embodied experience, acknowledging their mutual roles in establishing and maintaining the relationship. This embodied encounter forms an affective memory of relational care. Memories of affective embodied care such as this have implications more broadly, whilst they establish the significance of relational interconnectivity, they also provide an experience of the self and the other as morally responsible and capable but additionally, these experiences further convey the moral importance of interspecies relationality.

As outlined in Chapter, 3 AAI is built on the premise that the human-animal bond leads to the production of oxytocin (Olmert, 2009). Whilst the mere presence of animals increases the production of the chemical, touching heightens levels of release, and touching dogs amplifies this further (Carter *et al*., 2008). This could explain Miriam's earlier claim, "*I've got a hamster but a hamster is not like a dog it's totally different".* But in the day-to-day practices of an organisation, the benefits of the engagement for human and animal have to be made without scientific evidence of oxytocin. Decisions are driven by care and made based on attentiveness and responsibility. As discussed earlier, Barad (2012:215) suggests, "Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability: Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other" suggesting that the affective experiences evokes a responsibility to care. Haptic and affective touch, stroking and feeling, establishes the interrelatedness of human experiences within an interspecies encounter which has lasting resonance (Maurette, 2018). When you touch and are touched you do not know who touches who (or what touches what) physically or emotionally, but you feel and experience the relationality, interconnectedness between self and other (Despret, 2004). The multisensorial practices of touch provide an alternative account of the benefits associated with the 'human-animal bond'. It helps unravel science fictions; replacing the rational with the affective, objectivity with subjectivity and separateness with interconnectedness. Thus, touching

experiences evoke the possibility of rewriting a story of the self and other as interconnected (Manning, 2007).

In the stories so far, there has been significant attention paid to the capacity of humans to interpret what animals need based on empathy. Kennedy (1992) and Wynne (2007) suggest that interspecies empathy is an anthropomorphic mistake. I will now consider examples of anthropomorphism in the context of AAI putting forward the argument that what matters is how assumptions evoke responsibility to the relationship and how this informs practices of care.

## Touching Connections: Anthropomorphism in AAI

Anthropomorphic claims are littered throughout the stories in this chapter. Work from ethology, outlined in Chapter 3, urges acceptance that mammals are emotional, feeling creatures, who have perspective and the capacity to care (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007; Balcombe, 2006). This work raises the profile of animal sentience whilst also emphasising the importance of remaining alert to the capacity for anthropomorphism. In human-animal relations, knowing what an animal is thinking has been extensively problematised, particularly in respect of the human tendency to anthropomorphise (Kennedy, 1992; Wynne 2007). Bekoff and Goodall (2007) have urged that when working with animals it is essential that humans are capable of looking through their eyes, suggesting our own emotional templates are a reliable guide for assessing emotion in animal companions.

Here, staying with Ant and Herman's Story, I focus on Tyler to explore how careful anthropomorphism (Bekoff, 2002) can contribute to practices of interspecies care that are mutually beneficial. Mary, a regular client at Noah's A.R.T., is experiencing cramping and pain associated with an underlying health condition.

> "… but you can see she's in pain. It really hurts, please. Massage, breathe, deeply breathe. Hold hands, massage. Pushing, sniffing, determined, I'm here, Tyler, I know something isn't okay. Let me sit here. Let me be with you"
>
> (from Ant and Herman's Story)

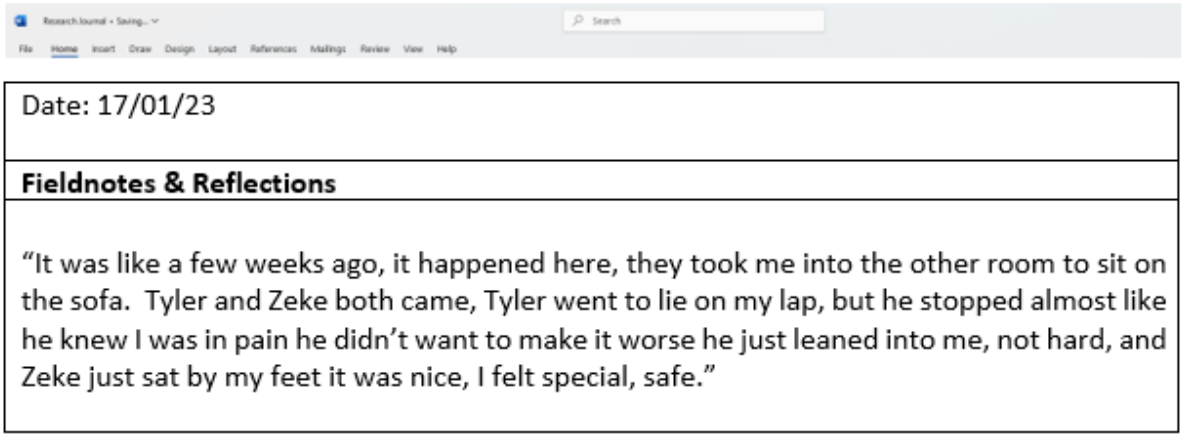
The multisensorial happenings have elicited Tyler's attention and sparked his canine interrogation, pushing, sniffing and sitting close by. Dogs' attunement to humans has an extensive history influencing their care work over a number of years (DeMello, 2012). In human illness, dogs seek close proximity to provide emotional and practical assistance with caring (Wells, 2009a). However, there are distinct anthropomorphic interpretations here; the suggestion that Tyler knows that something untoward is happening "*I know something isn't okay"* could be projectional (Mead, 1956). But alongside his movements, his choice to sit nearby could be reflective of an affective connection to Mary's need to be reassured and cared for, as Gruen (2015:46) suggests dogs are "emotional sponges". The interpretation of Tyler's behaviour whilst anthropomorphic is respectful and attentive to the agentic capacity of Tyler. In an AAI organisation anthropomorphic appraisals are prolific. I will look to these further in Chapter 7 and consider how careful anthropomorphism can provide a mutually beneficial approach to AAI work that ensures interspecies flourishing.

In the ongoing, to-ing and fro-ing of care work, touching, massaging, breathing, Tyler places himself beside the happenings. *"Let me be with you"* an anthropomorphic assumption assigned to Tyler's positioning, in the centre of this intimate relational process. This positioning is significant to the ongoing therapeutic work happening in the space. Seeing she is in pain and the statement "*it really hurts, please."* suggests she is asking for care, which evokes a sense of vulnerability. It is widely purported that dogs specifically can sense human vulnerabilities and respond through their behaviours and gestures (Hare, 2007; Horowitz, 2009). If Gruen's (2015:46) perception that dogs are "emotional sponges" has some weight, then this may lead to increased levels of stress leading the dog to need reassurance from their human companions. What matters is perhaps not what has caused Tyler to sit in this position,

it is not possible to fully know why Tyler is close by, but how his presence is responded to. As Aaltola (2013) explains if the encounter fosters a relational connectedness, then a responsibility to the relationship is evoked.

Before moving on, I wish to consider how Tyler's decision to sit close to her was interpreted as an act of care by Mary,

*Fig.22. Fieldnotes: Mary, Tyler and Zeke*



Date: 17/01/23

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

"It was like a few weeks ago, it happened here, they took me into the other room to sit on the sofa. Tyler and Zeke both came, Tyler went to lie on my lap, but he stopped almost like he knew I was in pain he didn't want to make it worse he just leaned into me, not hard, and Zeke just sat by my feet it was nice, I felt special, safe."

Like many clients who attend the organisation, Mary experiences both mental and physical health challenges. Here, she explains how she felt after Tyler and Zeke came to sit with her following a medical episode during an AAI session. The excerpt is taken from my fieldnotes. Mary is engaged in making snuffle mats for the dogs and is prompted to share her recent experiences. Her interpretation is reflective, suggesting she is attentive to Tyler's behaviour, taking into consideration his actions and her needs, as she observes and interprets his decision-making. *"Tyler went to lie on my lap,"* but she thinks he didn't because *"he knew I was in pain."* Instead, knowing she was in pain and wanting to provide comfort, Tyler *"just leaned into me, not hard."* Tyler and Zeke have chosen to be near her. The dogs have the freedom to move around the spaces, with the exception of the animal welfare room (though this often doesn't stop them!). They noticed her, and she was touched by the experience,

saying, *"it was nice, I felt special, safe."* Zeke and Tyler enjoy proximal relationships with their human companions, and being close to Mary provides a beneficial experience of such a relationship. For animals, memories of the pleasure and joy experienced through physical touch can enable the continuation of certain survival behaviours and encourage their close proximity to human companions (Balcombe, 2006). Equally, being close is beneficial for Mary, as she feels cared for by them. Whilst the explanation for their proximity cannot be definitively established, Mary's interpretation and response suggests a relational connectedness, where Zeke and Tyler's capacity to care for her evokes her desire to care for them.

Tyler and Zeke's decision to be close to Mary during a previous session has become a remembered moment of being cared for—one that she has since chosen to share with others in the group. Mary's experience of having a medical episode rendered her in need of care, sparking a sense of vulnerability. This affective experience was absorbed and subsequently recalled, forming part of her narrative identity. The affective state of vulnerability, alongside the felt sense of being cared for by Tyler and Zeke, led to her feeling special and safe. This has become not just a memory of the moment itself, but a positive memory of relationality—a meaningful experience of being cared for. In retelling this story, Mary reinforces it as part of her emotional sense of self. The animals provide a focus for the conversation (Jau and Hodgson, 2018), helping to detract from her immediate need for care, whilst still illustrating an emerging recognition of the shifting nature of vulnerability and capability in relationships—the ontological basis of human being.

In this instance, assuming Tyler and Zeke's proximity to Mary as an act of care recognises animals' care work in the organisation (Coulter, 2016). To provide care for others, requires the practice of being cared for. It appears from the stories that Tyler and Zeke sat with Mary by choice, and they felt cared for by the experience of being close. But humans have an ethical and moral responsibility, particularly in organisational contexts, to reflect upon the broader

implications of animal choices in respect of their welfare. Human capacity to empathise, evokes consideration of the demands of care work placed on Tyler and Zeke. Whilst it is impossible to know how the experience impacted on Tyler or Zeke affectively and psychologically, considering the demands of caring alerts to the possibility that this experience could have been emotionally demanding for the dogs (Gruen, 2015). If, like his human colleagues, Tyler was affected by an intense embodied interconnectedness, then there is an organisational responsibility to act to protect his welfare. To consider that the affective experience of illness evokes Tyler's need to care, may suggest that his exposure to these experiences needs to be carefully managed. I will consider how organisational practices facilitate care in this way in Chapter 8.

A recurring consideration in this chapter has been the role of memories of caring in the practice of care. I will now move on to consider how affective embodied experiences of caring, can shape memories, vulnerability, and self-perception.

## Navigating Vulnerability: The Complex Dynamics of Interspecies Care

As discussed above, memories of affective embodied care have implications beyond the moment. AAI organisations aim to generate improvements in mental health and wellbeing through the benefits of the human-animal animal bond (Fine, 2015). The organisational context provides an affective experience that highlights the capacity of animals to influence what is happening. Donaldson and Kymlicka, (2012:5) suggest that in organisations "people must foster the circumstances and trusting relationships with which animals can exercise agency and then interpret the signals that animals give regarding their subjective good, preferences or choices". Animals are driven by their needs and wants, often advocating for them in any way they can. This ability to fight for or secure what they want, by influencing the behaviour of those around them can evoke reflection on the agentic capacity of the self. This has implications for the capacity to care for oneself, which is specifically relevant to the role of the AAI organisation within the neoliberal context.

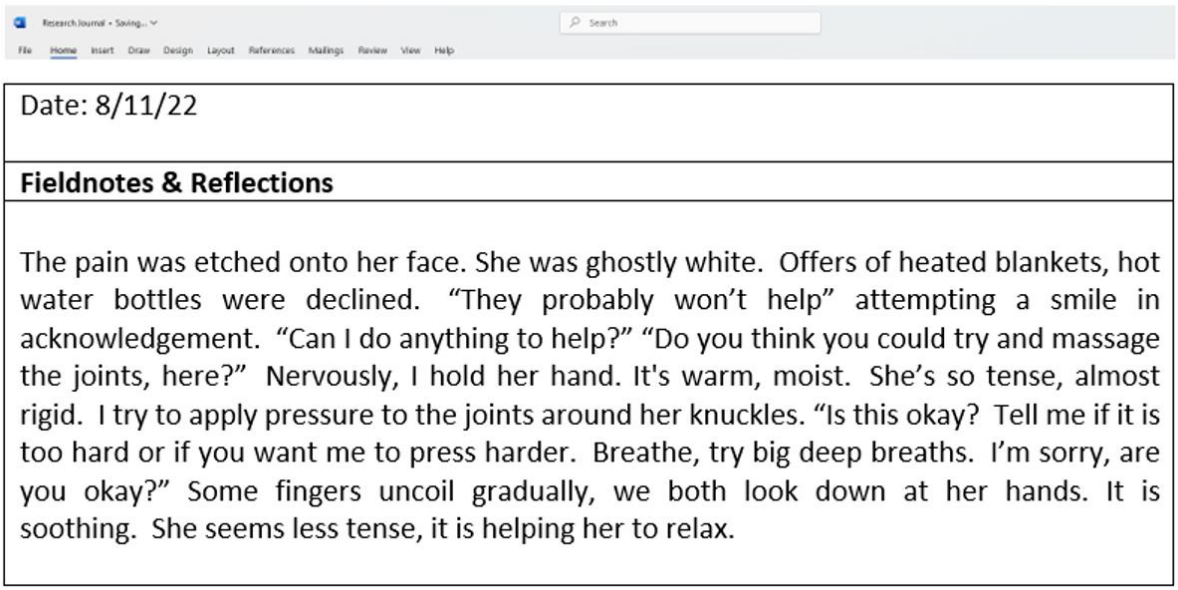
Above, we heard how Mary felt cared for by Zeke and Tyler following a medical episode. Here, I return to Ant and Herman's Story (Fig. 20) to consider Mary's need for care and her capacity to ask for help.

> "…but you can see she's in pain. It really hurts, please. Massage, breathe, deeply breathe. Hold hands, massage."
>
> (from Ant and Herman's Story)

In the busyness of the space, Mary is experiencing pain and asks for help—specifically, help that involves the intimacy of touch and massage. Whilst Mary knows what she needs, her need for care renders her vulnerable. However, experiences with the animals in this organisation have perhaps begun to influence her understanding of vulnerability. Clients like Mary absorb experiences with the animals in which their capacity to communicate their needs and wants is both respected and responded to. The animal in need of care is agentic and powerful, influencing the behaviour of others. Whilst needing care makes one vulnerable, asking for care simultaneously evokes a sense of capability and vulnerability, sparking an affective experience of the flows between these states (Noddings, 2013; Gasper and Truong, 2010). In this instance, Mary's sense of vulnerability and capability is exposed in the context of human relationships. In the midst of the tussles between capability and vulnerability, Mary advocates for what she needs: massage. The intimacy of touch once again evokes a sense of vulnerability. These shifts between vulnerability and capability reflect changes in her affective state; Mary is not necessarily considering this consciously. However, her experiences within the interspecies environment have a therapeutic significance that influences self-perceptions (Gorman, 2017). The respect for the agentic capacity of the animals suggests a corresponding respect for the agentic capacity of humans. Having the capacity to advocate for one's needs is a marker of citizenship, particularly in a neoliberal healthcare context. Yet, being able to assert a need for relationality may not align with neoliberal ideals, but it is significant in the effort to challenge the notion that care is solely an individual responsibility.

The complexities inherent in human relationships often complicate the practice of care, as they introduce layers of emotional dynamics and vulnerabilities that can challenge even the most experienced caregivers. Initially I assumed that Mary's request for a massage indicated her vulnerability. In spite of my practice in human care relations, there remains the potential to project our emotions onto others (Hamington, 2004). The openness to engage in intimate touch sparked a concern in me. However, reflecting upon this, I suggest that this might be a case where I unwittingly projected some of my own feelings onto her. To massage Mary would make me vulnerable. Whilst stroking and responding to the reactions of a guinea pig or canine sit fairly comfortably with me, I felt anxious and vulnerable at the prospect of trying to massage her joints and alleviate her pain. This insight captures the essence of my recorded reflections following the experience.

*Fig.23. Fieldnotes: Massage*



Date: 8/11/22

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

The pain was etched onto her face. She was ghostly white. Offers of heated blankets, hot water bottles were declined. "They probably won't help" attempting a smile in acknowledgement. "Can I do anything to help?" "Do you think you could try and massage the joints, here?" Nervously, I hold her hand. It's warm, moist. She's so tense, almost rigid. I try to apply pressure to the joints around her knuckles. "Is this okay? Tell me if it is too hard or if you want me to press harder. Breathe, try big deep breaths. I'm sorry, are you okay?" Some fingers uncoil gradually, we both look down at her hands. It is soothing. She seems less tense, it is helping her to relax.

I consider that my angst in these fieldnotes is palpable, reaffirming that perceptions and experiences of care are multiple and diverse; individual memories of care are affectively triggered during the practice of caring. I was surprised that the thought of providing a touching experience triggered such a palpable sense of vulnerability. My professional

background in education, where no-touch or limited touch has prevailed, perhaps significantly influenced my response, highlighting how institutional norms can shape emotional reactions. This discomfort resonates with Cuddles' Story earlier in the chapter, where the complexities of affective touching experiences entangle with embodied experiences of neoliberal notions of care. Miriam's narrative about caring for Cuddles parallels my reflections, as both rely on the use of language to articulate our experiences and emphasise the importance of storytelling and reflection in understanding the self. On a broader scale, these emerging threads point to the reality that learning how to care is a lifelong journey of relational experiences, extending beyond traditional parent-child dynamics. It suggests the necessity for alternative relational opportunities in various contexts, such as community programmes, professional training, and educational settings, to foster a more inclusive understanding of care and connection.

## Summary

In this chapter, I focus on the touching interspecies encounters that respond to the research question: What is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation? This discussion is situated within the context of neoliberal organisations and also considers a second research question: Can interspecies care help challenge neoliberal values? Interspecies relationships are rooted in affective connectivity, which sparks the process of "becoming-with". Routine practices of caring—such as stroking, cleaning, and conducting health checks—provide an embodied experience that evokes imaginative empathetic connections. The affective bond between human and animal makes these relationships sacrosanct, fostering acute attentiveness to multisensorial means of communication. A desire to protect, both the animal and the relationship, refines the practice of care through attentiveness, empathy, and responsiveness, which slows down the self and allows for absorption in the feelings of the other, thereby establishing the agency of the animal. Likewise, the human companion's capacity to empathise, interpret, and respond to the animal's needs reflects their own capacity to care. However, throughout this experience, vulnerability and capability ebb and

flow. This intense interplay of vulnerability and capability leaves a lasting impression, creating affective stories of caring that foster a sense of "the inherent and continuous susceptibility of corporeal life to the unchosen and the unforeseen" (Harrison, 2008:427). The organisational context means that interspecies relationality sparks additional forms of relational connectedness. Together, these experiences gradually interrupt neoliberal narratives of self-care, independence, and autonomy. The practical experiences of caring for the animals instils a related connectedness that facilitates a slow rewriting of the story of self.

# Chapter 7
# Caring Conversations: The Power of Language in Interspecies Relationships

## Chapter Overview

This chapter builds on Chapter 6, continuing to focus on what is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation and further exploring how interspecies care might offer opportunities for mutual flourishing within the context of neoliberal values. To delve deeper into these themes, this chapter takes you into the heart of a health check, focusing on Nutella and Oreo, whose human companions, Holly and Katie, navigate the experience alongside some interspecies interferences from Tyler. In the previous chapter, I highlighted the affective and embodied power of touch in interspecies relationships. Here, I explore two related components: first, the co-constitution of the language of interspecies care and how this contributes to mutually beneficial care practices; and second, how interspecies relationality within organisations sparks other relationships that significantly impact the health and wellbeing of both humans and animals. Drawing from Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story, I begin by examining the "ways animals talk to us" (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007:15) and how and why these interactions are translated into human language. I analyse the structure and form of the communication to reveal how it not only acknowledges the agency of the animals but also creates connections among those present impacting upon a sense of self as relational. I argue that shared marginalisation between human and animal provides a safe space to experience relational vulnerability, which is crucial for addressing broader societal inequalities. Next, I turn to the role of small talk within healthcare contexts. I discuss how small talk creates a caring soundscape, where the focus on animals alleviates the pressures of human interaction. I explore how narrating the animal's perspective—despite its anthropomorphic undertones—can challenge neoliberal ideals of citizenship and care. I also further consider how anthropomorphism supports caregiving practices and how paying attention to what is spoken

reveals the status of animals within the organisational infrastructure. In the later sections, I discuss how language helps narrate the actions and intentions of both humans and animals, thereby informing caregiving practices. I examine how affective and embodied experiences centred on the animal can foster other forms of human connectedness, which leads to the suggestion that there are mutual benefits of organisational experiences of animal care which can have implications for pet purchasing and rehoming.

## Co-Constructing Interspecies Care: Bodies and Words

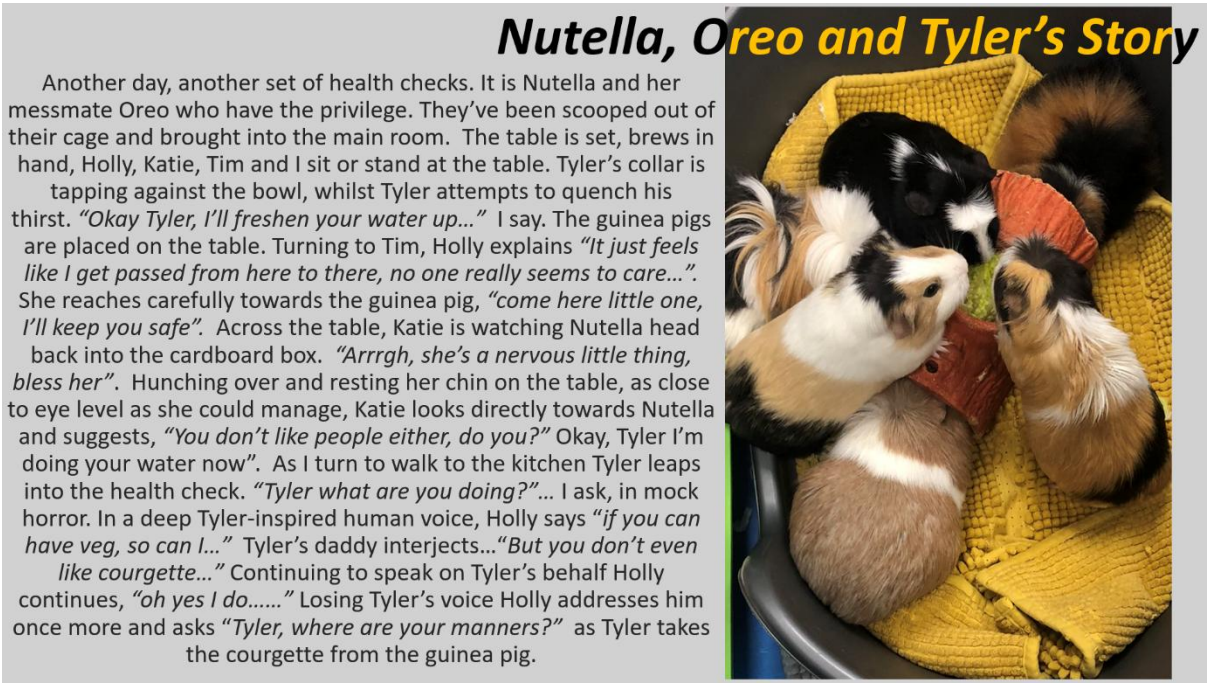



*Fig.24. Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story*

As I identified in Chapter 6, the health checks are a routine practice of care within the organisation. Nutella, Oreo, and Tyler's Story is about the process of carrying out a guinea pig health check. In this chapter, I focus more intensively on the language of interspecies caring, starting with the ways in which humans and animals co-construct a shared language and moving on to consider how this contributes to the affective and embodied practice of

interspecies caring. Animals' inability to speak has perpetuated perceptions of their objectivity (Hurn, 2012), and attention to human talk is often charged with anthropocentrism (Connolly, 2023), making language a problematic area in interspecies relationships. Yet relationships need a form of language to be sustained (Gilligan, 1982). All caring relies upon attentiveness to different forms of bodily communication, not merely talk (Moser, 2010). The language formed in interspecies relationships is important to consider; rather than focusing on the animals' inability to talk, it is also crucial to consider the ways they do communicate (Coulter, 2016). The slow dance of interspecies caring, as explored in Chapter 6, allows us to think about the to-ing and fro-ing of communication across human-animal relationships. It focuses attention on how caring relations are co-constituted through a series of moves; each micro-move made by human or animal shapes and reshapes the relationship, informing and shifting practices of caring. Mutually respectful interspecies relationships are fostered through attentiveness to the different forms in which animals communicate their moves in the dance. Whilst there is a lot of human talk in this extract, the talk represents a series of moves in a "dance of relating" (Haraway, 2008:25). These moves are set in and amongst the multiple dynamic gestures and actions that animals and humans make, which inform the practices of caring. As Despret (2013) argues, attending to these bodily interactions—and including the researcher's own embodied engagement—is not a methodological weakness but a way of making visible the knowledge that is co-created in interspecies relationships. For instance, the multiple moves that lead to the sound of Tyler's collar tapping against an empty water bowl or the sequence of moves prior to leaping onto the table and sourcing some courgette. Without talk, Tyler's moves provide visual and auditory information that informs human interpretation of his needs and desires.

Whilst there is a societal familiarity with dogs and their means of communication, there is also a significant attentiveness to Nutella's modes of communication during the health check. Her movements toward the cardboard box evoke a physical response in her human companion, influencing interpretations of how she might be feeling. In the practice of caring

bodies are significant. As Nutella runs away and Tyler leaps onto the table, Katie makes a series of deliberate bodily moves, *"hunching over*" and *"resting her chin on the table"* to adjust her position to "*obtain as close to eye level as she could manage"* looking *"directly towards Nutella".* These bodily actions attempt to establish a more intimate connection, which sparks further verbal exchanges when Katie remarks, *"You don't like people either, do you?"* In between each of Katie's verbal moves, one can infer the multiple responses from Nutella, Oreo, Tyler, and others involved in the health check. I have attempted to break down the practices of interspecies caring into defined moves, but it is challenging to ascertain with clarity 'who-did-what-to-whom'. Relationality is inherently messy and entangled; as Barad (Barad, 2007: ix) explains, "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another… but to lack an independent, self-contained existence". Moreover, the moves are a "response to the arrangement and distribution of events and actors in space and time," (Law, 2010:67), suggesting that further attention must be paid to how the physical space facilitates the co-construction of attentiveness. I will revisit the significance of the space in Chapter 8.

I now return to the story to consider how Tyler's moves spark other moves including talk which drive the embodied practices of care. I consider how talk provides a response which summarises the process of interpretation of multiple forms of interspecies communication and frames responsibility for care which indicates the moves to come.

> "Tyler's collar is tapping against the bowl, whilst Tyler attempts to quench his thirst. "Okay Tyler, I'll freshen your water up…"
>
> "Okay, Tyler I'm doing your water now". As I turn to walk to the kitchen Tyler leaps into the health check".
>
> (from Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story)

Human talk has a role to play in the development of shared interspecies language. The first statement summarises the multisensorial experiences that led me to determine that Tyler needs water. Tyler's movements towards his bowl to source water, and the subsequent

sounds of his name tag jangling against the bowl stimulate the sentiment "*Okay Tyler, I'll freshen your water up…".* This interpretation of Tyler's need for water is based on his actions. This culminates in the statement "Okay Tyler, I'll freshen your water up…" asserting that I have adopted responsibility for this care need. Connolly (2023) explains that speaking these thoughts out loud is a means of ensuring animals' contributions to the situation are not silenced. Whilst the words suggest attentiveness and responsiveness to animal communication, they also draw attention to how interspecies languages are co-constituted. Whilst Tyler cannot *talk back* the human sentiments provide a space which draws attention back to Tyler, focusing further attention on his embodied means of communicating. Whilst these moments that led to the talk have passed, talking to Tyler about changing his water articulates an awareness of my body and its relationship with other bodies and objects in the space. Whilst it culminates in talk, the experience was sparked by sound and movement, sparking cognitive and affective processes leading to interpretation (Mol *et al.,* 2010). Attentiveness to what I see and hear Tyler doing influences how I feel, what I say and what I do. There is a relational connection between self and other, which is interpreted in the context of time and space, affectively influencing how I choose to respond and thus how I choose to care. The decision to share this thinking out loud may be influenced by the relational focus of the organisational context; it could act as a form of small talk which lessens the intensity of human relations and emphasises the centrality of animals. I will consider the role of small talk in a health organisation later in this chapter.

Having considered what might be perceived as a marginal aspect of the health check, I now turn to the process itself, focusing on the practice of conducting Nutella and Oreo's health checks as an opportunity to learn the language and practice of interspecies care. Returning to the story, Holly and Katie put to work the skills of care, attending to the animals' different modes of communication, and this is accompanied by embodied moves in the form of talk and bodily expressions that convey the process of feeling and sensing the affective experience (MacLure, 2013).

"come here little one, I will keep you safe"
"arrrgh, she's a nervous little thing, bless her"
"you don't like people either, do you?"
"Tyler, where are your manners?"

(from Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story)

In feminist care theory, practice and dialogue are central to understanding how to care (Noddings, 1984). In interspecies relationships, dialogic encounters are fostered through various forms of *talk* between humans and animals. During the health check, Katie verbally expresses the sentiment, *"arrrgh, she's a nervous little thing, bless her,"* whilst this is a response to observed behaviours, it also represents a verbal expression of the cognitive process of empathy. In conversations, such verbal expressions draw the attention of others. In this context, whilst Katie expresses her thoughts, the focus remains on Nutella. This moment of attention provides an opportunity to learn more about Nutella's behaviour, either affirming or refining the interpretation of her nervousness. For Katie, articulating her thoughts in words is a practice of developing relationality, reflecting an openness to different thoughts and opinions. The attention given to Nutella's care serves as the catalyst. The unknowable mind of the guinea pig renders Katie open to learning (Barnes, 2015), in a way she might not experience in human relationships. Her desire to care effectively for Nutella allows her to share her thoughts, offering others the chance to confirm or challenge her perceptions. Aaltola (2013) suggests that in the practice of empathy, what matters is that a new subjective reality is being constructed. For Katie this involves making sense of the world in relationship with others.

Language provides insight into the practice of interspecies empathy. The multiple excerpts of talking that transpire during the health check reflect a move or series of moves in response to what the guinea pig communicates. Statements like *"I will keep you safe," "she's a nervous little thing," and "you don't like people either, do you?"* can be seen as expressions of feeling and sensing the embodied communication of the companion animals (MacLure, 2013). These words are an outward expressions of a desire to care for the vulnerable guinea pig, but they

may also be viewed as anthropomorphic projections (Mead, 1956). Bekoff and Goodall (2007:128) suggests that anthropomorphism is born out of empathy: "I am feeling the emotion directly, without words or even a full, conscious understanding of the animals' actions." Thus, trying to assess whether this talk is anthropomorphic or empathetic is less important because, in the practice of empathy, anthropomorphism is inevitable (Irvine, 2004). Taking Bekoff and Goodall together with MacLure's suggestions, these words provide insight into the emotions of the human companions; the need for safety or the sense of nervousness reflects how the animal has evoked these feelings in them. Such sentiments may reflect a sense of embodied vulnerability evoked through the practice of caring, implying a need for reciprocity of care—a need to be cared for. Thus, what is spoken is an attempt to make sense of the multiple affective and entangled sensations that the body experiences, forming part of the dance of interspecies caring that inspires further connections and actions. Rather than fixing a truth, the words that are spoken spark further moves in the ongoing practice of "becoming-with".

As mentioned earlier, these encounters take place in an organisational context, and the capacity to care is facilitated by the organisational infrastructures (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023; Kandel *et al.,* 2023). The entanglement of people and animals provide embodied experiences of the subjective shifts that occur in the practice of caring. Perpetual moves refocus attention from human to animal, unravelling perceptions of positionality as care-recipient or care-giver. At the start of the story, Holly shares with Tim that her care experience was not-caring stating "*It just feels like I get passed from here to there, no one really seems to care…"*. Similar to Mary's experience in the previous chapter, Holly's capacity to enter into a dialogic relationship suggests she feels safe in the space, a space in which her experiences are listened to and she is cared for (Gorman, 2017; Newbigging *et al*., 2020). In her sentiment she adopts the position of care recipient; what makes this more complex is that, in the interspecies organisational context, the presence of the animals allows Holly to move from care-recipient into the role of care-giver. Her reflections on her care experience outside of the organisation

suggest she has a need to be acknowledged and cared for, hence, in part, why she attends the Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation. Talking out loud about her experiences of care focuses attention on her, which evokes a sense of vulnerability as she awaits a caring response. She attempts to respond to the discomfort this evokes in herself by connecting and engaging with Oreo: *"Come here little one, I will keep you safe,"* repositioning attention back onto the animal, and in doing so, reasserting herself as a caregiver. Equally, this verbal interaction suggests that she appreciates that Oreo has the capacity to quell feelings of vulnerability whilst she can provide a source of comfort or reassurance that will keep Oreo safe. There is reciprocity in the caring relationship. This micro-encounter provides a rich and complex experience of her agentic capacity whilst also recognising Oreo's capacity to care, which informs her perception of self and the animal other; a new subjective reality is being constructed (Aaltola, 2013).

The intricacies of the moment have the power to unsettle perceptions of needing care. Societally, to need care is often equated with vulnerability, lacking power, autonomy, and capability (Tronto, 1993). Holly and Katie have internalised these ideas based on embodied experiences of care that reinforce this doctrine. The notion that domestic animals require human care, rendering them vulnerable, is part of their human attractiveness (Lorenz, 1991). In this context, this creates a shared experience of marginalisation between humans and animals. Yet, the complex affective experience of interspecies care generates an embodied memory in which both humans and animals are agentic. As Holly learns to shake off feelings of vulnerability and assert her sense of capability, she also recognises the agentic capacity of her companion species. Equally, Holly feels her own agency as she carefully reaches toward the guinea pig, and her ability to express her capacity to "keep you safe" is significant in understanding how vulnerability and capability flow within relationships. This shared experience of marginalisation generates a kinship which "provides the conditions of possibility … to change how we understand the relationships among the categories that define humans and nonhuman animals in a way that has important implications" (Weaver,

2013:691). The recognition of mutual agency in this relational encounter becomes pivotal in addressing systemic experiences of oppression and injustice. I will develop this argument further in Chapters 8 and 9.

As I have explained, the emphasis on talk in human-animal animal relationships often raises concerns. Turning away from what is being said and considering the linguistic form of the interactions offers insight into perceptions of interconnectedness. Following her exchange with Tim, Holly's initial engagement with an animal companion is with Oreo, in which she indicates her capacity to keep her safe. This is framed as a statement which may be a subconscious but intentional strategy that aims to avoid questions from others. Interrogation through questions could cast doubt on her capacity to care, reigniting a sense of vulnerability which she is trying to escape from. Whilst Katie watches Nutella head to the cardboard box, she comments on her nervousness again, using a statement but as she shifts her body positioning "*Hunching over and resting her chin on the table, as close to eye level as she could manage"* she asks "*you don't like people either, do you?"* Lien (2022) suggests that eye contact with animals can deepen the affective experience of interspecies connectivity. Whilst her statement creates a connection with Nutella, her question is respectful of the guinea pig's agency and her capacity for choice. The question establishes a space in the dance which focuses attention intensively on Nutella and awaits her next move which is interpreted in light of the question "*you don't like people either, do you?".* Whilst the practice of asking Nutella is recognition of her agency, the use of questions suggests that Katie is open to the practice of mutual becoming (Haraway, 2016; Despret, 2005).

The practice of carrying out the health check is significant to how Holly and Katie understand themselves and others. The affective experiences become internalised, informing their story of self. Having had the opportunity to practise being a care-giver sparks an appreciation of how vulnerability is inherent in relationality (Harrison, 2008). Experiencing this in the context of human-animal relationships removes the complexities of human interaction. Structural

perceptions of animal vulnerability mean that human companions can enter these relationships with a moral obligation and a sense of being able to care, which dilutes the feeling of being vulnerable evoked through being a care recipient. Vulnerability arises within the process of providing care, but because the starting point was a position of feeling competent and capable, the vulnerability that arises becomes an affective platform on which to rebuild a sense of self. As Manning suggests, affective and embodied experiences "open us up to a story we have not heard" (2007:13). For Holly and Katie, practising and speaking about caring for the animals helps to create a new story of the self, which reflects their need for relationality and the vulnerabilities inherent in such experiences.

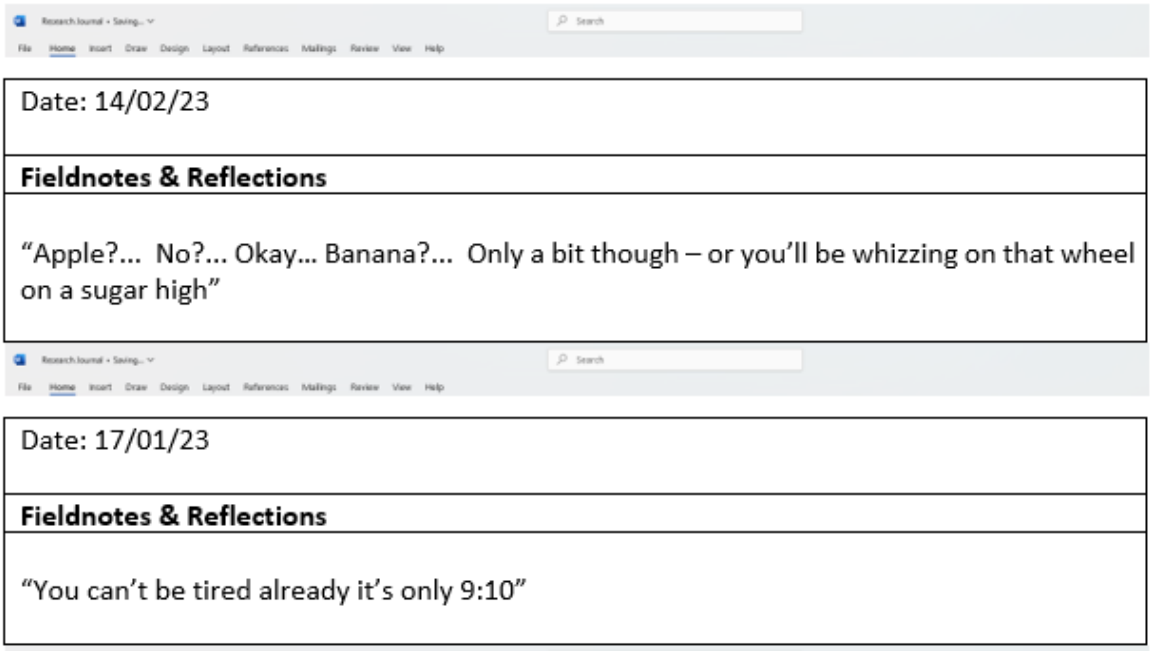
In this section, I have explored how humans and animals develop a shared interspecies language through the practices of caring. I examined how the practice of caring during a health check fosters attentiveness to the ways "animals talk to us" (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007:15) and highlighted the role of verbal communication in choreographing respectful, relational interactions. I considered how cognitive and emotional responses to the animal's behaviour are translated into words, and how sharing these thoughts provides further opportunities to refine the practice of care, contributing to mutual flourishing. I argue that practising care provides an experience where structural vulnerability intersects with relational vulnerability, fostering a kinship which has implications for tackling inequality and oppression (Haraway, 2008).

I will now move on to consider the role of small talk in the context of the organisation, and then focus on how playful use of anthropomorphic talk can be beneficial to the practice of caring and the formation of relationality.

## Interspecies Small Talk: Fostering Relational Care Beyond Words

In this section, I consider the mutual benefits of interspecies small talk in the context of an interspecies organisation. As I have explored above, dialogue aids understanding of care practices (Noddings, 1984). Narrating practices of care in the organisation constitutes a form of interspecies small talk. Chatting to Tyler about fetching his water could be considered a form of small talk. In health and social care settings, small talk aims to lubricate power differences, attempting to build mutually respectful relationships. In a human-animal care organisation, the use of *small talk* (Ragan, 2000) has benefits for both human and animal inhabitants, fostering mutually respectful interspecies relationships. Here are some further examples of interspecies *small talk* recorded during the fieldwork.

Fig.25. Fieldnotes: Small Talk



| Date: 14/02/23 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "Apple?... No?... Okay... Banana?... Only a bit though – or you'll be whizzing on that wheel on a sugar high" |

| Date: 17/01/23 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "You can't be tired already it's only 9:10" |

| Date: 29/09/22 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "I know it's warm… I'll get you a cool mat?" |

| Date: 6/12/22 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "Is that a wee wiggle? Wait then, let me get a towel." |

Fig.25. Fieldnotes: Small Talk (continued)

The small talk adopts a similar choreography to the form of talk used in the health check. There is an abundance of questions, some accompanied with responses, there is attentiveness to the relational encounter—for instance "…*Apple*?... No?... Okay… Banana?..." —which opens up a space in which to imagine or reassess the animal's choices. The focus of the talk centres around the animal's welfare needs, such as sleep patterns, food preferences, toilet habits, and body temperatures, all of which are pertinent to both human and animal health and wellbeing. Whilst the focus on the animal frames the small talk in health parlance, the way in which this talk is spoken is also significant. In human-animal relationships, the form of talk, particularly with dogs, has been likened to the maternal practice of motherese (Hirsch-Pasek and Treiman, 1982). Whilst I can hear loud and clear Haraway's (2003) adamant voice that dogs are not babies, a similar pattern of human talk has been employed when relating to dogs and other animals. Initially referred to as "doggerel" (Hirsch-Pasek and Treiman, 1982:229) but now more generally referred to as pet-directed speech (PDS) (Burnham *et al.,* 2024), there is a structure and form to human-animal talk which reflects

responsiveness to the relationship, similar to that used in parent-child interactions. In the small talk examples here, the prosody of the questions establishes a form of inquisitiveness that reaffirms the centrality of "becoming-with". This is combined with the acoustic form of PDS, which typically uses a higher pitch and slower tempo. Together, these linguistic practices can be seen as an adjustment to the embodied experience of the human-animal relationship, refining the practice of interspecies caring. Whilst the questions actively seek out the agentic contributions of the animal, the pitch and tempo also accommodate the acutely different hearing frequencies of animals.

Small talk in the human–animal organisation is mutually beneficial. Whilst it creates a soundscape that structures verbal interactions with animals, it also contributes to the infrastructure of care experienced by both humans and animals. Third-sector AAI organisations aim to provide opportunities for people to build relationships (Galardi et al., 2021; Newbigging et al., 2020). The focus on the animals is critical to the decision to participate within the organisation and this forms the basis upon which relationality is fostered. For the people who attend the organisation, talking—specifically small talk—that focuses attention on them and their lives before they are ready, or attempting to ask questions about how they feel can be counter-productive to the holistic impact of the intervention (NICE, 2013). Thus, talking to Tyler for instance "*You can't be tired already it's only 9:10"* or narrating practices of caring *"Is that a wee wiggle? Wait then, let me get a towel.*" distracts from feelings of discomfort experienced in unfamiliar situations and shifts attention away from human relationships whilst offering some insight into the animal's character or needs. Animals provide a focus for attention, both visual and conversational, which lessens the responsibility to conform to conventional relational practices such as making eye contact or talk with others. The practice of small talk establishes ongoing attentiveness to the animals' actions and behaviours refining our understanding of how "animals talk to us" whilst incidentally becoming immersed in a network of other relationships (Bekoff and Goodall, 2007:15).

Having looked at the micro-interactions of small talk and considered them in the context of the organisation, it is important to consider how small talk in health and social care contexts can also help to intervene in neoliberal discourses of self-care. As I discussed in Cuddles' Story in Chapter 6, societal perception of the ideal citizen as independent, autonomous and entrepreneurial is sustained by societal institutions (Lynch, 2022), impacting on human subjectivity and shaping perceptions of what it means to care and how care should be practised, through discourses of choice, autonomy, and independence. Organisational small talk in third sector organisations (TSO) has the power to create a resistance to these discourses. Whilst small talk is potentially anthropomorphic it helps to narrate a story of caring, offering insight into the component parts of care. Attentiveness to the body language of Tyler, who is sleeping on the sofa, assuming responsibility to alleviate perceptions of discomfort by sourcing a cool mat and combining knowledge of animal needs with affective and embodied experiences are all narrated out loud. This small talk plays a significant role in developing embodied understandings of care. As Noddings (2013) explained, narrating care practices offers benefits in terms of developing understanding of relationality and connectedness. Talking about experiences of care is a key component of the praxis that establishes the mutual embodied choreography of caring between human and animal. The practice of human-animal care evokes an affective experience that becomes stored as a memory of how care feels. Repeated experiences of care in this way help to intervene in neoliberal discourses of care. This use of small talk helps to mobilise a relational discourse of care.

In the next section, I move on to consider how anthropomorphic talk can have mutual benefits. I consider how practising the process of interspecies empathy through anthropomorphic talk conveys an openness to "becoming-with". Then, I focus on what is said and suggest that this provides insight into perceptions of animal's status in the organisational context.

## Anthropomorphism in Interspecies Care: Shaping Cultures of Care

Further into Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story (Fig.24), you may recall, we experience the arrival of Tyler.

> "Tyler what are you doing?"… I ask, in mock horror. In a deep Tyler-inspired human voice, Holly says "if you can have veg, so can I…" Tyler's daddy interjects…"But you don't even like courgette…" Continuing to speak on Tyler's behalf Holly continues, "oh yes I do……" Losing Tyler's voice Holly addresses him once more and asks "Tyler, where are your manners?" as Tyler takes the courgette from the guinea pig."
>
> (from Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story)

We feel Tyler landing onto the animal health check table. His size and stature near to the guinea pigs evokes a need to protect them. Holly narrates her practices of relational care through talking with and talking for Tyler. As human and animal make their moves around the table, Tyler moves in, leaping onto the table to steal some courgette. Holly suggests that Tyler is thinking *"if you can have veg, so can I…"* and when his love of courgette is rejected by his "*daddy"*, she proceeds "*oh yes I do……*" born out of the observation of him moving in to steal the courgette from Nutella the guinea pig.

This example illustrates how anthropomorphism can provide a role for the animal in the story, offering an additional level of security for people learning interspecies empathy. The absurdity of a large dog jumping onto a table to source courgette is underplayed through the use of talk. By using talk, she invites others into the dialogue, evoking the practice of turn-taking. Summarising Tyler's actions – "*if you can have veg, so can I…"* – opens up a gap for response, "*But you don't even like courgette…,"* which generates further connections with human companions around the table, providing access to other perspectives. Karlsson (2012) suggests that anthropomorphic assumptions, particularly those based on physiological needs like food choice, are fairly acceptable, as they can often be validated by observable evidence. Whilst caring involves trial and error, the evidence driving practice is often rooted in affective

experience as opposed to visual evidence. Karlsson (2012) further suggests that anthropomorphism can be justified if it upholds the values and beliefs of a particular practice, which implies that it is permissible in the practice of caring. In this story, anthropomorphism helps to give voice to Tyler's contribution (Connolly, 2023) whilst also allowing Holly to hone practices of caring. By speaking for Tyler, Holly illustrates her capacity to interpret interspecies interactions, establishing herself as relationally connected and open to experimenting with different ways of being caring.

In the concluding remark, Holly returns to speak in her own voice, asking Tyler, *"where are your manners?"*. Here the form of the move, as a question, together with the content, which focuses on social rights and wrongs expresses to others both a capability, in that she understands the importance of social expectations of behaviour and an openness to learning more about the boundaries of the relationships in the organisation. Voicing concern over Tyler's manners relates to both his position on the table and his stealing of the courgette. There is a sense that whilst manners may not be considered to be understood by animals, Holly is attempting to establish the rules of the relationships within the organisation. Whilst Tyler's agency is acknowledged, voicing concerns as questions, reinforces her openness to understanding the parameters and boundaries in this space. Posing the question to Tyler helps Holly to develop an understanding of what is permissible, suggesting that there is a moral obligation to reconsider the rules of social interaction in interspecies contexts.

Concerns over the falsehood of identifying a human as a dog's "daddy" trouble many human-animal scholars (Berger, 1980; Fudge, 2002; Haraway, 2003). However, in the context of an interspecies organisation, it can contribute to the infrastructure of care, drawing on human attitudes towards animals (Kandel *et al., 2023;* Greenhough *et al.,* 2023). As MacLure (2013) suggests language acts as a cultural and symbolic resource, conveying something of what is felt or sensed, rather than an expression of sense-making (MacLure, 2023). Of course, Tim is not Tyler's Dad, but pet ownership often parallels the parent child relationship (Fox and Gee,

2019). Thus, the use of the term “daddy” connotes something about how human-animal relations are constructed societally, as well as how the relationship between Tyler and Tim is expressed and communicated in the organisational practices of interspecies care (Karlsson, 2012). The parent-child analogy within the human-animal relationship can also be seen to suggest a dissolution of a species divide and an affirmation of the subjectivity and value of the animal in the organisational context. Who and what we choose to incorporate into our kinship networks can include human and animal, and successful caregiving does not necessarily need to be fulfilled through traditional maternal or familial practices. If parental nomenclature asserts responsibility for care, and this is used within the organisation, it provides a form of small talk which can evoke conversation and discussion.

At this juncture, through several extracts of story, I have explored how interspecies care is a contextually situated, complex, relational process involving the interpretation of different forms of animal and human communication (Schuurman, 2021). Here, I move on to explore in more detail the organisational context of AAI. In the next two sections, I will illustrate, through explorations of what is spoken, how opportunities to mediate relationships between humans and animals enable interspecies caring and how this entangled experience of competing needs remoulds affective memories of care. In doing so, I will explain how organisational experiences with animals, although financially and emotionally costly, can help develop human understandings of the unpredictability of relationality and why, in the context of mental health recovery, this experience may offer an ethical and mutually beneficial outcome.

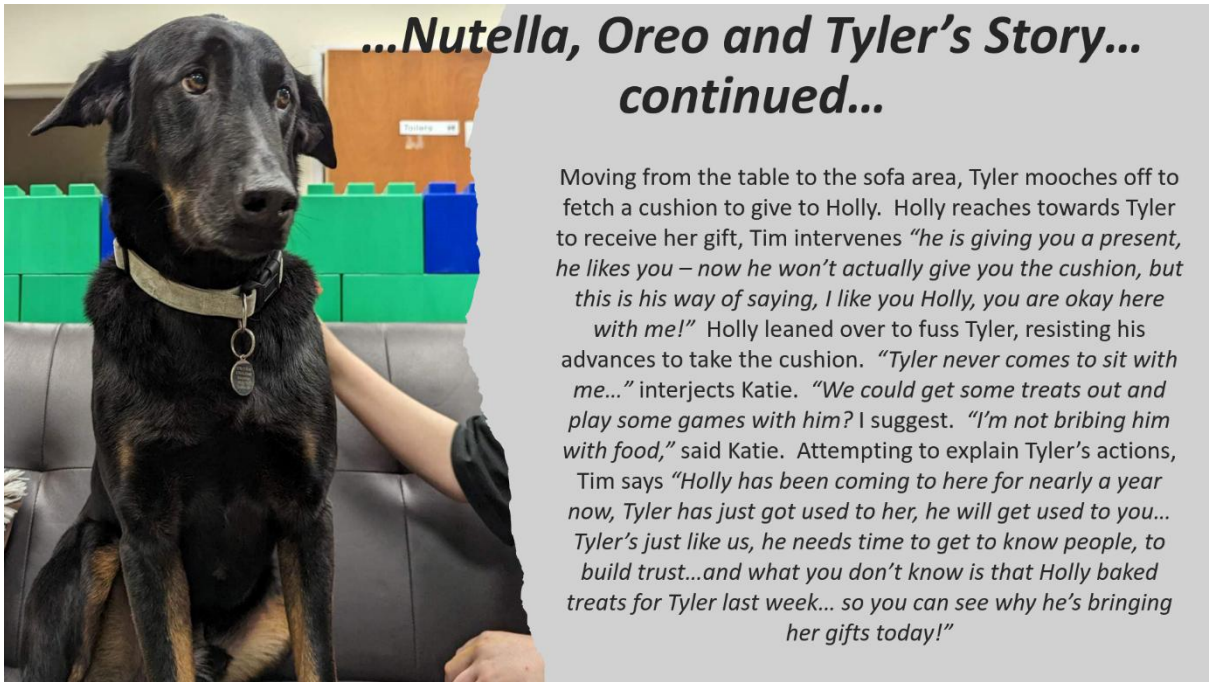



*Fig.26. Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story Continued*

Tyler has decided to pick up the cushion and present it to Holly, suggesting a desire for interaction. Tyler faces competing demands for his attention. Holly interprets Tyler's moves to collect the cushion and bring it to her as a request for a response, in the form of physically moving and taking the cushion from him. As she makes moves to this end, Tim plays another move. He interrupts her flow to take the cushion from Tyler, instead offering a verbal explanation of Tyler's behaviour. This is an act of mutual caring. He is caring for Tyler by allowing him to continue to express his natural behaviours whilst at the same time, he also senses Holly's need for Tyler's attention and tries to address this through what he says. Moving to Katie, her need to connect with Tyler is met with the offer of treat games, but in response she expresses what might be considered a moral position, expressing a belief that human relationships should be built upon choice, as opposed to nurtured through rewards. When Tim hears Katie's need to feel cared for by Tyler he intervenes once again. His explanation, whilst offering both an appraisal of animal and human relationships, also

emphasises the significance of human intervention in interspecies care practices, further emphasised by his concluding remarks where he makes a jovial reference to the power of treats.

The network of relationships in the organisational context creates multiple demands of care. In Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story, Tim draws upon his multiple senses and his knowledge of the people and animals present, interpreting and responding to the care needs of Tyler, Holly, and Katie. He ricochets back and forth between human and animal, attempting to see the world through two sets of eyes at any given moment—a skill that, according to Noddings (2013), is essential for any *teacher*. These two sets of eyes incorporate both animal and human perspectives, highlighting the multiple demands of interspecies caring.

The presence of the animals, who both need care and are capable of caring, contributes to the organisational infrastructure, conveying that it is acceptable to move between the roles of care-recipient and caregiver. A few minutes earlier in the story, Katie and Holly both experienced themselves as capable of caring. Through caring for the guinea pigs during the health check procedure, they rendered themselves both vulnerable and competent. Katie's claim that Tyler never sits with her is a verbal expression of her vulnerability and a need to be cared for. This follows in the vein of her chattering during the health check, where she talked about the guinea pigs' nervousness and their dislike of people. In response to Katie's need for a relationship with Tyler, care is offered through human intervention. It is initially suggested that she could play treat games with him. However, she declines, stating affirmatively, that she has no intention of bribing him.

Responding in this way suggests an elicitation of a moral code of care, which evokes an internal struggle over how she should behave. Her need for care is met with responsiveness, but she rejects this response. Her rejection perhaps mirrors the rejection she felt when Tyler would not sit with her. Gilligan (1982) explains that in caring, women often tussle between

selfishness and responsibility. Whilst I cannot definitively claim this is what is happening, there is a sense that Katie is struggling to interpret the situation and decide how to respond appropriately. By implying that she wanted Tyler to sit with her, she becomes conscious that she could be seen as neglecting the needs of others, both Tyler and Holly. The offer of the option to play treat games serves as a reminder that people are responsive to her needs, which leads her to reconsider how she should care for Holly and Tyler, accepting responsibility for ensuring that they get what they want and need. In Katie's mind, an important part of this is ensuring Tyler has the capacity to choose where he sits and who he sits with. In the process of treat games, Katie considers that his choice is removed because he is coerced through food, and coercion, from her moral perspective, is not caring—from her subjective position, caring incorporates elements of choice.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, talking provides insight into how someone is feeling, which invites a response. In this extract, Tim recognises that the offer to provide treat games has not sufficed a need in Katie, and therefore he intervenes. His explanation introduces some fundamental components of relationality. Starting with Holly's experience, he suggests that Tyler has had time to build a relationship with her. He then moves to consider Katie's experience, offering reassurance that, over time, Tyler "*will get used to you"*. Having talked through the different perspectives in the network of care, he then offers a narration which attempts to explain the interaction, positioning Tyler and Holly in the best possible light. As Noddings (2013) explains, dialogue can provide understanding of the motives behind decisions, which shape the memories of care. These memories can be elicited in future caring encounters to help understand the motives of the "one-supposed-to-be-caring" (Noddings, 2013:114). In his explanation Tim emphasises the importance of time, proximity and trust in relationality.

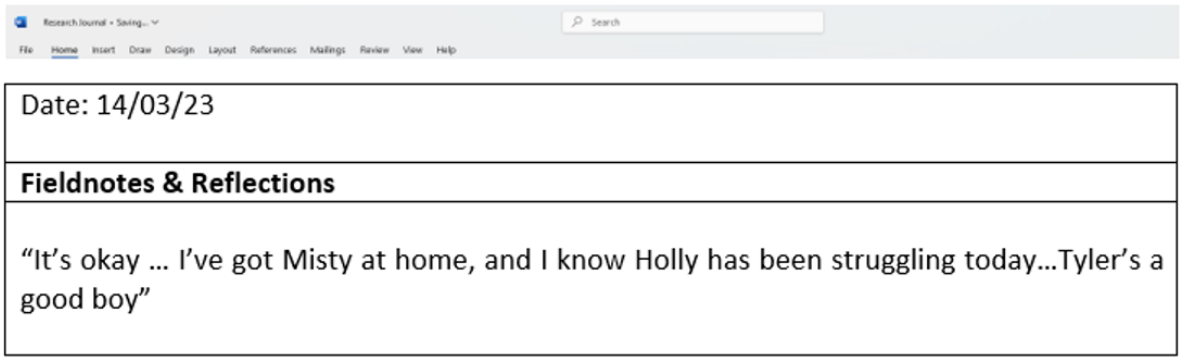
Bringing attention back to Tyler, Tim's final statement can be seen as an attempt to lighten the intensity of the interaction with some light-hearted small talk. He suggests to Katie, *"What*

*you don't know is that Holly baked treats for Tyler last week… so you can see why he's bringing her gifts today!"* Whilst tinged with humour, this message is significant in contextualising animal behaviour and the importance of reciprocity in relationships. Moreover, his sentiment highlights how others can offer different perspectives that challenge and broaden our initial perceptions. His use of humour not only serves to defuse tension but also opens up space for deeper reflection on the relational dynamics at play. By highlighting reciprocity in Tyler and Holly's relationship, Tim subtly reminds Katie of the mutual exchange that is part of all caring relationships, human or animal. His comment also emphasises the value of shared perspectives, encouraging Katie to reconsider her understanding of Tyler's actions through a broader, more relational lens.

For Holly and Katie, the love of animals has encouraged their participation in the community organisation. We have already heard Katie express her dislike of people, a sentiment I frequently encountered during my fieldwork. Despite this, her decision to engage is an outward expression of her moral position, *I care for animals.* But beyond that, her love of the animals creates an emotional susceptibility, allowing her to understand herself within a network of relationships involving both humans and animals. Initially, Katie expresses her vulnerability when she questions Tyler's lack of attention toward her. However, Tyler's presence also prompts reflections on her past care experiences, specifically the power dynamics inherent in care relationships. As practices of care often rely on power inequalities, Katie feels compelled to adopt the role of the more capable other, assuming the responsibility of the caregiver, whilst Tyler becomes the vulnerable other. This encounter thus serves as an affirmation of her relationality, a reminder of her competence in caring, and a protection from her own sense of rejection.

The complex affective experience moves Katie to respond verbally, summarising her reflective thoughts.

*Fig.27. Fieldnotes: Katie's Reflections through Interspecies Care*



| Date: 14/03/23 |
| --- |
| **Fieldnotes & Reflections** |
| "It's okay … I've got Misty at home, and I know Holly has been struggling today…Tyler's a good boy" |

Katie summarises the multiple strands of care thinking, framing this around her interspecies relationships at home with Misty and here with Tyler. In the midst of the statement, she mentions how she noticed that Holly has been struggling today. This simple reflection provides a form of "aerobic exercise" that strengthens Holly's responsibility within multispecies networks (Haraway, 2016:29). Despite the abundance of human talk in this section of Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story, it is Tyler's actions that drive the choreography of interspecies care. Tyler's 'dogginess' unfolds in the space, affecting his human companions through his behaviour. He remains the focus of attention, maintained through talking about his motives and previous experiences. This affective connection with Tyler creates an openness to learning from the experience. Whilst the focus is on Tyler, the dialogue informs understanding of decisions made in a network of relationships, contributing to a memory of care that shapes care practices in other contexts (Hamington, 2017). The organisational experience of interspecies care generates further insights into the complexity of relationality, deepening the understanding of caring with implications that extend beyond the organisational context.

I will now consider how organisational practices of interspecies caring provide an opportunity to receive care and practice caring. I will also refer to how this experience can be valuable for people who love animals and how, in turn, this helps to protect animals.

## Nurturing Mutual Flourishing: Learning to Care for Humans and Animals

I have considered how interspecies language is developed and how this fosters mutual flourishing. Here, I turn to the importance of organisational experiences of caring, exploring how the practices of care and the conversations around care have broader implications for the wellbeing and protection of both humans and animals. Animals are cared for in the day-to-day practices through the caring responsiveness of the care workers and clients such as Holly and Katie. This is an interspecies relationship. However, the experience of care in an organisational context has benefits that extend beyond the experience for Holly and Katie, offering advantages for animals on a societal level as well. The benefits of companion animals for human health and wellbeing are well-established (Hawkins *et al.*, 2021; Brooks *et al.,* 2018). It is often the case that people experiencing illness or depression seek comfort in animal companions (Jau and Hodgson, 2018). Yet, as I alluded to in Chapter 2, the demands of caring, psychologically and economically can make such relationships challenging.

This is a short extract of Poppy's Story. She has been engaging with the organisation on and off for over 3 years now.

## Poppy's Story

*"After I lost Lilly, I was broken, mum got me a Frenchie, she was free… look she was gorgeous… but I don't really know what happened…"*

Sarah interrupts and explains that she'd been overbred, she was really, really, poorly… Ronnie looks to Sarah and nods. Moving back to her phone, flashing it towards me,

*"I've got Poppy now, look, she beams. She's crazy, she's got so much energy, but she just loves being with me and doesn't like being left on her own or with anyone else."*

For several weeks, Ronnie didn't show up to the weekly group session. Sarah would call her. Ronnie would talk about Poppy's antics. Over the weeks she relays her experience with Poppy.

*"Poppy doesn't like me leaving the flat"...*
*"she just destroys it when I'm out"...*
*"she's upset the neighbours upstairs and downstairs"...*
*"she wouldn't eat any of the food I give her"...*
*"she's not even fussed about playing".*

Sarah explains to me that Poppy is affecting Ronnie's health – eating, sleeping and this is affecting her meds. Just before Christmas, Sarah tells me that Ronnie has become unwell, leading to hospital admission. One of the other staff at Noah's A.R.T, had offered to take care of Poppy whilst Ronnie was in hospital with a view to adopting her in the future.

*Fig.28. Poppy's Story*

The desire to have relationships with animals is a common sentiment expressed at Noah's A.R.T. Dogs and cats are popular choices, though restrictions in housing can lead to other pets, such as hamsters, rats or exotics. Ronnie is aware of the practices involved in caring for her canine companion, such as feeding, stroking, and playing. The acknowledgment and engagement with the animal other provide recognition and care. Ronnie's experience with Poppy is not unique. Like others I have met in the organisation, she craves relationships, and dogs, in particular, provide that consistent presence. Dogs are adept at understanding facets of human relationships including eye contact and turn-taking (Hare, 2007; Horowitz, 2009). However, by choosing to invest heavily in the human-animal relationship, Ronnie has reduced contact with an external source of care in the form of the weekly AAI sessions. She believes that Poppy can't be left: *"she just loves being with me and doesn't like being left on her own or with anyone else"* which has had a detrimental impact on Ronnie's wellbeing. Ronnie feels that Poppy's love is conditional upon her 100% devotion and attention. By withdrawing from her weekly contact with others at the organisation, she loses the opportunity to talk about

her experiences with Poppy and gain different opinions regarding Poppy's behaviour. Over the weeks, Ronnie begins to feel her care is being rejected, as Poppy is not eating the food or and is not interested in playing. Poppy's lack of responsiveness reduces the feeling of being cared for by Poppy. She starts to believe that the dog doesn't care for her. In response, she tries harder, as being able to care for another being is important to her sense of self. As with all care work, the lack of reciprocity and joy in the experience can lead to burnout. For Ronnie, the need to care for Poppy took over and impacted her capacity to care for herself, in part because she wasn't feeling cared for in other areas of her life. Ronnie became unwell, which ultimately led to both her and Poppy receiving the care necessary for their flourishing.

Whilst I am not suggesting that pets do not support mental health and wellbeing, I argue that for people with mental health difficulties, interpreting the behaviour of others can often be challenging. The opportunity to practice this in an organisational space, where the focus is on the unknowable nature of animals, makes experimentation more permissible (Barnes, 2015). Talking about these experiences, whilst simultaneously engaging in care practices, can shape subjectivity, influencing an understanding of both human and animal relationality to the mutual benefit of both. For Ronnie, the organisational experience provides connections with both humans and animals, which positively impacts her health and wellbeing. However, for others, this form of intervention could potentially mitigate the desire for pet ownership, reducing the risk of animals being unintentionally neglected and needing to be rehomed. I will return to how AAI organisations can intervene in the pet industry in Chapter 9.

In this final section, I have suggested that for Ronnie, her need to be cared for is imperative to her capacity to care (Noddings, 2013). Whilst the acquisition of Poppy provided her with the opportunity to love and care, it removed her from a space where she received care from others, both human and animal, leading to "a flight into the futility of total thought" (Dumm, 2008:159). AAI organisations provide an affective and embodied experience of caring and being cared for, which informs and sustains the capacity to care. Attentiveness to the moves

of animals sparks the process of learning—both about animals and about how to care. Watching, listening, sensing, feeling, and interpreting these experiences often leads to conversations that steer care practices in different directions, continually refining the understanding of self and other. The practice of caring for animals in organisations can have mutual benefits for both humans and animals, potentially reducing the need to rehome pets that prove challenging to care for.

## Summary

This chapter builds on the themes introduced in Chapter 6, particularly focusing on what is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation and how interspecies care offers opportunities for mutual flourishing, especially in the context of neoliberal values. I explored two interconnected components: first, the co-constitution of the language of interspecies care and its role in fostering mutually beneficial care practices; and second, how relationality within organisations fosters relationships that significantly impact the health and wellbeing of both humans and animals. Through examining how animals communicate—via sounds, movements, and body language—I have shown how humans interpret these signals to guide caregiving practices. These empathetic connections often lead to verbal expressions that refine care practices. I highlighted how specific forms of talk, such as questions, pitch, and tone, not only shape caregiving but also provide insight into how the affective experience of care is understood and how the animal's role within the organisation is perceived. As dialogue centres on the animal, it sharpens awareness of further communicative cues, continually refining the language of interspecies care whilst promoting the animal's agentic capacity. In routine practices like health checks, animals' perceived vulnerability helps establish their human companions as more capable, yet caregiving opens humans to their own vulnerability within these relationships. This experience offers an opportunity to rewrite the story of self in relation to the other. Although the focus on the animal may reduce attention to human relationality, these experiences are shared, creating a context where humans also receive care—from both humans and animals—which evokes joy and nurtures the capacity to care.

These relational encounters leave a lasting emotional and affective resonance, reinforcing the story of self as relational. Finally, establishing the self as relational is essential for enabling autonomy, which is crucial for the success of neoliberal healthcare practices. Thus, I argue that opportunities to practice relationality are fundamental within these care structures.

# Chapter 8
# Interspecies Care in Context: Relational Tensions within Neoliberal Organisations

## Chapter overview

This chapter builds upon Tallberg and Hamilton's (2023b:1) question, "Where do animals fit in the contemporary organisation and organising?" It does this by addressing two key research aims: how does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation? and how does interspecies care challenge neoliberal values? Focusing on the practices of interspecies care in an Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation, this chapter explores these questions in depth. The next instalment of Merlin's Story examines the governance of care in the animal welfare room and how this organises interspecies caring. This leads to an exploration of how relational interspecies care practices often disrupt formal organisational structures, creating a sense of chaos and disarray. I then discuss the economic and logistical challenges of interspecies care within third sector organisations (TSO), concluding with a critique of the limitations of rights-based ethics in policies related to care. Following this, I explore how the practices of interspecies care reflect the organisation's values, fostering a culture of mutual benefit. As Merlin takes to the floor, I consider how attentiveness to the specificity of animal movements informs the language of interspecies relationality, sparking affective immersion in relational encounters. This immersion counteracts the perceived chaos within the interspecies organisation and allows for an experience of "life in the present" (Lynch, 2022:76), which is integral to caring relationships. I argue that such experiences foster a subjectivity that resists neoliberal productivity, instead prioritising affective, immersive relationality as a driver of health and wellbeing. Next, I consider how the "canine orchestra" that plays upon arrival shapes the organisational atmosphere, creating an "invitation to connect" and enabling individuals to cross the organisational boundary with a desire and capability to engage in caring practices

(Huopalainen, 2023:96). This affective immersion in interspecies relationships provides a moment of respite from the anxieties often associated with entering new spaces. In the final section, I return to the role of volunteers in the Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages. This narrative illustrates how interspecies relationships open up new ways of being for human participants and how the repetitive practices of interspecies care create time and space for mutual caring between humans and animals. Lastly, I address the moral and ethical challenges of relational care within the context of neoliberal society, revisiting the costs of care within TSO.

## Interspecies Care as Organised Chaos

Here, is an opportunity to reconnect with Merlin's Story from the introduction (Ch.1). It is a busy Tuesday morning, there are multiple dances of interspecies caring unfolding in the Animal Welfare Room which feels overwhelming and chaotic.

*Fig.29. Story of Merlin's Beard*

As noted in Chapter 2, research on AAI within organisational contexts remains limited, despite its growing role in UK health and wellbeing services. Most AAI research focuses on human benefits and animal welfare, but the capacity to care for both humans and animals is shaped by the interaction of architecture, governance systems, and socio-material infrastructures of care (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023).

In this section, through the Story of Merlin's Beard, I explore how layers of governance contribute to the organisational infrastructures of care, and how the practice of interspecies caring can disrupt and unsettle the AAI organisation. Immersed in the chaos of the Animal Welfare Room, the story places the reader in the animals' living space. Appropriate shelters and habitats are provided—Merlin has a vivarium and lives alone, whilst Princess Leia (rabbit) has a cage. The room contains haystacks and bedding bins, suggesting that the habitats are appropriately equipped with suitable substrates. The water containers are a potential source of fungal infection, whilst the rats' need for more calcium can be addressed by preparing a new feed. This story invites the reader behind the scenes, placing a spotlight on the dynamic and complex care work that takes place behind closed doors in the Animal Welfare Room. Animal welfare requirements provide a layer of governance that guides interspecies care practices. The Story of Merlin's Beard highlights the organisation's commitment to providing shelter, space (alone or with companions), food and water, health treatments, and prevention (FAWEC.org, n.d.). Additional guidance documents supplement these legal requirements, offering detailed and species-specific responsibilities (RSPCA, 2019; IAHAIO, 2018). Together, the legal requirements and practical guidance help organise the practice of caring, shaping the routines and schedules that define the daily practices of the organisation.

Legislative and policy requirements translate into local organisational procedures and practices. Tim's question *"Have they been taken off the weekly rota?"* suggests that animals are scheduled to provide care work for humans in other places and spaces. This is managed through a weekly animal rota that limits the amount of AAI work an animal engages in to

protect their health and wellbeing (IAHAIO, 2018). In the context of neoliberalism, this timetable of animal activities serves as one source of evidence that demonstrates the organisation's accountability for ensuring animal welfare. Neoliberalism also influences the staffing structure. When a volunteer enters through the thermal door shields, we are reminded of the human resources employed to care for the animals. Her comment on the installation of the shields suggests that she volunteers regularly and is rostered for specific days and times. Rotas and timetables help organise both people and animals in time and space, promoting organisational efficiency, individual accountability, and strategic decision-making. They communicate who should be where and when, enabling the effective distribution of tasks such as cleaning cages, washing, conducting health checks, and preparing food.

Thus, local organisational mechanisms intersect with legal and policy guidance, creating routines that shape the organisation's daily practices. In doing so, they spatially and temporally organise people, animals, and resources. However, whilst these legal and policy requirements provide "systems of governance" for interspecies care in organisational contexts, the practices of caring often intervene and disrupt such systems, contributing to a sense of overwhelming chaos (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023:1).

> *"*…it feels a bit overwhelming, chaotic"
>
> (from Story of Merlin's Beard)

The Story of Merlin's Beard begins to reveal the significance of legislation, policy, and organisational practices in human-animal care work. Whilst their presence is not always overt, they are crucial to the organisational architecture, generating patterns of care that flow efficiently and effectively, creating a rhythm for daily practices within the organisation. However, as I have established in Chapters 6 and 7, interspecies care is relationally co-constituted (Coulter, 2018; Schuurman, 2021); it is embodied and affective (Hamington, 2004). Although the textual documentation of policy sparks planning and creates habits and

routines that are organisationally beneficial, the policy itself does not guarantee that care is practised. If the structural and local factors create a sense of order in the animal welfare room, it is curious that the story—and others told up to this point—evoke a sense of chaos and disarray. In Ant and Herman's Story in Chapter 6, there was the noisy busyness of care work: the baking of tuna treats, the fetching of tea, and hot water bottles. In the previous chapter, Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story involved Tyler jumping onto the table to grab courgettes. These moments contribute to a sense of interspecies commotion. The dance of interspecies care focuses attention moment-by-moment on the dynamic moves that animals and humans make, which then inform subsequent moves, enabling the practice of care. This ongoing attentiveness to human and animal actions reorganises the space, people, animals, and resources, perhaps contributing to the feeling of overwhelming chaos. Interspecies chaos sets the scene for the organisational experience.

In the Story of Merlin's Beard, the fundamental focus of everyday work in the animal welfare room is driven by the needs of the animals. To notice is embryonic to caring (de Merich, 2015): signs of a fungal infection; a lack of calcium; respiratory difficulties all involve sensorial, cognitive and interpretive processes which become reflected in language (Coulter, 2018). But noticing alone does not lead to caring. Taking responsibility to act, to move the infected guineas, to make a different food source for the rats, is the point at which the organisational mechanisms begin to unravel. Whilst the guinea pigs with fungal infections should have been visiting a school or care home, as per the rota, the diagnosis of a fungal infection leads to a remaking of the rota and sparks an alternative series of moves in the practice of care. Grabbing the surgical gloves, the infected guinea pigs must be moved into a quarantined cage, they need daily medication administering and this needs to be communicated to all team members via the "Watch and Wait" white board and recorded in the medical records folder, referred to as "The Bible". The piggy pit, which contains 13 other resident guinea pigs needs deep cleaning, all bedding disposed of, towels washed at high heat, and water and food sources cleaned and changed. Further, staff and volunteers must keep a

watchful eye on other pigs to check for further outbreaks of the fungal infections whilst also protecting themselves, as fungal infections transmit across species. The practice of interspecies caring is a complex, coordinated, and responsive process, deeply embedded in the everyday workings of the organisation which unravels and intervenes in organisational structures and processes. I will now move on to consider the costs of interspecies caring.

The practice of caring is inherently costly, with every element in the Story of Merlin's Beard carrying an economic value. From the sentient beings to the spaces, objects, and practices, everything translates to a monetary cost. Renting space, meeting the welfare needs of animals, and managing illnesses all add up. Whilst paid staff receive wages for their labour, volunteers contribute "hope labour" (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013:9), in the hope of future opportunities in the labour market, highlighting the social injustices inherent in neoliberal marketisation. The care work required to manage the fungal infection is significant in terms of both time and resources. For instance, quarantining infected guinea pigs to prevent the spread of a fungal infection in the piggy pit not only requires additional space but also disrupts commercial services like outreach visits to schools, hospitals, and care homes. Since fungal infections are transmissible across species, the infected guinea pigs cannot participate in client-facing work until they recover, which impacts the organisation's revenue. The costs of replacement bedding, medication, and additional surgical gloves, along with the labour involved in deep cleaning the piggy pit, administering and recording medication, and monitoring the health of other guinea pigs, all have a tangible impact on the organisation. Furthermore, when animals are ill and unable to participate in AAI services, the organisation faces additional challenges in meeting community obligations, potentially leading to overwork of other animals and compromising their wellbeing. Care work is both practically and emotionally challenging, demanding significant "emotional labour" which can be psychologically costly (Hochschild, 1983:48). Thus, whilst regulatory requirements and carefully planned routines aim to ensure care, they do not eliminate the substantial visible and invisible costs that come with maintaining such practices.

Other stories unfold simultaneously in the animal welfare room. Here we move to the Story of Hutches and Cages.

*Fig.30. Story of Hutches and Cages*

This story suggests that whilst requirements of policy are met, improvements could be made to the animals' living spaces. As outlined at the outset of this chapter, animal welfare requirements provide a means of organising interspecies care practices, but legislation and policy provide a rights-based approach to caring which conflicts with relational care-based approaches (Donovan and Adams, 2007). In animal welfare, such approaches perpetuate animal objectification in the interests of capitalism. All animals in the animal welfare room are provided with the required space and resources to abide by policy and legislation but Anya's conversations with the volunteers highlights how relational approaches to caring suggest that the guidelines are perhaps insufficient. Adopting a rabbits-eye view, a volunteer raises a question, *"don't they need more room to popcorn and binky?!"* As I have discussed in

the previous chapter, the use of questions reflects an openness to learning from others. But her knowledge of the rabbits' natural behaviours leads to her assessment of the space as insufficient, opening up the possibility that more space would allow the rabbits to exhibit more natural behaviours thus providing a better experience of care. But space is a costly commodity and whilst the ideal would be to provide more space[1], perhaps indoors and outdoors, this is restricted by economic capacity. But in addition to the financial costs, practising relational care in this way can be emotionally and psychologically costly. Having an awareness of a need and being unable to respond can have emotional and psychological impact which can contribute to psychological burnout (Baines *et al*., 2020).

In this section, the Story of Hutches and Cages has highlighted how the practice of caring for animals unsettles organisational structures of governance. Whilst building an organisational infrastructure which centres around relational caring in a human-animal care-based organisation is morally and ethically appropriate, it is costly, financially and psychologically. In the context of TSO, financial challenges are acute, further amplifying the emotional costs of such work (Health and Social Care Committee, 2021). I will now move on to consider how the disordered practices of interspecies care embody the organisational values of caring which contribute to mutual benefits for human and animal.

## Interspecies Caring: Practices and Values

> "why is Merlin's beard so black?"
> "Have they been taken off the rota ?".
> "I'll make a different food today".
> "It will be more, they share the water containers…."
>
> (taken from Story of Merlin's Beard)

[1] Since March 2024, Noah's A.R.T. took on additional premises which has meant a significant increase in space for small animals including the rabbits and guinea pigs.

As explored in Chapter 2, TSO are value-driven, but there is limited research on how these values translate into cultures of care within organisations (Blake, 2016). In this section, I examine how the practices of interspecies care reflect these values, fostering a culture of care that drives both human and animal care. In the Story of Merlin's Beard, the practices observed in the animal welfare room provide insight into the organisation's values. Central to these practices are the principles of respectful interspecies relationality and openness to learning, which highlight the importance of agency, capability, and responsibility in the organisation's approach to care. Attentiveness to the animals, along with the understanding that care is co-constituted through ongoing experimentation, fosters a space where there is a shared responsibility to participate in the practice of caring.

Caring for the animals is pivotal to the provision of the service and directly reflects its core values of agency, capability, relationality, and responsibility. The organisation's structure supports this. Spatially, the animal welfare room is designed to ensure a continuous human presence, allowing for regular attention to and participation in the animals' care. This setup acknowledges the agency of the animals, emphasising that their wellbeing depends on the humans around them responding appropriately to their needs. For example, when Tim observes, *"It's a lack of calcium, I'll make a different feed today,"* or when Carrie comments on the effectiveness of the thermal curtains and the risk of further fungal infections, these everyday interactions exemplify how the organisation's values are brought to life through the practice of caring. The process is one of continuous learning, where human and animal communication shapes the care provided. Ultimately, the focus on animal agency and the responsive actions of the staff and volunteers highlights the organisation's dedication to building trusting and mutually respectful relationships between humans and animals. The practice of caring for the animals is an ongoing process of learning. The emphasis on the animals' agentic capacity and responsiveness to their multiple forms of communication

conveys the centrality of trust and mutual respect in relationships between both humans and animals.

In the Story of Merlin's Beard, the importance of attentiveness in interspecies care is highlighted through various actions and interactions. A seemingly minor observation about Merlin's black beard becomes a catalyst for care, reflecting the organisation's commitment to attentiveness as a core component within the practice of caring. When Tim responds to the question, *"Why is Merlin's beard so black?"* he not only shows care for Merlin but also validates the human contributor's concern, reinforcing the organisation's respect for individual contributions and its broader values of openness and mutual recognition. This attentiveness and responsiveness emphasises the critical role of these values in the practice of caring, extending beyond human-animal interactions to also nurture the relationships among human caregivers. The timetabled practices of caring, such as ensuring the animals' needs are met and providing food, play a significant role in establishing trust between humans and animals. Routine tasks also offer opportunities to observe and respond to changes in the animals' physical or emotional states, as seen in the Story of Merlin's Beard, with the detection and treatment of respiratory problems and fungal infections.

**Story of Merlin's Beard continued…**

*"Am I doing the piggy pit as usual today?"* asks Stacey, a veteran volunteer in the animal welfare room. Pushing back out through the thermal door cover, Tim emerges, and places Merlin on the floor. Merlin sets off … he's lummoxy, his movements are laboured, as he writhes and rustles his way across the floor… Tyler stretches off the wicker chair and half-heartedly peers over Merlin's bobbing head. Picking up pace, Merlin heads straight to the kitchen. By desire or coincidence, I don't know, but his beard is lighter now. Tim leans over and closes the kitchen door, but Merlin seems determined to plough through it. After allowing him several attempts, Tim, scoops him up and swizzles him round, his beard blackens almost instantly, *"see, Tom says, he doesn't like being told what to do"…* off he trots again, with increased speed and a hint of indignation.

*Fig.31. Story of Merlin's Beard Continued*

Staying with the focus on the practices of caring, this continuation of the Story of Merlin's Beard shows how Tim's attentiveness reflects the organisation's values of mutual care and relational connectivity. Earlier, Tim trusted what others were telling him in the animal welfare room; here, he trusts himself to take responsibility for addressing Merlin's needs. He practises respectful relationships with both humans and animals, using his understanding of interspecies communication. In this instance, he takes personal responsibility for Merlin's black beard. He allows Merlin time and space to explore, despite competing organisational demands, suggesting that caring is a learning process where experimentation and collaboration are encouraged. Tim knowingly renders himself vulnerable through the practice of caring; whilst he doesn't know precisely what Merlin needs, he is committed to responding. His willingness to learn through these practices highlights the organisation's value of openness to learning in interspecies relationships. The focus on Merlin's unknown needs demonstrates that care involves imaginative experimentation, where not knowing is the starting point, but openness leads to relational growth (Aaltola, 2013).

The careful anthropomorphic statement at the end of the story, *"see… he doesn't like being told what to do,"* exposes the challenges in care reciprocity. Care is not always positively received (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), particularly in situations where individual agency is disregarded. According to Noddings (2013), the practice of caring for another should nurture the self and enhance their capacity to continue to care. Initially, the freedom to explore appeared to please Merlin, as his beard lightened. However, Tim's later interventions for Merlin's safety suggest that, from Merlin's perspective, the practice of care was either unsuccessful or unfinished. Continuous exposure to such experiences can be emotionally costly. Tim's statement, combined with his actions, highlights how a lack of positive feedback can be mitigated through other experiences. Tim trusts in his moral responsibility to ensure the safety and protection of the animals, which nurtures his sense of self. Additionally, his interaction with another member of the organisation sparks a new relational space, potentially leading to positive regard of a different nature. Contextually, this emphasises the importance of trusting oneself within relational networks of care, whilst also highlighting the tensions in caregiving. The agency of the animal is respected, but the practice of care is shaped by relationality and broader systems of governance. Being cared for may not always feel like being cared for (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The human-animal encounter may have parallels with human experiences of care.

The focus on animal care within the organisation is a direct reflection of its values, influencing the subjectivity of those who engage with it. As Lynch (2022:77) notes,

> Decisions about time are decisions about values and what and who is prioritised… the act of caring involves making time for others, often at the expense of productivity and with that at a cost to power, status and money.

This perspective is embodied in the organisation's practices, where making time for the animals is an essential part of daily routines. These interspecies caring practices, which prioritise attentiveness, listening, and responsibility, create an affective and embodied

experience of care that communicates the organisation's values to its human participants. Over time, this focus on care influences human subjectivity, providing a guide to the ontological necessity of relational care, which challenges the neoliberal emphasis on productivity that typically governs organisational priorities (Hoppania and Vaittinen, 2015). This theme will be explored further as we progress through the chapter.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, care is a costly commodity, especially for TSO where funding is precarious. The organisation operationalises its values of care to ensure productivity and sustainability. Returning to the first instalment of Merlin's Story in Chapter 1, his status as a rescued bearded dragon is significant to the values of the organisation. By focusing on the agentic capacity of rescued animals, the organisation communicates a moral responsibility to recognise and intervene in practices of marginalisation, thereby contributing to a broader social and environmental ethic, as discussed in Sarah's Story in Chapter 5. However, this care-driven approach is not without its challenges. The reliance on volunteers, without financial remuneration, raises concerns about the perpetuation of low-status views of care work, a dynamic exacerbated by neoliberal pressures. These tensions point to deeper structural issues that are woven into the fabric of care work – a complexity that will continue to surface throughout the following discussions.

## The Language of Movement: Attunement and the Rhythm of Care

In this section, I return to the Story of Merlin's Beard to explore the role of language in the practice of caring and how it contributes to the "socio-material infrastructure of care" (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023:1), which offers mutual benefits. Building on ideas from Chapter 3, I examine the role of language in the dance of interspecies care, focusing on how detailed descriptions of animal movements demonstrate a respectful attentiveness to the practice of care. This deep engagement with animal communication not only shapes the actions of caregivers but also creates immersive moments of calm amid the chaos of interspecies commotion. Attuning to the rich variety of animal communication acknowledges their agency

and refines our understanding of their competency. In turn, affective immersion in the animal other enables a connection to "life in the present" (Lynch, 2022:76), offering mental health and wellbeing benefits. This immersive approach to interspecies care provides a model for ethical, relational human subjectivity, challenging the neoliberal focus on productivity as the primary measure of value.

The significance of language keeps reemerging. The use of story creates an opportunity to "make the specificities of care practices travel" (Mol *et al.,* 2010:10). A focus on words might seem to distract from the non-verbal practices of care. However, I suggest that the use of words within the story affectively conveys the acute attentiveness required to develop an understanding of these non-verbal components in interspecies caring. The choice of words used to describe animals' movements provides insight into how agency is interpreted and responded to and reflects the seriousness with which interspecies communication is regarded.

Below are the words used to describe or discuss the movements of humans and animals in the Story of Merlin's Beard. A quantitative breakdown of the frequency of each word, as recorded in my research journal, can be found in Appendix 15. The table also identifies whether the word was used by a client, a member of staff, or myself.

| **Animal Movements** | **Human Movements** |
|---|---|
| Lummoxy | Push |
| Writhes | Emerges |
| Rustles | Places |
| Stretches | Leans |
| Peers | Closes |
| Bobbing | Scoops |
| Heads | |

*Fig.32. Table: Attending to Movements*

The Story of Merlin's Beard conveys the attentiveness to the specificity of embodied movement in the dance of interspecies care (Fox *et al.,* 2023). Focussing on Merlin's adventures, the unfolding dance encapsulates the affective attunement to the subtle ways in which animals communicate without language. The words used, such as he *"writhes"* and *"rustles"* suggests knowledge of the species and perceptions of Merlin's individual character. Equally, these words alongside others such as *"lummox"*, "*laboured", "ploughing"* and *"trotting"* demonstrate attentiveness to the pace and timing of movements, reflecting the rhythm of care. This focus on movement suggests that the momentary loss of self, pivotal in the practice of caring, can slow down time, creating a mindful engagement with the other in "compassionate time" (Lynch, 2022:81). This kind of engagement has proven benefits for mental health and wellbeing (Schuman-Olivier, 2020).

Whilst we have seen how the practices of care interrupt organisational procedures, the logic of the organisation is aligned with clock time (Lynch, 2022). The words used to describe Tim's movements—decisive, iterative actions like closing the kitchen door, scooping Merlin up, and swizzling him around—allow the care process to flow. However, they also reflect the influence of neoliberal capitalist mechanisms and how these translate into organisational practices. Although interspecies care can disrupt day-to-day plans, organisational productivity remains essential for sustainability. In a neoliberal context, an organisation's productivity is closely tied to time. Tim practices caring for Merlin by allowing him to explore the open space in the main room, yet he is also aware of other care tasks and responsibilities, such as preparing rat feed or adjusting the rotas. Whilst he has given time to Merlin, he must balance this with other time-based commitments, meaning Merlin's care, though attentive and responsive, must fit within an allotted time slot.

So far in this chapter, I have explored how legislation and policy shape the practices of interspecies care within the organisation. I have also examined how relational practices can challenge and unravel these structured processes, influencing how time and space are used. Additionally, I have considered the psychological and economic implications of relational care within the organisation and how the practice of interspecies care reflects the organisation's core values of respectful relationships and openness to learning. At the end of this section, I suggest that the language of movement reflects the tensions between compassionate time and clock time, and how this tension infiltrates organisations, creating an ongoing tussle between relationality and productivity. In the next section, I will discuss how the sensory-rich environment of the interspecies organisation creates an "invitation to connect" (Huopalainen, 2023:96), and how the practice of care provides an immersive experience that offers momentary comfort, encouraging continued participation over time.

## Affective Immersion: Time in the Present

Merlin is now safely ensconced in his vivarium in the animal welfare room, the chaos continues to unfold, when a client arrives.

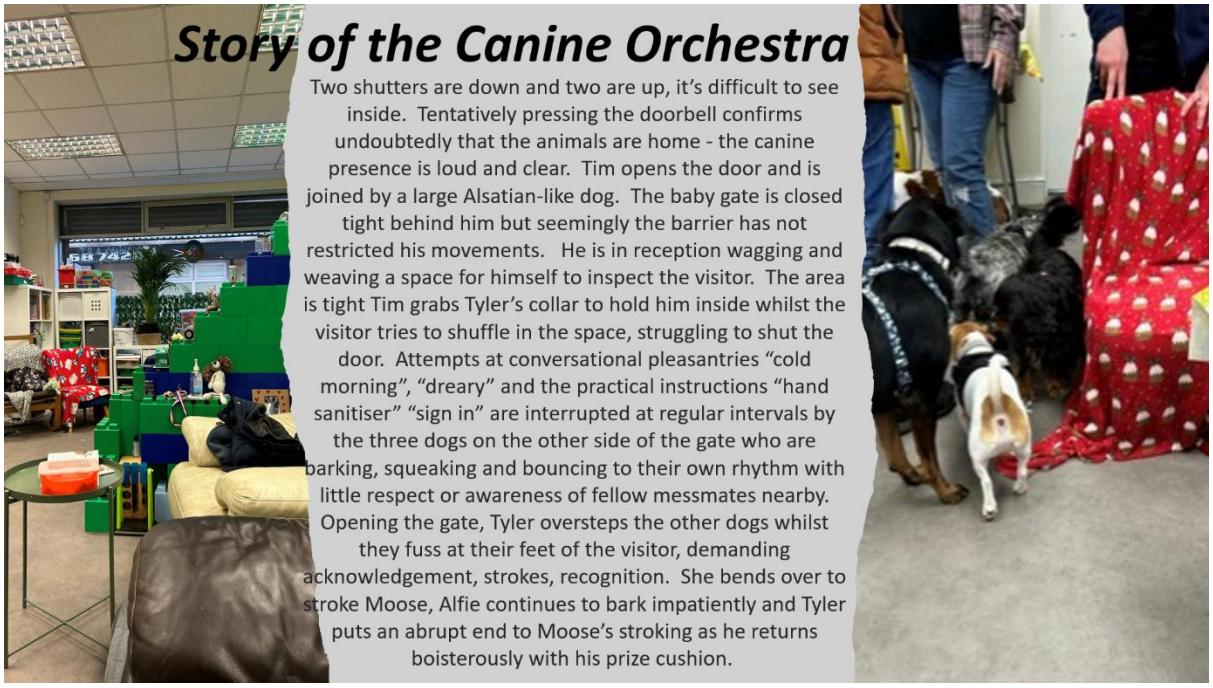


*Fig.33. Story of the Canine Orchestra*

Tyler is, once again, the focus of attention. Tyler's incapacity to obey rules and I presume a desire to be the best working dog that ever-lived means that on his working days, very few people enter the premises without being greeted by him. Responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of all the animals is paramount, and the proximity to a main road creates a significant risk if a dog were to escape, hence the installation of the baby gate. Whilst Tyler is not the only one who will follow into the reception if the gate is left ajar, his presence in this space conjures less of a sense of fear than that which would accompany the presence of his canine colleagues. Tyler's presence feels part of the routine, business as usual. On his rostered days off, the absence of Tyler will often be the focus of conversation when clients and visitors arrive (Fine, 2015; Gorman, 2017).

In many contexts, the sound of dogs barking is intentionally used to evoke fear, potentially creating a barrier to entry into a space (Kuris, 2015). However, for those who choose to attend

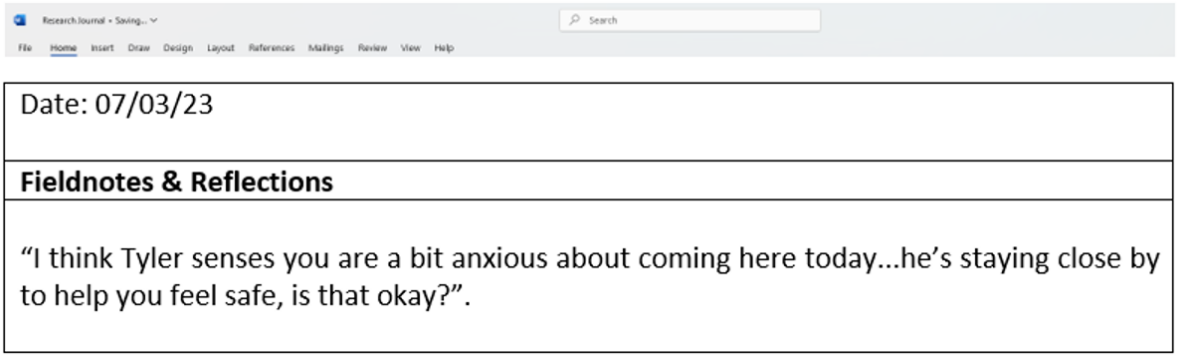
this organisation, their affective connection with animals motivates their participation (Baxter *et al.,* 2022). Gorman (2017) suggests that the presence of animals can make an organisation feel more welcoming, offering an "invitation to connect" (Huopalainen, 2023:96). In this context, the barking of dogs evokes an affective experience that sparks a desire to care. For individuals, especially those experiencing mental health challenges, crossing the threshold into a support organisation can be daunting. Rather than creating a barrier to entry, the affective attunement to the ensemble of canines evokes an embodied experience, which Cusick (2006:6) describes as "being touched-without-being-touched" —a sensation fostered in utero. Neuroimaging research suggests that experiences in utero are stored in the unconscious and can be triggered by experiences later in life (Gentsch and Kuehn, 2022). The somatic experience of dogs barking has been likened to the sound of babies crying. Together, the pre-birth experience of 'touch without touch' and somatic memories of a baby crying, which reside in the subconscious, can be triggered in the present. Regardless of where dogs fit into an individual's personal history, this affective and auditory encounter connects past memories of interconnectedness with present experiences, triggering both vulnerability and comfort. In doing so, it fosters a sense of openness to relational connections, which is crucial to the mission of a mental health support organisation.

In the provision of mental health services, creating a welcoming environment is critical to sustained participation and, thus, the success of the intervention (Baxter *et al*., 2022). Preferences for clear routines, a sense of organisation, and structure are cited as necessary for engagement in mental health spaces (Baxter *et al*., 2022). However, the encounters storied thus far are the antithesis of order. Yet, this chaotic welcome seems to place interspecies caring at the heart of the organisation, sparking different understandings of the capacity of the self. As discussed in the previous two chapters, structural perceptions of animals' vulnerability ignite a sense of capability and competence in their human companions. Tyler's animal status renders him vulnerable, yet his behaviour illustrates his capacity to move and vocalise, showcasing his agency. Tyler has noticed the visitor, and she has noticed him.

Watching and attending to his movements around her feet aims to ensure that she cares for him by not stepping on his paws. The focus on Tyler also means that face-to-face eye contact is not necessary or expected, providing a level of self-care for the client. The etiquette of social relationships can be challenging for people who experience a range of mental health difficulties (NICE, 2013). Structurally, the human adopts the role of the more capable other, taking responsibility to listen, feel, and respond to Tyler's embodied communication in order to care for him within the limits of the space. A sustained immersion in the interspecies relationship is essential to the practice of caring. The need to respond shifts moment-by-moment, and close attentiveness to how the dance is unfolding creates an extension of time in the present (Lynch, 2022), distancing the individual from the concern and stress often associated with entering a new space. Whilst there is a sense of chaos and unpredictability, the interspecies acknowledgement instils a desire to care, rendering both Tyler and the visitor mutually capable.

Once safely inside the building, with doors closed and gates locked, the client is escorted by both human and animal companions to the main room. Attempts to engage with the client are frequently interrupted and derailed by animal intervention. As the dogs' fuss and push around in human pathways, they are often introduced by name and character to new clients. For frequent visitors, as in the Story of the Canine Orchestra (above), the dogs' actions nearby can provide a means of noticing and responding to how someone appears to be feeling. When Tyler returns boisterously with his prize cushion, his actions are accompanied by a narration:

*Fig.34. Fieldnotes: Careful Anthropomorphism*



Date: 07/03/23

**Fieldnotes & Reflections**

"I think Tyler senses you are a bit anxious about coming here today...he's staying close by to help you feel safe, is that okay?".

It is not possible to know with certainty that the client is feeling anxious, nor is it possible to know that Tyler has sensed such a need. However, as shown in Ant and Herman's Story in Chapter 6, I provided some insight into Tyler's capacity to sense and respond to human vulnerabilities (Hare, 2007; Horowitz, 2009). The lines between who has genuinely noticed the client's anxiety are blurred, which could reinscribe anthropomorphic criticisms. Still, I consider the use of talk here to be careful anthropomorphism (Bekoff, 2002:49). In the fieldnotes above, Sarah narrates Tyler's actions; in doing so, she establishes relationality between herself and the client. She reveals elements of the practice of interspecies caring, suggesting that Tyler has noticed a need and is responding, thus acknowledging his canine agency. The question *"Is that okay*?" provides a simple but important recognition of the client's agency in their own care. It suggests that in this space, structurally determined notions of vulnerability are set aside at the entrance, and all actors—human and animal—are agentic and capable of participating in the organisational context.

This Story of the Canine Orchestra highlights how the organisation's values manifest in the everyday practices of interspecies care. The dance of care, unfolding move by move to the sounds of a canine orchestra accompanied by a multispecies ensemble, reveals the unpredictable and sometimes disordered nature of caring for animals. This disordered and

unpredictable experience of care likely mirrors the complexity of human caregiving as well. It challenges conventional perceptions of organisational care as defined by neoliberalism. The transactional, sanitised, customer-oriented approach to healthcare is replaced by something much closer to the messiness of relational caring. From the very first encounter, roles of caregiver and care-receiver are immediately blurred. The affective connection to the animals, amplified by their orchestral presence, fosters an openness to relational engagement. Trust is built through this relationship, as attentiveness to each other's responses ensures that the practice of caring is co-constituted and shared. In this way, all participants—human and animal—are recognised as agentic, competent, and responsible within the caring relationship. Caring for the relationship itself becomes of utmost importance.

Having explored how the organisation's values manifest in interspecies care relationships, I will now turn to how these values translate into human relationships within the organisation. This shift in focus is reflected in the next Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages, which is notably absent of companion animals. This story provides a platform from which to respond to Connolly and Cullen's (2018) invitation to consider the morality of 'dirty work' in an interspecies organisation. As I mentioned earlier, engaging volunteers is an intentional act of care that enables sustained involvement with the organisation. However, it is important to reflect more deeply on the role of volunteers, especially as Coulter (2016) notes the strong opposition from some who criticise non-profit organisations for relying on unpaid labour. Through the exploration of the journey from client to volunteer, I suggest that whilst we must remain attuned to the structural oppressions associated with care work, the embodied and affective practices of interspecies caring offer the potential to disrupt these structures of marginalisation. As introduced in Chapter 7, the shared experience of being perceived as weak and vulnerable can create a kinship (Haraway, 2008), fostering a sense of competence and capability that can intervene in processes of structural oppression. As Noddings (2013:177) aptly states, "If we continue to insist that all work—at whatever stage of

expertise—is dignified only to the extent that it is paid, then we really are lost as a caring community."

## "Becoming-with": Navigating the Complexities of Dirty Work in an Interspecies Organisation

***Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages***

Peace and quiet reins. A pungent smell of mint fills the room. Rats, mice, exotics, guineas and sticks have been caged and have left for outreach visits. Kale, carrots, cabbage, apples, pears, peppers and tomatoes have been laid out on the table in the Animal Welfare room. Intent on the task in hand, Josie begins chopping and placing produce orderly in the containers. A work experience student is cleaning out one of the mice cages. Sarah pops her head round the door.

*"Josie, tell Ben how you got involved with us here…"*

Josie sighs and mouths *"do I have to…?"* a wry smile fades in …. Looking down, carefully chopping, she says, *"Well I did the Art group and then the animal welfare courses…I think people kept telling me I could…"* Taking a deep breath she continues

*"There was this one day when I made like a den for the guinea pigs, and she said it was good… And the fact she said my name and let me put it in the piggy pit and they started nibbling the box and the veg, squeaking loads, I was dead chuffed, I didn't think they would and then cos she said she would see me next week … I felt I wanted to come back and help… so I said okay, I'll do Thursday as long as I can do the treats, and the veg … and now I'm doing some Wednesday afternoons with clients at the one-to-ones"*

Sarah returns with a stack of clean towels… *"see…"* with a hint of cheekiness she continues "we can't get rid of her now! She's part of the furniture!"

*Fig.35. Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages*

Interspecies caring organises time and space, providing opportunities to rewrite the story of self. The Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages articulates a process of "becoming-with", through Josie's experiences of care within the organisation. Recounting the story of how she became involved with the Noah's A.R.T., Josie reflects upon the passage of time, explaining *"I did the Art group and then the animal welfare courses"* and that "*people kept telling me I could"*. She doesn't specify the timeframe for these activities but, the reference to multiple courses and the use of "*kept*" suggests a passing of time. She focuses on an affective memory of caring for the guinea pigs, recalling her hand-crafted den with accompanying vegetables.

She remembers feeling *"chuffed"* by her creation, though uncertain about the guinea pigs' reaction. Recognition from a member of the staff team — "*she said it was good"* — together with the guinea pigs' desire to eat both the box and vegetables, was mutual validation of her capacity to care competently. These intertwined experiences instilled a sense of trust in Josie's ability to care for the guinea pigs, sparking a desire to *"come back."* She recalls hearing her name and someone expressing a desire to see her again, affirming her sense of self as a relational subject in the present and future. Her mouthing of the question *"do I have to"* followed by a *"wry smile"* illustrates her relationality in the present, whilst Sarah's quip, "*see, we can't get rid of her now! She's part of the furniture,"* reflects the ongoing relationships contributing to her evolving sense of self. There is also a subtle realisation that she has the capacity to become whatever she chooses over time. She can exercise her agency and make decisions about the care work she does — "*I'll do Thursday as long as I can do the treats and the veg*" — and these choices are valued within the organisation, allowing her relationships with both humans and animals to continue to grow.

The Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages illustrates how Josie's experiences of care have allowed her to exercise her agency and build relationships within the organisation. These ongoing relational practices have not only shaped her present sense of self but also opened up new possibilities for her future. In this context, the 'dirty work' practices of animal care have provided a source of meaningful activities that create embodied and affective memories, further influencing Josie's self-perception. The time spent during the animal welfare courses, carrying out tasks like making edible dens for the guinea pigs and observing their responses, has instilled a sense of competence in her caring abilities. As Josie continues to carry out these tasks as a volunteer, these memories and stories are re-triggered, creating a lasting impact (Power and Bartlett, 2018). Feeling safe in the organisation, Josie is comfortable sharing her story with others, recounting her experiences to illustrate her ability to care alongside others.

> "Do I have to…?"
> "I did the Art group and then the animal welfare courses…"

> "I think people kept telling me I could…"
> "I made like a den"
> "I was dead chuffed"
> "I didn't think they would"
> "I felt I wanted to come back and help…"
> "I said okay, I'll do Thursday as long as I can do the treats, and the veg …"
> "And now I'm doing some Wednesday afternoons"
>
> (taken from Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages)

Josie is recounting how she has been empowered through interspecies care. Whilst quietly engaging in care work—cutting up fruit and vegetables to be used as treats and rewards for the animals during therapy sessions—she frequently refers to her own agency and how this fostered recognition from both humans and animals. Her involvement with the organisation suggests that Josie has experienced intersectional oppression, as a result of her gender and mental health difficulties, leading to further economic and social marginalisation. Participating in the organisation serves as a way to support both her own and others' mental health and wellbeing. Josie has developed relationships with people and animals, experiencing both her capacity to care and be cared for. This capacity has been acknowledged by others—both human and animal—which has motivated her to continue engaging with the organisation. Her increasing desire to help through volunteering suggests that these experiences have instilled a positive sense of self.

> "I felt I wanted to come back and help… so I said okay, I'll do Thursday as long as I can do the treats, and the veg … and now I'm doing some Wednesday afternoons with clients at the one to ones" Sarah returns with a stack of clean towels… "see…" with a hint of cheekiness she continues "we can't get rid of her now! She's part of the furniture!"
>
> (taken from Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages)

Choosing to engage in 'dirty work' in human-animal organisations has been framed as both empowering (Bekkers and Ingen, 2016) and a form of oppression (Dowling, 2021). Whilst the story Josie tells above reflects a sense of her knowing and being as relational (Haraway, 2008), illustrating a sense of responsibility within multispecies networks (Haraway, 2016), the desire

to provide *free* care labour may also be considered exploitative, adding another layer to her oppression. Her labour does not translate into economic reward, but it contributes immensely to her self-perception and the perception of others. Like owning a pet, it contributes to her wellbeing by creating routines and broadening social relationships (Sable, 1995). However, in addition, the organisational experience provides her with the opportunity to be cared for by both humans and animals. Her sense of agency in constructing her story and her ability to negotiate her contribution within the organisation suggest that interspecies caring organisations can offer experiences that help to challenge structural oppressions. As Josie recognises her agency and competency, she can gradually intervene in processes and experiences that contribute to her oppression. This can have a significant impact beyond the organisational context.

In recounting her story, she chooses not to discuss her mental health history that led her to engage with the organisation. Instead, she recounts a story of competence and capability in caring for the guinea pigs which establishes herself as similar to and alongside others in the setting (Power and Bartlett, 2018). A mental health crisis can intervene in autobiographical narratives, thus making relationships and conversation more challenging (Brooks *et al.,* 2018). The purposeful acts of interspecies care have provided a different means of understanding herself and a different access point to relationships with others. Rather than positioning herself as the person needing care in a mental health organisation, she retells the story from the position of being the one able to contribute and provide care (Gorman, 2017). In addition to this, Josie talks freely about how she has had some choice in what she does and when she does it. Choice is a neoliberal marker of citizenship which is entangled within economic capacity (Lynch, 2022). For Josie, her economic capacity has been affected by her mental ill health, but within this context she has exercised her capacity to choose, and this has been listened to and this has allowed her to experience herself as an agentic citizen.

The Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages suggests that Josie has benefitted significantly from her sustained engagement with the organisation. The practice of interspecies caring provides meaningful experiences that leave affective traces on the self. Whilst the focus is on caring for the animal, the necessary relationships with other people that develop over time reinforce an awareness of the networks of relationality in which individuals are embedded. The affective traces of experiences with humans and animals interweave with memories of care, resuscitating the interdependency of existence. These experiences help establish a sense of self as relational and interdependent. However, whilst this offers positive support for Josie's participation in caring within the organisation, it is important to remain mindful that oppression and inequalities are often perpetuated by the ways in which care is organised in society. Care work, especially in TSO, is often undervalued and underpaid, or in Josie's case, unpaid. This can lead to the exploitation of those who engage in such work, particularly individuals like Josie who are already navigating intersecting forms of oppression. The reliance on unpaid volunteer labour, whilst providing meaningful experiences for participants, can mask deeper systemic issues around the devaluation of care work, reinforcing cycles of economic and social marginalisation. Therefore, whilst Josie's experience within the organisation fosters a sense of agency and relationality, it is crucial to recognise the structural challenges that can undermine these gains.

In the next section, I will explore how volunteering is the *sine qua non* of third-sector provision. Whilst volunteering fosters relationships through meaningful activities (Tierney, *et al.,* 2021), it also serves as a stark reminder of the pervasive forces of neoliberalism. Although the third sector exists outside the welfare state, its funding and structural identity are shaped by the political and legal frameworks orchestrated by the state. As mentioned earlier, volunteering can be seen as a form of "hope labour" (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013:9), aimed at equipping citizens with the skills needed to engage in the labour market. I will now consider how organisations strive to ensure that such practices remain moral and ethical. Specifically, I examine how the repetitious practices of caring for animals create opportunities to care for

volunteers. This dual experience of being both a caregiver and a care-receiver nurtures the ontological drive for human connection and relationships—yet it comes at a significant cost to the organisation.

## Volunteering as a Lifeline: The Emotional and Economic Costs of Care

For volunteering to be mutually beneficial in an organisation there is a significant amount of labour involved. Care labour plays an important but often invisible role which is costly, both economically and psychologically (Coulter, 2016). Let's revisit the story to consider how interspecies care practices provide space and time for relationality that is nurturing of the self.

> "Josie, tell Ben how you got involved with us here…" Josie sighs and mouths "do I have to…?" a wry smile fades in …. Looking down, carefully chopping…"
>
> (taken from Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages)

Josie chops up the fruit and veg, Ben cleans the mice cage, and Sarah washes and folds the towels. Each person contributes a significant economic resource that enables the organisation to function. Whilst sorting the washing, Sarah pops her head around the door. There was no necessity for Sarah to engage with Josie, but her choice to do so reflects the relational nature of the context and perhaps a belief in the ontological power of storytelling to reveal new ways of understanding the self (White and Epston, 1990). The routine practices of interspecies care—such as chopping vegetables and cleaning cages—provide space and time for small talk. In Chapter 7, I focused primarily on small talk between humans and animals, suggesting that narrating care practices has implications for understanding and promoting animal agency, as well as addressing societal injustices. Here, I explore how small talk in the context of human relationships can promote similar benefits for the volunteers.

The mutuality of caring experiences generates a positive sense of self. The space becomes a "safe haven" (Power and Bartlett, 2018:336), characterised by the joy evoked by affective recognition of our relatedness (Noddings, 2013). Just as animals naturally seek out pleasurable experiences (Balcombe, 2006), Josie has experienced a sense of pleasure through her engagement with the organisation, which explains the longevity of her involvement and her desire to increase her volunteering. Yet, as discussed earlier, organisations are "governed, managed, and produced by clock time" (Lynch, 2022:81). The courses offered at the organisation are limited by their funding streams, reflecting the short-term nature of third-sector funding, which may be a neoliberal intention (Baxter *et al.,* 2022). By design or otherwise, this urges Josie to consider the prospect of volunteering. However, unlike the organisation's short-term projects, her commitment to volunteering is not temporally defined by external constraints. From a neoliberal perspective, Josie's commitment to volunteering might be seen as a means to an end, offering the "hope labour" (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013:9), necessary to propel her into the labour market. But from a care perspective, the development of self that occurs over time is critical to her confidence and self-belief, fostered through relational experiences that resonate beyond the immediate present. This suggests that care work in a voluntary capacity should not be measured by whether it is paid, but by the extent to which it contributes to the growth of a "caring community" (Noddings, 2013:177).

The decision to engage with an AAI organisation reflects a moral commitment to care, challenging neoliberal notions of the ideal citizen. Whilst this engagement is empowering for Josie and others, it also comes with costs for the organisation. The initial choice to participate in animal-assisted services indicates a moral commitment to care. Taking responsibility for care work through volunteering amplifies this moral position (Taylor, 2007; Hamilton and Taylor, 2012). Equally, recognition from others that one is capable of caring creates a sense of being cared for, making the act of caring feel more achievable. In a neoliberal society, disengagement from the labour market is often viewed as a lack of citizenship, further complicated by the perceived loss of subjectivity associated with mental health difficulties

(Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019). However, the experience of interspecies caring within the organisation establishes interdependency and relationality as central to existence, offering a counter-narrative to neoliberal ideals of citizenship. Josie enters into a relational contract with the organisation. Her experiences within the organisation have brought her joy through relationships. She recognises her need for connections with others and, in exchange for her time—a valuable economic resource—she carries out care tasks that support the wellbeing of the animals and contribute to the sustainability of the organisation. In neoliberal terms, she can be seen as entrepreneurial. However, this capacity is only made possible through co-constructed relational networks fostered over time, which comes with both economic and psychological costs to the organisation.

Whilst the benefits of this approach to work seem evident from the Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages, the precarious nature of care work in TSO triggers an acute sense of caution. Inherent tensions exist for TSO that operate within neoliberal constraints and ideologies. As Schabram and Maitlis (2017) note, those who establish TSOs are typically driven by a strong belief in social justice, often acting out of a sense of calling—a theme I also explored in relation to Sarah's Story in Chapter 5. Choosing to care is an ideological and moral position central to individual identity, shaping the organisational approach. For Sarah and others working at the organisation, the ability to care for others, both human and animal, nurtures their sense of self. This means that even when faced with funding cuts and limited resources, their moral and individual commitment to care persists, resulting in 'business as usual' despite reduced budgets. For neoliberalism, this is ideological perfection. Whilst commitment to ensuring the provision of the voluntary, non-contractable, non-commodifiable element of caring is ideal from a neoliberal perspective, it still incurs significant psychological costs (Lynch, 2022). A constant tightening of budgets reduces the costs of caring for the state, yet the work to care continues. As a result, care work can continue to be exploitative of particular individuals and groups. In this context, the work of caring extends to both humans and animals, with the assumption that animals, as therapy workers, are also taking on care roles that would have

been performed by people. This might lead to the perception that the human burden of care is lessened. However, this could not be further from reality. The provision of interspecies care significantly increases overall care costs. The simultaneous demands of caring for both humans and animals compound the risk of psychological burnout (Tallberg and Jordan, 2023). Combined with rising resource costs and reduced funding, this creates a genuine risk of the dissolution of care-based organisations and the critical services they provide in fostering a mutually flourishing society.

## Summary

This chapter set out to address two key research aims: how does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation? and how does interspecies care challenge neoliberal values? In doing so, it provides a response to Tallberg and Hamilton's (2023b:1) question: "Where do animals fit in the contemporary organisation and organising?" Within an interspecies care organisation, the practice of caring for animals shapes the daily experience. Whilst governance structures help organise time and space, it is the attentiveness to animals' agency that drives the organisation's day-to-day activities. This often leads to a sense of disorder and chaos, as the relational dynamics between humans and animals resist conventional organisational structures. Animals are not simply fitted into the organisation but play an active role in co-creating a sense of interspecies belonging. Particularly, the recognition of rescue animals as agents of care challenges traditional notions of their marginalised status. Their roles as care workers demonstrate their agency and capabilities, whilst their need for care highlights their vulnerability. This dynamic mirrors the organisation's values, emphasising the interplay between vulnerability and capability within human-animal relationships.

Moving on to consider how interspecies care challenges neoliberal values, the affective experience of care—both giving and receiving—has transformative potential, as seen in

Josie's story. The culture of care within the organisation fosters a shared sense of interspecies connection, helping to challenge neoliberal categories of marginalisation and oppression. However, this chapter also addresses the challenges and costs associated with this approach to care. Caring is inherently costly, both economically and psychologically, and TSO like this one are not immune to the pressures of neoliberalism. Whilst interspecies care fosters a sense of presence and connection in the moment, the organisation's productivity and sustainability still rely on compartmentalised time and structured routines (Lynch, 2022). The tensions between relational care and neoliberalism are explored throughout the chapter. Responding to Connolly and Cullen's (2018) invitation to consider the morality of 'dirty work' in interspecies organisations, I examine the role of volunteers within this context. Whilst acknowledging the structural inequalities associated with unpaid care work, I argue that volunteering should not be dismissed solely through the lens of neoliberal ethics. Interspecies care volunteering offers valuable experiences of both caring and being cared for, contributing to an individual's sense of agency and competence. These moment-to-moment experiences are productive in ways that extend beyond economic value, shaping narratives of selfhood that are crucial for fostering a mutually flourishing society. Rejecting productivity-focused, future-oriented notions of time and economic reward must be weighed against the importance of fostering relationality and mutual care. These experiences may have implications for employability and self-care, but the centrality of relationality is key to the sustainability of both individuals and the organisation.

# Chapter 9
# From Shared Marginalisation to Mutual Flourishing: Interspecies Kinship and Care

## Chapter overview

This chapter addresses the third research question: How can interspecies care practices foster mutual benefits for both humans and animals? Throughout the thesis, I have explored the mutual benefits of care practices for both species, alongside the organisational and societal implications. In this chapter, I weave these themes together to examine the personal, political, and societal costs and benefits of interspecies care within an organisational context. The chapter begins by examining the opportunities and challenges for organisations driven by an ethics of care. Building on previous discussions of the love of rats, I explore how organisational decision-making, rooted in a commitment to care, can become problematic within a neoliberal framework. For the first time, the stories introduce the fancy rats—first in the context of animal rescue, and further in Roland's Story, which illustrates how organisational values intersect with societal narratives, creating both challenges and opportunities for mutually beneficial care experiences. The chapter continues to elaborate on animal rescue stories, including a rabbit named Hope and a guinea pig called Cloud, examining how these rescue narratives serve as a generative resource in Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) work. These stories highlight the moral significance of animal rescue and the affective, therapeutic potential of such narratives, which offer benefits extending beyond the immediate context. Merlin, an exotic creature, then reappears, and I discuss how caring for exotic animals in AAI work poses risks within a neoliberal world but also brings ontological and epistemological insights. In the penultimate section, the chapter turns to Remi, Rolo, and Rhubarb's Story, focusing on small talk on the sofa. Upon closer examination, this small talk illustrates how interspecies care practices serve as both individual and collective resistance to societal discourses surrounding care, particularly those shaping perceptions of women.

These exchanges reveal how interspecies care offers an alternative to dominant narratives, creating space for new understandings of relational care within both human and animal contexts.

## From Rescue to Care: Balancing Ethics and Practicalities in AAI

In this chapter, I explore how interspecies care can provide the foundation for ethical AAI work that is mutually beneficial. Situating this within an organisational context, I examine the ways a therapeutic human-animal organisation aims to support mutual flourishing, along with the inherent challenges posed by the current social, political, and economic landscape.

Below, is the Fancy Rats' Story, it is the end of a busy Tuesday afternoon. Before the debrief, the final care work tasks are being completed.

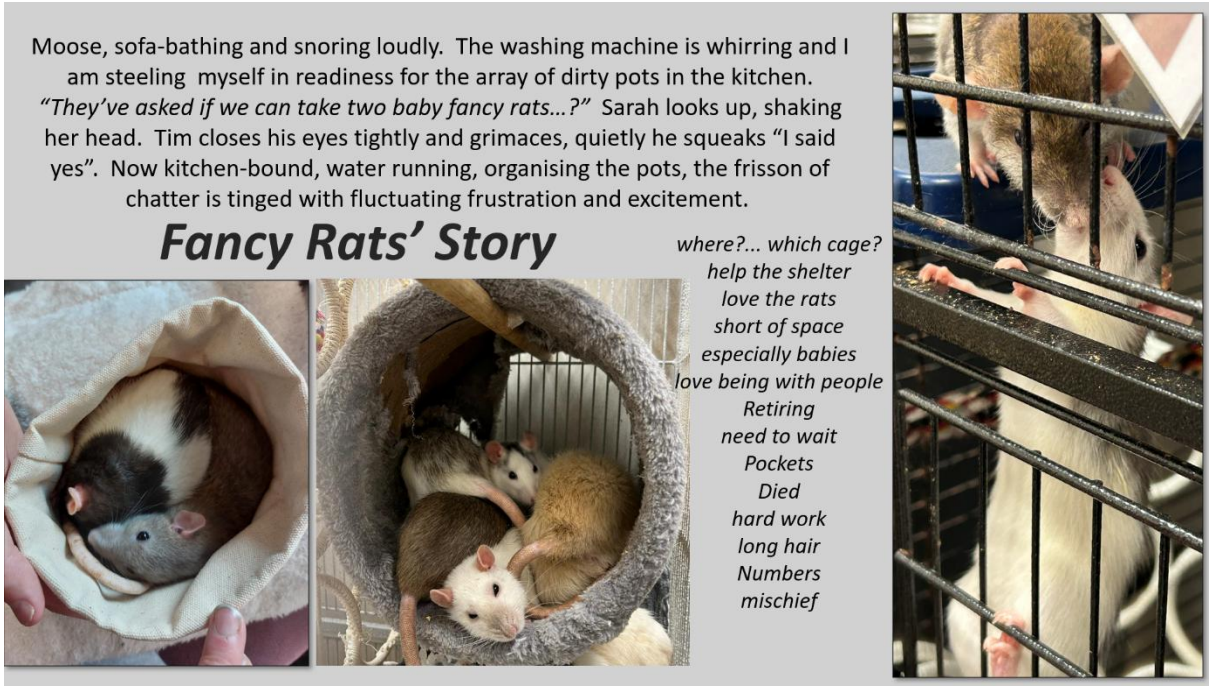



*Fig.36. Fancy Rats' Story*

Through the Fancy Rats' Story, I explore how the values of interspecies care influence organisational decision-making, fostering mutual flourishing both within and beyond the organisation's physical boundaries. The story illustrates how care, both as a value and practice (Held, 2006), is shaped by a mix of practical considerations and affective connections. Building on the importance of attentiveness in care, as discussed in the previous data chapters (Ch.6-8), the narrative highlights the joyful appreciation of rats—their love of people, pockets, and long hair—emphasising the mutual affection that reflects an understanding of the species and the significance of human-rat relationships (PETA, 2024). The decision to rescue animals from shelters aligns with the organisation's ethical stance, reinforcing its values. By taking responsibility for the care of these animals, the organisation benefits ontologically and epistemologically from rat-human interactions in AAI. In essence, this relationship operates within a commercial framework, where rats serve as care workers in exchange for having their care needs met (Coulter, 2016). Practical decisions regarding the rats' care, both short- and long-term, are necessary, with organisational logics demanding operationalisation within clock time, hence the underlying frustration in discussions (Lynch, 2022). As mentioned in the previous chapter, welfare regulations dictate minimum space requirements for each species, limiting the number of animals that can be housed. The death of a rat, therefore, creates space for another, underscoring the realities of the short lifespan of small animals. The Fancy Rats' Story captures the complex interplay of values and practicalities in organisational care decision-making, as seen in the way emotional bonds and ethical commitments to rescue are balanced against spatial constraints, regulatory requirements, and organisational time pressures.

Values of caring need to be considered in context. Whilst a moral commitment to helping and supporting the work of the shelter is evidence of the values of caring, it is also necessary to consider the practical implications from a position of organisational productivity. The need for significant space falls within the realms of stipulated welfare requirements but is equally significant within the practice of caring for sentient creatures. Attentiveness to clients'

choices and their desire to spend time with a particular species of animal is incorporated into the decision-making process, reflecting the co-constructed nature of third-sector community provision. Rescuing the rats as babies is also significant to the process of enculturation into the work of AAI. Like the domestication of pet animals, baby rats in this organisation are gradually introduced to more human interaction with staff and volunteers. Knowledge about the species themselves suggests that their need and desire for human interaction is an essential form of care. Therefore, person-centred care work in AAI may be more suited to some rats than work as companion animals (Coulter, 2016). Whilst the animal sanctuary is required to abide by regulations ensuring the animals' welfare needs are met, the pressures of time and space limit relational experiences (Giroux and Voigt, 2023). Thus, moving the rats into a relational context can be mutually beneficial in terms of the animals' wellbeing and the sustainability of the sanctuary.

But whilst there are certainly significant benefits, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that operating within an ethics of care can be costly. The provision of sufficient animals is essential for maintaining income and protecting animal welfare. However, acquiring rescue animals does not always lead to the acquisition of new therapy animals, and an ethics of care implies both practical and moral responsibility for the animals' care and changing needs. The organisation works hard to ensure they do not relinquish responsibility for animals that become unsuitable for therapy work, which has both organisational and financial implications. When the rats are no longer able to act as care workers yet still require care, questions arise about how to accommodate this within the limited budgetary constraints of the third-sector organisation (TSO). I will explore this further in the next section, focusing on Roland, the rat who is *prison-bound*.

In summary, organisational decision-making in this context reveals how the values and practices of care deliberately aim to establish a more caring interspecies community. The organisation's commitment to attentiveness—whether to the needs of individuals, animals,

or society—drives its mission, but this comes with relational and emotional costs. Choosing to collaborate with rescue organisations reflects a moral imperative to promote mutual flourishing, favouring rescued animals over those from breeders as a stance against contributing to the capitalist pet industry. This decision supports the sustainability of rescue organisations and ensures the animals' needs align with the demands of the organisation's clients. Attentiveness to which animals clients prefer, though time-consuming, highlights the importance of choice and agency in care work—crucial for the success of AAI on both individual and organisational levels. However, maintaining relational balance among the various stakeholders is emotionally demanding. Whilst this approach offers mutual benefits, it also incurs significant organisational costs, especially when animals rescued for therapy are found unsuitable due to temperament or health. In such cases, the organisation remains responsible for their care, further adding to its operational burdens. In the next section, I will continue with the story of the rats—let me introduce you to Roland.

## Ideas Matter: thinking ideas with other ideas

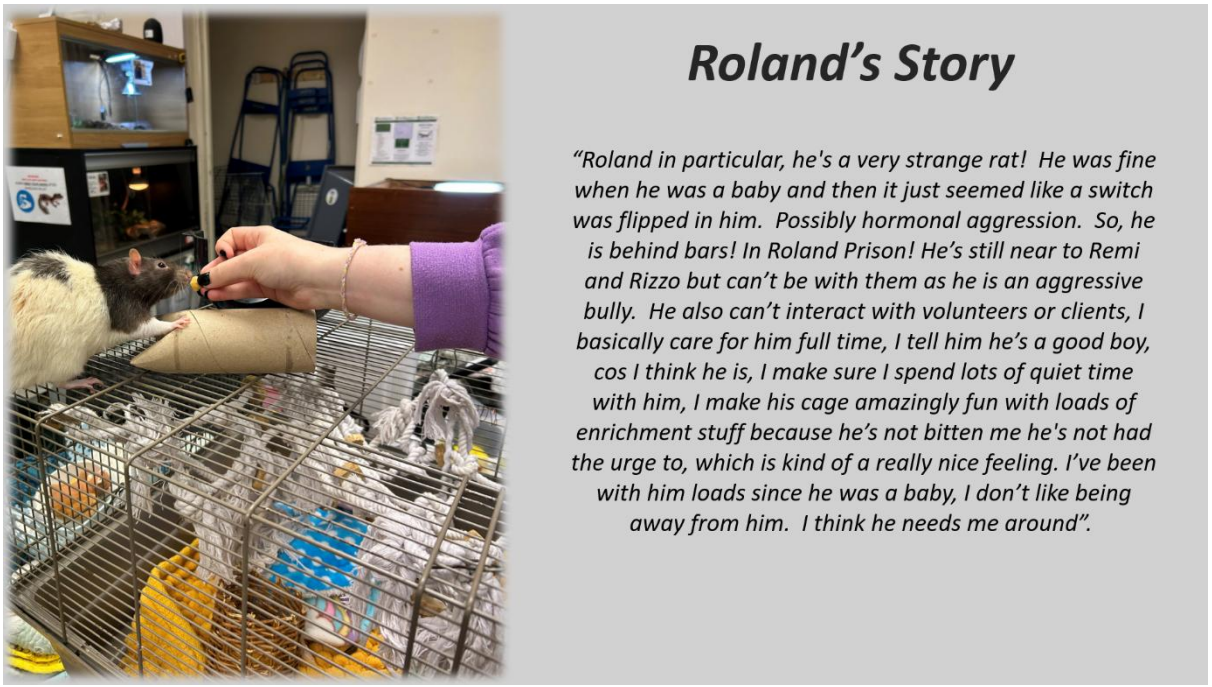



*Fig.37. Roland's Story*

Roland's Story illustrates the challenges and opportunities inherent in long-term care. Initially, I will focus on Carrie's personal relationship with Roland, then expand to explore how her competence in care leads to broader reflections on the societal influences and organisational responsibilities that emerge from this work.

Introduced in Chapter 5, Carrie plays a pivotal role in the care provided within the animal welfare room. In this story, she explains her special relationship with Roland, a rat she cares for, to a client. Through Roland's Story, Carrie demonstrates her skill in caregiving by attending to his unique needs—such as ensuring he has quiet time, balancing his proximity to other rats whilst maintaining separation, and providing ample enrichment in his cage. Although Roland initially thrived as a therapy rat, his tendency to bite people or bully other rats has led to his retirement from interactive therapy. For Carrie, Roland's restraint in not biting her feels like a reciprocal form of care, which further motivates her to intensify her care for him.

Whilst Carrie's desire to feel competent and capable in her relationship with Roland is important, this intense responsibility to care is also shaped by societal expectations. A longstanding critique of feminist care theory is its association with the assumption that women possess a natural capacity for care (Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998), a notion that permeates societal discourses and influences individual self-perceptions. In this story, Carrie provides a detailed account of her ability to offer the best possible care for Roland. Whilst this is not inherently problematic, intensive caregiving can have detrimental effects on her wellbeing (Gilligan, 2003). As a young female employee, her desire to excel in caring for Roland and to embrace the organisation's values could lead to emotional burnout. Carrie is aware that maintaining a positive relationship with Roland is crucial; if he were to bite her, her ability to care for him could be compromised. Although others could take over his care,

the likelihood of him biting them is higher, which could escalate the risk of harm, impact his quality of life, and potentially force difficult decisions, such as considering euthanasia. Carrie's reluctance to be away from Roland may reflect her desire to maintain consistency in their relationship and reduce the risk of him biting someone else, adding yet another layer to her care work. Miller (1986) suggests that in organisations women can get stuck in relational patterns of behaviour that are restrictive. Whilst Carrie's intentions are undoubtedly genuine, the intensity of their dyadic relationship can be costly. Retiring Roland from AAI services whilst continuing to care for him is a moral and ethical decision aligned with the organisation's values. However, it is also the organisation's responsibility to ensure that this care work does not lead to psychological and emotional burnout for staff, further multiplying the demands and costs of care.

Building on the previous discussion of care and relationality, Roland's Story offers a unique perspective on how these dynamics unfold within the AAI organisation. A recurring theme in this thesis has been the multiple roles that stories play in establishing subjectivity and relationality. I intend to build on this shortly by exploring the role of rescue stories in the provision of AAI. But first, I want to consider how Roland's Story provides a significant caring resource within the AAI organisation. Whilst it is not a story of his rescue, it is one that emphasises that who he is and how he behaves is the result of an iterative and interactive process incorporating both biological and social factors. "*He was fine when he was a baby,"* and thus, he is not inherently bad; despite his behaviour, he still deserves the best care. Adopting a care perspective focuses attention on what he is communicating, offering insights into his needs, including social relationships, stimulation, and space. Although Roland can no longer perform AAI work in an interactive capacity, his story serves as a resource within the organisation, illustrating its values and beliefs about the transformative capacity of care and its significance for mental health and wellbeing. Metaphorically, the story suggests that whilst mental illnesses may affect how someone behaves, this behaviour results from a combination of biological and social factors. Being listened to, responded to, and cared for impacts a

person's sense of self, suggesting that relational experiences can be reparative, promoting different ways of living and being.

Staying with the rats and drawing on their capacity to spark affective connectivity, I want to briefly explore the significance of attachment with a rat. Throughout the thesis, various stories of human relationships with rats have been considered. In Chapter 6, we see Miriam's discomfort when Tim walks through with a rat in hand, and in Chapter 4, I reflected on my personal struggles with rats. In Western culture, rats are often viewed as disgusting (Polák *et al.,* 2020), diseased, dirty—problems to be dealt with (Aivelo, 2022). A prolific extermination industry exists to rid private and public spaces of such unwanted inhabitants. The fact that rats are not considered animals under the UK Animal Welfare Act makes this practice acceptable. Yet in other cultures, the perception of rats is very different (Noble *et al.,* 2011). The Western cultural perception characterises them as unloved (Aivelo, 2022:81), leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Their sophisticated capabilities are overshadowed by discourses of disease and infection, leading to their frequent misunderstanding. Whilst this perception fosters extreme distaste and anxiety in some, it can spark a connectional motivation for others. Those with mental health difficulties are often seen as representing the 'dis-ordered' or 'dis-eased' (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019), and there is an extensive self-care industry that promises to 'exterminate' mental health challenges, provided one has the capacity to choose to enlist its resources. For individuals who affectively connect with rats, there is a sense of shared experience in being othered, generating an affective connection and a sense of being "kin" (Haraway, 2016:2). As discussed earlier, rats are believed to desire human relationships, possess a capacity to care, and are attuned to the needs of their human companions (PETA, 2024). Connecting with a rat in an AAI session, therefore, becomes both an experience of caring for the unwanted and caring for oneself. It conveys the subliminal message: "*I too am like the rat - I want human connection, but often I am misunderstood."*

This interspecies connectedness has implications for mutual flourishing, particularly when grounded in shared experiences of marginalisation and relational obligation. As I discussed in Chapter 7, these affective entanglements foster a form of kinship that exceeds conventional, biologically grounded understandings of family. Drawing on Haraway's notion of "making kin" as a form of enduring, consequential relatedness shaped by "unequal and unjust patterns of suffering" (Paulson, 2019), kinship here is not optional, nor is it based on convenience or blood ties. Rather, it emerges through shared vulnerability and the ethical demand to respond. For those who feel kinship with rats, this sense of obligation is grounded in empathy, but also in the recognition of how structural inequalities are distributed across species lines. The rats' status as "not-animal" under the Animal Welfare Act (Taylor, 2024) parallels the ways certain human groups—particularly in the contexts of mental health, ethnicity, and disability—are positioned as "not-quite-human." Kinship in this sense is intersectional and relational: it reshapes subjectivity through "becoming-with" (Haraway, 2008) and, as Despret (2004) suggests, through an openness to being transformed by the agency of the other. This is a form of kinship rooted not only in love or affinity but in shared becoming—what Weaver (2013) calls "becoming in kind"—where human and non-human lives intertwine to challenge dominant narratives of exclusion and hierarchy. These reconfigurations of care and kinship, situated within broader structures of power and inequality, offer possibilities for rewriting the story of self and other in more relational, accountable, and compassionate ways.

Picking up on threads from the last three chapters, Roland's Story considers how enduring mutual relatedness impacts organisational practices. I explore how caring is influenced by organisational values and societal discourses and how this can generate further costs in caregiving. Additionally, I examine how enduring mutual relatedness offers different ways in which animals contribute to the organisation's commitment to care. Roland's story makes a significant contribution to a culture of interspecies caring, which has the capacity to evoke self-reflection on experiences of marginalisation due to mental ill health. Finally, I critically consider the *unloved* and misunderstood status of rats in Western society and suggest that

affective kinship, based on shared marginalisation, can help disrupt structural oppression and marginalisation.

Staying with the power of storytelling, I now turn to a more specific exploration of how the rescue narratives of animals inspire human storytelling, enhancing opportunities for mutual flourishing.

## Interspecies Caring: Mutual Transformation through Stories of Animal Rescue

In Chapter 8, I discussed how animals inspire human storytelling through the Story of Kale, Carrots, and Cabbages. Here, I will explore how animal rescue stories can be both ontologically and epistemologically significant within mutually beneficial interspecies care. Whilst the use of rescue animals in AAI has been approached with caution, there are increasing examples of AAI work that incorporates rescued animals (Hatch, 2007; Kaufmann *et al*., 2015). The fact that many of the animals at Noah's A.R.T. are rescued from a variety of circumstances provides a narrative of vulnerability, which helps frame the purpose of human participation with the organisation. This also conveys the centrality of care as a core organisational value. Conversations about the rescued animals highlight their vulnerability and need for caring relationships, whilst also emphasising interdependency as fundamental to both human and animal existence. For example, although the animal in the next story, a rabbit called Hope, was in need of care and support, her needs did not render her incapable or ostracised. In fact, the organisation believed she could make a significant and valuable contribution to the lives of others through her care work. By caring for animals like Hope, both individually and collectively, she is able to provide care for clients through AAI work.

Staying with the notion of kinship, I introduce Hope's Story. Hope, a lop-eared rabbit, has a rescue story that, whilst not an overt element of her narrative, may spark reflections on personal memories of care experiences.

*Fig.38. Hope's Story*

In Chapter 1, I discussed the blurred lines between AAI and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). Unlike AAT, AAI does not primarily aim to work through emotional struggles via conversation. Instead, the multisensory nature of interspecies relationships fosters different forms of relationality, reducing the need for verbal interaction. Whilst animals can evoke conversations, as seen when the story of Hope's rescue triggers an empathetic response, this moment is not deeply explored as it might be in traditional therapy. AAI allows the client to experience their feelings in the moment, which can be therapeutic in itself (Beck and Katcher, 1983). In this instance, the explanation of Hope's rescue from the bath to the organisation evokes a connection, where the client reflects on a similarity between her personal experience and that of the rabbit, saying, *"That's like my Gran, she looks after me now."* This fleeting acknowledgment of similarity sparks a sense of vulnerability, which is quickly redirected as she shifts her focus to caring for Hope, asking, *"Can I feed her?"* Rather than probing this connection further, AAI allows the client to experience her feelings in the moment, which can be therapeutic (Beck and Katcher, 1983). Her interaction with Hope, a

vulnerable rabbit, allows her to assume the role of caregiver, reflecting on her memories of being cared for by her Gran. This shift from care-receiver to caregiver fosters a sense of capability (Gorman, 2017). The experience not only builds a memory of care but also expands her understanding of kinship and different forms of connection.

In another session, the story of Cloud's rescue is elicited through the practice of interspecies caring.

*Fig.39. Cloud's Story*

Cloud had an inner ear infection when she was rescued by the organisation. It caused her to tilt her head slightly to one side, which sometimes leads to a little discharge around her eye. In Cloud's Story, Casey's mum explains that in college, Casey doesn't talk. However, a few weeks into her engagement with the organisation, after spending 20 minutes stroking, watching, and feeding Cloud, Casey spoke aloud to inquire about the guinea pig's health. The origins of AAI/AAT were based on evidence suggesting that animals made it easier for people

to talk, often allowing them to discuss difficult emotional experiences (Freud, 1959; Levinson, 1969). Whilst it is not possible to know why Casey chooses not to speak in college, the interactive, affective experience with Cloud, who also cannot talk, prompted Casey to speak. As mentioned earlier, talking is not the primary goal of AAI, but in this relational encounter, Cloud's visible vulnerability led Casey to feel a sense of responsibility to care. In this moment, Cloud's needs became more important than Casey's need to maintain silence. As discussed in Chapter 6, questions indicate an openness to learning— *"is there something wrong?", "does it hurt?"* —but Casey's interconnectedness with Cloud might also suggest these questions could be self-reflective. Although choosing not to speak is not typically considered physically painful, there may be something emotionally painful in her experiences that contributes to her silence. This is speculative, as I am articulating care practices that may not fully align with the lived experiences of those involved (Mol, 2008). Yet, the visible imperfections of the animals, such as Cloud's eye or Hope's rescue from a bath, evoke an affective connection with their human companions, blurring the boundaries between self and other.

As discussed in previous chapters, the practice of caring for a small, vulnerable creature like Cloud slows Casey down, both mentally and physically (Beck and Katcher, 1983), allowing her to be attentive to Cloud's responses to her stroking and feeding. This slowing down is essential for noticing Cloud's acknowledgment of care, which facilitates a shift in Casey's sense of self—from feeling vulnerable to feeling capable. Maintaining this sense of capability is crucial for Casey's self-perception. During this slowed-down process of caring, Casey becomes immersed in an affective experience, where her attention shifts moment-by-moment between Cloud and herself, sparking reflections on the connectedness of their beings. In a neoliberal context, where organisations, especially educational establishments', operate almost exclusively on productivity and future-oriented time (Lynch, 2022), this immersion in present time allows Casey to respond iteratively to her feelings and emotions. This affective experience creates a memory of caring—a story of herself as relational, capable, and vulnerable—that has the potential to guide her in future relational encounters.

Having considered the rats and guinea pigs, we now reconnect with Merlin to explore the less common AAI animals—those that are wild and exotic.

## Exotic Animals in AAI: Navigating Care, Connection, and Sustainability

Although you have not had the opportunity to interact directly with the animal residents at the organisation, it is my hope that you have formed some affective connection to the central animal characters through their stories thus far. Before Tyler takes centre stage again, I would like to spend a little more time reflecting on Merlin and his fellow companions.

*Fig.40. Wild and Exotics Story*

AAI "refers to the unstructured, structured, or goal-oriented activities that intentionally include or incorporate animals into human services in health, education, and similar fields to promote wellbeing benefits for humans and provide a positive experience for the animals"

(IAHAIO, 2018:5). For Millie, the benefits of interacting with Merlin are palpable. The proximal encounter evokes an embodied and affective response, prompting Millie to express her affections. According IAHAIO, wild and exotic species should not be incorporated into AAI work. Bearded dragons, being classified as reptiles, fall under this category, and IAHAIO—along with its member organisations, including the Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS), the primary UK animal assistance organisation—stipulates that they should not be involved in care work. However, there is a rising trend in their use in the field of AAI (Fine *et al*., 2019). The rationale for their exclusion is based on two risk factors. First, it is suggested that there is an increased risk of zoonoses (IAHAIO), although Friedmann *et al*., (2015) argue that few cases of zoonoses have been reported in AAI. Second, it is believed that close interaction with exotic animals may encourage their purchase as pets, which poses a threat to biodiversity (Pasmans *et al.,* 2017). Whilst the desire to own such animals may be present, proximal encounters in an AAI setting can offer an affective and educational experience regarding the realities of exotic care (Pasmans *et al.,* 2017). These encounters have the potential to challenge the simplistic portrayals of exotic pets often seen on social media (Riddle and McKay, 2020).

Revisiting the story above, Millie chooses to spend time with Merlin, stating, *"He is absolutely my 100% favourite…he doesn't talk, I bond with him…I relate to him…he gets me."* This reflects her deep affective attachment and multisensory connection with him—an entangled mind-body encounter (Maurette, 2018). Channelling the multisensory power of touch, as discussed in Chapter 6, Millie strokes Merlin's spiny, bumpy scales, absorbing his coarse texture and breathing in his presence. This act helps her uncoil her muscles, prompting her to rest and relax into the chair. She becomes absorbed in the relational encounter, immersed in compassionate time. The physical connection evokes a sense of being cared for by Merlin, emphasising the importance of their interaction. However, Millie's statement, *"I relate to him,"* suggests a reflective, imaginative process that extends beyond the immediate moment (Hamington, 2004). Whilst she may not fully understand Merlin's feelings, she empathises

with his structurally determined positionality. The vulnerability evoked through touch, smell, and observation connects Millie with her own "lived and affective experiences" (Hamington, 2004:72). This immersion in her interconnectedness with Merlin sparks a new understanding of herself. Her claim that Merlin *"gets me"* indicates that she perceives a similarity between their experiences, forming the foundation of their relational connection.

As discussed above in relation to rats, societal inscriptions of different species categories inform public perception. For Millie, Merlin's categorisation as *wild* and *exotic* is possibly part of the reason why she feels a connection. Concepts of wildness and exoticism evoke colonial inscriptions of otherness—an unsocialised, otherworldliness (Halberstam, 2020). Millie herself has experienced objectification, othering, and discrimination due to her intersectional identities, notably her gender as a woman and her mental ill health. Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey (2019:2) point out that "Madness is itself gendered, coded, as a female malady." Societally, women with mental illness can be perceived as wild, untamed, and lacking the necessary domestication for the neoliberal world. Millie's desire to care for Merlin may stem from a connection with his peripheral positionality and perceived wildness and exoticism. Millie strokes Merlin's coarse scales, suggesting that despite the tactile harshness, he needs to be touched and cared for—perhaps reflecting what she also needs. Whilst those who experience mental ill health may feel compelled to isolate themselves for fear of judgment, they too have a desire for relationality and a need to be understood and cared for. I will now move on to consider how kinship, as seen in Millie's relationship with Merlin, forms the basis for unsettling colonial inscriptions of otherness.

In Chapter 6, I discussed the benefits of being "carefully anthropomorphic" (Bekoff, 2002:49). Here, we see another example of its mutual benefits. Caring for Merlin has triggered in Millie an empathetic connection to the moral injustices of othering that affect both humans and animals. To remain silent on this issue would allow such injustices to persist. Merlin's otherworldly origins, along with perceptions of his uncleanliness and disease, are seen as a

threat to mainstream society. However, recent research highlights that the risk of zoonoses is not confined to exotic animals (Boyle *et al*., 2019), raising questions about why reptiles remain prohibited in IAHAIO guidelines. Whilst Millie's actions—such as bringing Merlin close to her nose—might raise zoonoses concerns, she is trusted to practise responsible care within the organisational context. If zoonotic risk were the primary concern, then kisses with Moose, as seen in Chapter 6, should provoke similar worry (Boyle *et al*., 2019). Yet, they do not. What matters is that the kinship between Millie and Merlin evokes a sense of moral responsibility that extends beyond the immediate moment. Her awareness of how categorisation and perception justify othering, and thus restrict access to care, has broader implications for how she navigates relationships, addressing the marginalisation of both self and other.

Before moving on, I want to address how the organisation's commitment to marginalised animals, exemplified by the rescue of an exotic reptile, is mutually beneficial. The demand for reptiles as pets has grown (Hausmann *et al*., 2023), yet many of these animals end up in rescue centres due to the significant time and costs associated with their care. The capitalist industry of animal ownership is sustained by a nexus of media that promotes the allure of owning exotic creatures (McMullen, 2015). Unfortunately, this often comes at the expense of educating potential owners about the actual needs and realities of caring for such animals. This has led to an interspecies problem, where the desirability of exotic pets inflates their economic value, resulting in unethical sourcing, breeding, and treatment (McMullen, 2015). The pursuit of profit in the animal trade has had severe consequences for planetary biodiversity, highlighting an urgent need for a shift in perspective and action (Haraway, 2008). As Millie notes, Merlin doesn't speak, yet within the work of the AAI organisation, time and space are devoted to fostering interspecies care relationships. This environment of attentiveness and responsiveness prioritises matters of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), enabling the ongoing development of practices that cultivate awareness of the demands of exotic pet care. Such experiences can provide an affective and educational impact, influencing human subjectivity and encouraging more responsible actions in an interspecies world.

Ultimately, the goal is for this individual transformation and heightened desire to care to become a moral foundation for decision-making. In turn, this could help curb the exotic pet industry and work towards redressing the harm it has inflicted on biodiversity.

Whilst this focus on matters of care seems beneficial for mutual interspecies flourishing, the sustainability of the organisation is also a matter of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The organisation needs to remain financially viable, and choosing to engage with exotic animals comes at significant costs. The IAHAIO's exclusion of reptiles from AAI practices prohibits the organisation from obtaining membership with IAHAIO, which is considered a marker of quality and service standards. In a neoliberal context, such affiliations can influence funding opportunities, public perception, and trust in the quality of service provision—each with financial implications. The potential risk of zoonoses adds further costs and risks. Increased attention to hygiene practices affects the organisation's time and resource management. In the worst-case scenario, the contraction of zoonotic diseases from handling exotics could seriously impact human health and damage the organisation's reputation.

The answer lies in the centrality of interspecies caring. Focusing on interspecies matters of care brings substantial benefits for both humans and animals, contributing to mutual flourishing. Merlin's move to the organisation not only increases his opportunities for relationality but also supports the sustainability of the animal sanctuary. As shown in the Wild and Exotics Story (Fig.40), Merlin's presence had a profound impact on Millie, where the ebb and flow of vulnerability and capability in caring for him fostered openness to learning beyond the moment. For the organisation, involving exotic creatures like Merlin offers mutual benefits. His rescue story highlights practical and environmental issues related to reptile care, whilst providing a cost-effective alternative to purchasing animals from breeders. By rescuing rather than buying, the organisation demonstrates a moral commitment to intervening in unethical breeding practices, potentially influencing decisions about companion animals and favouring rescue options. The presence of rats, exotics, and guinea pigs also fosters affective

connections with notions of difference, encouraging clients to engage with how animals are categorised in ways that perpetuate oppression. However, in a neoliberal context, these ethical decisions carry significant financial risks. Whilst Merlin's inclusion brings mutual benefits that affirm the morality of the organisation's choices, the costs of his care challenge their ability to flourish as a sustainable entity.

I will now consider how the practices of caring for animals in AAI evoke conversations that have "political potential because [they] theorise [their] social context as [they] practise [themselves]" (Biehl, 2017:45).

## Caring Beyond the Self: Interspecies Connections and Political Agency

*Fig.41. Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story*

### *Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story*

For the final 30 minutes, Laura, Kelly and Lyn have chosen to spend time with a guinea pig. Whilst I patiently attempt to collect the rostered Rhubarb for cuddles and cabbage, Carrie is in the animal welfare room explaining her work to a new volunteer *"it's very much like having a child when they give off a negative emotion you immediately tend to that emotion"* opening the cage door she swings Remi into the pouch of her hoodie *"… and try to make things better…"* pushing a tuna treat into her pouch *"here there is just a bunch of children that all need your attention at once and you are just trying to feed each need – and more".* Scrunching my body down the side of the cage where I've spotted Rhubarb *"Come here baby, I've got you"* I hold Rhubarb tightly to my chest, she wheeks. Towels on laps, I place the cuddle cup, safely housing Rhubarb onto Laura's knee. I pass over the veg for them to feed their guineas. Focussed intently on the guinea pigs, the sofa is alive with chatter. *"He will start school in September, I can't believe how quickly time goes, I remember when he was this tiny"* Lyn nods towards Rolo, who is gnawing a carrot in her lap. Attentively absorbed in Oreo's exploration of the sofa cushions Kelly adds *"Nope! Definitely not for me, guinea pigs yes, dogs yes, in fact animals yes, 100% yes, but babies! Hmmmm …Nope!" Reaching for some pepper,* Laura says *"arrrgghhh really, they are so cute, it takes me back to when they were small, frightened of dropping them, never sure what they wanted or needed. Thankfully my mum was around then …they're grown up now, with babies of their own"*

Such experiences are a typical form of AAI. Spending time with animals is seen to have benefits for human wellbeing (Fine, 2015). I argue that the focus on caring is central to these

wellbeing benefits. In both the animal welfare room and the therapy context—such as in the Story of Remi, Rolo, and Rhubarb—caring for the animals triggers conversations about babies, children, and mothering. As discussed earlier in this chapter, societal discourses often associate care with mother-child relationships (Lynch, 2022). The mother-child relationship provides a metaphor for how Carrie cares for the animals; she explains how she is responsive to her children's needs and takes responsibility to respond, *"and more."* The act of scooping up *"baby"* Rhubarb from the cage evokes embodied practices of care associated with mothering, as she is held *"tightly to my chest,"* soothing and comforting the small, fragile *"infant."* Such practices reflect breast-feeding images of motherhood (Giles, 2018). The affective, embodied interaction with the guinea pig conjures notions of vulnerability and fragility (Lorenz, 1991), which in this instance prompts discussions about mothering. In the therapy room, Lyn practices caring, feeding, and nurturing Rolo, which leads her to reflect on her son's upcoming transition to school and his growth over time. For Kelly, engaging in practices of care with the guinea pig creates a safe space to express her decision not to become a mother. Her attentiveness to Oreo's curious exploration of the sofa cushions illustrates her capacity for care and responsibility for the other, making it acceptable for her to reject societal expectations of motherhood. Concluding the story, Laura's reflection on her success in caring, as her children are grown up now, is enveloped within her concerns around her incapacity to know how to care. A fear of the fragility and vulnerability of her children, evoked by the "*cuteness*" of the guinea pigs, also provides insights into her own sense of vulnerability to live up to the expectations placed on women to care and to care well.

Attaching care to the maternal relationship has drawn widespread criticism (Hassan, 2008; Robinson, 2014). Similarly, associating the human-animal relationship with parenting has also faced significant critique (Haraway, 2003). The central concern lies in the potential for abuse and oppression that can result from these associations. An ethics of care focuses on relational practices as the foundation for tackling oppressions. The marginalisation and oppression of animals and women lead to a dance of interspecies care which "has political potential because

it theorises its social context as it practises itself" (Biehl, 2017:45). In the Story of Remi, Rolo, and Rhubarb, the affective experience of the guinea pigs' and rats' vulnerability prompts specific caring practices, such as Carrie placing Remi in the pouch of her hoodie and me holding Rhubarb tightly to my chest. These embodied practices of interspecies care reflect societal perceptions of what care should look like. Whilst neither Remi nor Rhubarb are newborns, their physiology evokes a drive to love and protect, akin to the human connection with their offspring (Lorenz, 1991). These embodied practices of caring—such as swaddling and feeding—elicit reflections on care and its societal association with babies and children. Whilst Carrie does not have children, her exposition of mothering in the context of her work provides further insight into the oppressive discourses that feminist care theories have been criticised for perpetuating.

> "here there is just a bunch of children that all need your attention at once and you are just trying to feed each need – and more".
>
> (from Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story)

As has become apparent in Chapters 5 and 8, Carrie plays a pivotal role in animal care within the organisation. As an employee, she likens her care for the animals to that of caring for her children. This metaphorical alignment suggests that Carrie views herself as driven by a love for animals and a natural capacity to care, similar to the relationship between mother and child. Mother-child care is often seen as pure and invincible, implying that Carrie's care for the animals shares similar unquestionable qualities. Her reference to *"and more"* in the context of caring resonates deeply with contemporary neoliberal notions of intensive mothering (Williamson *et al*., 2023; Kerrane *et al*., 2021). Her sentiments here, and earlier in Roland's Story (Fig.37), convey an immense sense of responsibility for her animal companions. However, I was also struck by my perception of her tone in this story—there was a palpable sense of angst in her words. Carrie's attentiveness to multiple care demands illustrates one aspect of the *"and more"* practices of care that society often expects from women. Whilst she cares for the animals in the animal welfare room, she, like other members of the organisation,

is also attuned to the needs of the volunteers. Her oral exposition reveals the intense demands of care work, communicating both her deep connection with the animals and a conscious or subconscious awareness of the societal expectations placed on women regarding caregiving.

Returning to the sofa chatter, I refocus attention on the role of talk in mutual flourishing care practices. I have previously discussed how talk is a key part of the "dance" of interspecies caring; here, I explore how talk fosters relationality, which in turn deepens interconnectedness and forms the basis of resistance and challenge.

On one level, talk can provide insight into human subjectivity, but on another, listening to what is said can contribute to understanding the political and cultural context. The focus on the animals serves as a way to foster human connectedness (Smith, 2019), which helps to alleviate social isolation (Roy *et al*., 2017). The small, soft presence of a guinea pig sparks an emotional connection, both to the animal and to oneself. As Lyn cares for the fragile guinea pig, the physical interaction reminds her of past experiences of care, which stimulates the sofa chatter.

> Lyn: "He will start school in September, I can't believe how quickly time goes, I remember when he was this tiny"
>
> Kelly: "Nope! Definitely not for me, guinea pigs yes, dogs yes, in fact animals yes, 100% yes, but babies! Nope!"
>
> Laura: "arrrgghhh really, they are so cute, it takes me back to when they were small, frightened of dropping them, never sure what they wanted or needed. Thankfully my mum was around then …they're grown up now, with babies of their own"
>
> (from Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story)

On the surface, this chatter is evidence of the organisation's capacity to develop relationality through a programme of animal interaction (Jau and Hodgson, 2018). A core requirement for third-sector mental health organisations is to provide safe relational spaces that help reduce social isolation and promote improved health and wellbeing (Roy *et al.,* 2017). Through

engaging in the practices of caring for the animals, conversation is sparked. Lyn chooses to speak out loud, to no one in particular. The reciprocity in the experience of caring for Rolo provides a relational safety net that propels her to connect with others (Gorman, 2017). Lyn doesn't merely narrate the practices of caring she is engaged in; she shares a sense of herself with the other women on the sofa. The focus on caring for the small creature slows movements and time, allowing her to think, feel, and reflect on herself as a mum, as the caregiver. Whilst her capacity to care for the guinea pigs leads her to undertake a form of biographical work (Brooks *et al*., 2018), the opportunity to narrate this experience and share with others helps frame her sense of knowing and being in the world which is rooted in relationality (Haraway, 2003; 2016).

Whilst care work takes considerable time in daily life, especially for women, opportunities for compassionate time are limited (Lynch, 2022). Pets have long been regarded as powerful in shaping human biographies, particularly in the context of mental health recovery (Brooks *et al.,* 2018). However, caring for pets also becomes part of women's broader care work responsibilities (Cudworth, 2022). The complex and multisensory demands on attention within the private confines of the home can make it difficult to find time to become fully absorbed in the relational experience. Similarly, in the AAI setting, the organisation of the care experience—such as collecting guinea pigs from the piggy pit, providing towels and cuddle cups, and preparing vegetables—scaffolds the potential for a successful caring encounter. As I have discussed, time spent in the present, or "compassionate time," as Lynch refers to it, has the potential to affectively provoke new stories of self. The experience of being capable of caring motivates Lyn to reflect aloud, perhaps with some level of acceptance that this reflection will make her vulnerable. The routine care of the animals during weekly sessions at the organisation may have contributed to a sense of familiarity with the affective dynamics of caregiving. Caring for the guinea pig fosters an affective appreciation of interdependency in human-animal relations, prompting Lyn to present herself as interdependent. This declaration leaves her vulnerable, as it awaits a response from others.

The act of caring alongside others creates a safe space (Power and Bartlett, 2018), where vulnerability is accepted and perhaps even positively regarded. The mutual engagement in caring for the animals unites Kelly and Lyn, helping to mediate their sense of vulnerability. The residue of Cartesian thinking positions animals as more vulnerable than their human companions, which renders Kelly, Lyn, and Laura capable in the context of their care work. Whilst Kelly responds with a conflict of perspective, stating that children are *"definitely not for me,"* she reaffirms her relational connection with Lyn by expressing her love for the animals. Kelly cares for Lyn by acknowledging her vulnerability in discussing her son's care and, in turn, making herself vulnerable as well. Societally, Cartesian thought acts as a haunting pentimento, an image suggesting that a woman's "maternal body is animal-like-cow-like — uncontrolled and excessive" (Malson, 1997:237), tamed through the practice of childbearing. As such, Kelly's refusal to reproduce may still render her of lesser status as a woman (Letherby, 2002), leading to suspicion (Fraser and Taylor, 2019). However, her ability to articulate her choice to reject motherhood is enabled through the practice of caring. Her capacity to feel both vulnerable and agentic whilst caring for the guinea pig allows her to present her self-story as one of vulnerability and agency. She explains that she is "making kin, not babies" (Haraway, 2016:5-6). Whilst this choice may lead to suspicion, she feels it is mediated by her moral and ethical commitment to care for animals as kin.

The practices of caring affectively trigger the "capacities to speak and challenge the silencing of the affective relational world" (Lynch, 2022:201). In this instance, it is the affective impact of care on the experience of women. Laura joins the conversation with an ambiguous sentiment, *"Arrrgghhh really, they are so cute…"* that could ironically unite her with both Kelly and Lyn. Such ambiguity in relational practices can fuel avoidance. Kelly could interpret her statement as referring to how cute the animals are, whilst Lyn might assume she is talking about babies and children, particularly as Laura follows up with reflections on her own parenting. However, what is manifesting here exceeds the relational value of conversation — it becomes an "affective site of political resistance" (Lynch, 2022:18). The practice of

interspecies caring is mutually beneficial: the animals enjoy feeding and human proximity, whilst their human companions develop relationships with others who share similar experiences. But the mutual benefits go beyond the individual human/animal dynamic, becoming a means of building communities with the potential to create political transgressions that contribute to the creation of "a different world" (Lynch, 2022:201). The affective, embodied experiences of caring for the guinea pigs hold significant political agency. Practising and discussing care in this way has allowed Laura, Kelly, and Lyn to share personal insights into how culturally imposed expectations to care impact their lives, sustained by societal expectations of what it means to be women. Moreover, these conversations open possibilities for understanding how societal expectations—particularly regarding gender identity—contribute to mental health difficulties, and why charges of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism help silence these conversations to sustain neoliberal capitalism. This framing of care as trivial, overly emotional, or anthropocentric is not incidental—it is a mechanism through which neoliberal capitalism suppresses collective resistance and maintains the fiction of autonomous, economically productive individuals.

Whilst focusing on babies, children, and mothering, I acknowledge that this could be aligned with anthropocentrism. However, I reject this view. Charges of this nature serve to oppress the conversations explored thus far. Fostering relationality as a basis for mutual flourishing challenges the individualism perpetuated by neoliberalism. Laura, Lyn, and Kelly are driven by an affective connection with animals, which draws them into the organisation to participate. The practice of interspecies caring is an affective, embodied experience that creates a present-time awareness, allowing them to feel and connect with themselves and others. It conjures a therapeutic space in which to reflect on how living might be done differently. In neoliberalism, such experiences can pose a threat to the status quo. The shared experiences of oppression generate a kinship that enables discussions about the oppressions and inequalities of caregiving. This, in turn, fosters a collective — a feared and fertile basis for challenging neoliberal capitalism in the interest of mutual flourishing.

## Summary

To conclude, I will now summarise the central points from this chapter in response to the research question: How can interspecies care practices foster mutual benefits for both humans and animals?

At the heart of mutual flourishing is attentiveness to the agentic capacities and subjectivity of all living beings. Mutual flourishing begins with the recognition of animals' "primary agency" — acknowledging their ability to act, respond, and influence their environment (Carter and Charles, 2013:321). The moment-by-moment attunement to the dance of interspecies caring highlights this agency, shaping how humans perceive and relate to animals. This recognition is the foundation of the intervention, fostering a relationship where the human's sense of responsibility to care is rooted in respect for the animal's inherent capabilities, rather than just their perceived vulnerability. Understanding animals as agentic beings shifts the human perception from dominance to partnership, where care is not simply a duty but a shared experience of mutual benefit. This relationality creates a multisensorial experience of the interplay between vulnerability and capability, enriching the practice of caring and enhancing the wellbeing of both human and animal. Over time, the ongoing recognition of agency and subjectivity within the human-animal relationship contributes significantly to the flourishing of both, shaping a more empathetic and interconnected understanding of all relationships.

The ethics of care extends beyond the immediate human-animal relationship, influencing organisational relationships both within and beyond the space, sowing the seeds of mutual flourishing across various contexts. For example, the decision to take in animals from rescue centres illustrates how caring can create a ripple effect of benefits. These rescued animals not only provide therapeutic value for clients but also establish a collaborative relationship with rescue organisations, potentially influencing clients' future decisions on pet ownership and impacting the capitalist pet care industry. Internally, the relationships fostered with rescued

animals cultivate other kinship connections among people, which have the potential to interrupt marginalisation and oppression.

In this chapter, I have also explored the significance of present time in care practices that enable mutual flourishing and can intervene in marginalisation and oppression. The act of interspecies caring fosters a necessary slowing down, as seen when Millie held Merlin, allowing her body to relax and her mind to fully sink into the present moment. This physical and emotional relaxation helps her inhabit the role of a capable caregiver, creating an affective memory of caring that deepens her understanding of the relational self. This experience of time through caring not only slows the caregiver but also creates a unique space —a form of time absorbed within the rhythms of the relationship itself. In neoliberal terms, this might resemble 'me time,' a space to recharge. However, true self-care, as Noddings 2013:46) argues, requires the capacity to "care for others and [be] cared for by them." The practices of caring create a space for reflection, which can challenge and disrupt narratives of oppression. In a world dominated by speed and efficiency, this slower, relational time acts as a form of resistance, reclaiming agency and fostering a more caring society. Establishing and nurturing such relationality is critical in countering neoliberal individualism, which often undermines communal bonds in favour of isolated individualism.

Throughout this chapter, the mutual benefits of care-focused AAI have been evident. However, whilst the organisation is driven by a commitment to care and the mutual flourishing of humans and animals through the 'human-animal bond', neoliberalism presents serious and persistent challenges (Haraway, 2016). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the desire to care for others is a key source of a person's identity, and when this is thwarted financially, organisationally, or relationally, it can be costly to the individual. In this chapter, I explored how Carrie's work is affected by neoliberal ideologies. She loves her job and wants to ensure all the animals receive the best possible care; failure to do so threatens her sense of self. However, providing "*and more*" care in a culture where care is undervalued, alongside

increasing cuts to funding for such services, jeopardises the mutuality of care. As a result, Carrie must navigate the multilayered demands of care work, which are intensified by the conflicting demands of neoliberal time structures. This reduction in time for genuine, affective engagement with both humans and animals interrupts the mutual benefits that such caring relationships are meant to foster, ultimately challenging the possibility of true mutual flourishing.

The challenges Carrie faces are not isolated; they reflect broader issues within the organisation's care practices. The Story of Remi, Rolo, and Rhubarb (Fig.41) illustrates how prolonged experiences within the organisation strengthen bonds not only between humans and animals but also among the people within the space. The environment, the animals, and the people together create a network of relationships that thrives on the principles of mutual care and connectedness. However, these relationships are constantly challenged by the neoliberal structures of linear, future-oriented clock time, which prioritise efficiency and short-term outcomes (Lynch, 2022). Funding for third-sector organisations is often driven by these metrics, limiting opportunities for sustained access to such transformative experiences. To truly support mutual flourishing, it is essential to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016:2) and embrace the long-term, transformative power of interspecies relationships. These connections foster deep, enduring bonds that not only enrich individual lives but also contribute to a more compassionate and interconnected society.

Having summarised the key points of this chapter, I will now proceed to the conclusion, where I will reflect on the broader implications of this research and its contributions to the field.

# Chapter 10: Conclusion

## Chapter Overview

This thesis set out to explore the co-constitution of care in interspecies relationships and its potential for mutual flourishing. By adopting an organisational approach within an Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) organisation, I aimed to illuminate how the benefits of AAI are shaped by the organisation's capacity to create infrastructures of care (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023; Kandel *et al.,* 2023). In this final chapter, I will begin by summarising the gap in the literature that this project aimed to address. I will then briefly revisit the research aims and questions before outlining how this thesis contributes to knowledge. Referring to the research questions, I will trace the findings throughout the thesis, illustrating how they weave together to build the contribution to knowledge. Before concluding, I will highlight recommendations for practice and consider ways in which this research can be developed theoretically. Finally, I offer personal reflections on the research process and my final thoughts on the importance of care-based research.

## Addressing the Gap

This thesis responds to dual calls for empirical research into AAI (Galardi *et al.,* 2021) and third sector organisations (TSOs) (Colebrooke *et al.,* 2023; Blake, 2016). Situated within, and contributing to, the field of human–animal organisation studies, and drawing on the work of Charles and Wolkowitz (2019), it advances Gorman's (2019) call for care-based research into the possibilities for mutual flourishing in human–animal organisations. Using Schuurman's concept of interspecies care, this research explores how care is co-constituted in a human–animal organisation and examines its potential for mutual flourishing within contemporary organisational life (Tallberg and Hamilton, 2023a). By focusing on how interspecies care shapes day-to-day practices, this thesis also considers whether such care can help challenge neoliberal values. In doing so, it offers a distinct contribution to human–animal organisation

studies by foregrounding the role of interspecies care as both an organising principle and a site of ethical and political resistance.

## Project Aims and Research Questions

This thesis sets out two key aims supported by 4 research questions -

**Aims**

1. To explore how care is co-constituted in an interspecies organisation
2. To consider how interspecies care might offer opportunities for mutual flourishing

**Research Questions**

1. What is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation?
2. How does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation?
3. How can interspecies care practices foster mutual benefits for both humans and animals?
4. Can interspecies care help challenge neoliberal values?

## Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis contributes new insights to the field of animal organisation studies by exploring how the values and practices of interspecies care can orientate third sector mental health organisations. The key contributions are:

**Mutual Benefits of Human-Animal Interconnectedness**

This thesis offers a nuanced understanding of care in AAI, highlighting the importance of affective relations and the roles of touch and talk in human-animal relationships. By focusing

on the shared marginalisation of humans and animals, the research explores how animals offer an "invitation to connect" (Huopalainen, 2023:96), sparking a process of "becoming-with" (Haraway, 2008:1). In this proximal relatedness, multisensorial interconnectedness establishes interspecies relationality as central to one's sense of self. This interconnectedness prompts reflections on societally determined notions of vulnerability and marginalisation, which help challenge dominant narratives. These practices not only foster wellbeing across species but also highlight the contrast between relational care and neoliberal approaches, helping to challenge market-driven models. The benefits extend to individuals, organisations, and society, both in the moment and beyond.

**An Organisational Perspective**

Building on the above, this thesis considers AAI within an organisational context, suggesting that the benefits of AAI interventions are shaped by the organisation's capacity to create infrastructures of care (Greenhough *et al.,* 2023; Kandel *et al.,* 2023). However, the research also highlights the challenges of doing so within a neoliberal framework, where care is often commodified and subjected to market-driven pressures. The complexities and tensions inherent in organisational interspecies care demand a delicate balance between maintaining ethical care practices and navigating the financial constraints and psychological demands faced by TSO. By placing care—rooted in affective connection, empathy, and mutual respect—at the centre of organisational practices, AAI organisations can push back against the logic of neoliberalism, offering a more humane and relational approach to the care of both humans and animals. Yet, doing this in a sustainable and consistent manner remains fraught with difficulties, as these organisations must constantly reconcile the values of care with operational pressures that threaten to undermine them. Despite these challenges, the research demonstrates that fostering mutual benefits for both humans and animals is possible when care is prioritised, but this requires ongoing commitment and critical reflection.

Together, these contributions advance the field of human-animal organisation studies by demonstrating how human-animal relations create political spaces that can resuscitate the values and practices of care. By "staying with" the complexities of care and allowing it to shape organisational practices, this research illustrates how interspecies caring can unsettle neoliberal approaches to care (Haraway, 2016:1).

I will now draw together the findings from the research to illustrate how they address the research questions and thus generate the contribution to knowledge outlined above.

## Question 1: What is interspecies care in a human-animal organisation?

In AAI organisations, animals serve as catalysts for relationality. Animals offer an "invitation to connect" (Huopalainen, 2023:96), providing an affective spark that draws individuals into engagement with the organisation. As Miriam explains in Chapter 6, she has a pet hamster, but there is no replacement for the love of a dog. For those experiencing mental health difficulties, relationships with animals often feel safer or more accessible than human interactions, offering a non-judgmental space to foster connection. This is also evident in Ant and Herman's Story, where the act of stroking Herman elicits the response: *"He loves it, they love the feel, I feel myself slow right down. I feel it in my body, my breath-calm, quiet. He guides me to touch, to feed, to love. I'm with Herman and no one else."* Participating in the organisation reflects a desire to touch and be touched, a fundamental need for connection (Paterson, 2006), which creates the basis for "becoming-with." Humans have an ontological desire for relationality, and animals provide a seemingly less complicated way to experience connection. The complexities of human interaction are temporarily set aside, allowing for deeper affective immersion and openness to new ways of being in relation to others.

The practice of touch is central to the work in AAI, and this is the focus of Chapter 6. Physical encounters with animals are widely recognised for their benefits—not only in fostering

connections but also in evoking deep emotional responses. As Barad (2012) suggests, being touched elicits a call to respond. Haptic and affective touch—stroking, feeling—establishes the interrelatedness of human experiences within an interspecies encounter, creating a lasting resonance (Maurette, 2018). These affective experiences carry an emotional charge, often triggering connections to past caregiving moments. Whether tied to childhood or other significant memories, the emotional intensity of these interactions informs and shapes a sense of self, where the past intertwines with the present to shape future understanding. The affective charge of the in-the-moment experience is crucial: when you touch and are touched, the origin of the action becomes secondary to the felt interconnectedness between self and other (Despret, 2004). In these tactile and affective encounters, the need for care of both human and animal intertwines, opening the possibility of rewriting the self in relation to the other (Manning, 2007). Such affective moments leave a lasting imprint, deepening human understanding of care and reshaping relational experiences in ways that transcend the immediate interaction.

Each of the stories in this thesis presents the intricate interplay between the physical and emotional significance of touch. AAI revolves around the practices of interspecies caring, where touch plays a central role in establishing responsibility and relational connection between humans and animals. The animals' need for care positions humans as responsible caregivers, inviting them into experiences that reflect the foundational role of care in society. The embodied experience of care leaves affective traces that shape future relationships. A willingness to learn and a desire to care for the animal deepens this connection. For example, in Chapter 6, Tina asks Tim if she is brushing Merlin correctly, and in Chapter 8, Josie's experiences of being physically and emotionally touched contribute to her evolving sense of self, strengthening her relational bond with Ben, a volunteer. These practices of care facilitate the rewriting of the story of self, where the self is relational, dependent on, and responsible for both humans and animals.

Beyond the immediate physical and emotional impact of touch, these encounters also invite deeper reflection on societal structures and individual capability. The literature set out in Chapter 2 explains how entering into a relational encounter from a position of perceived capability makes the interaction feel more achievable. In human-animal interactions, this sense of capability often arises from the comparison between humans and animals, where humans are seen as having more power and responsibility. However, this comparison does not merely reinforce human superiority—it also encourages reflection on one's own capabilities. By perceiving the animal as vulnerable and in need of care, humans are drawn into a space of moral responsibility, where they must confront their own strengths and limitations. This self-reflection opens up opportunities to question and intervene in processes of categorisation and comparison. Rather than reinforcing divisions, the relational encounter begins to blur the boundaries between "self" and "other." Ejertsen (2020) argues that shared experiences of marginalisation foster an affective connection that dissolves these boundaries, encouraging openness to learning and new relational possibilities. In this thesis, categories such as gender and mental illness, along with notions of species and breed, have been explored as sites of connection rather than division. The resulting mutually caring relationship offers a form of resistance to societal power structures, providing a political space to challenge oppression and cultivate mutual flourishing.

Whilst the affective connection with animals sparks the relationship, the practices of caring provide an experience of the ontological challenges of relationality. In an AAI organisation, the animals' need for care creates numerous opportunities to practise caregiving. As Noddings (2013) established, this is critical in the process of building care as the foundation of a moral society. A wide range of care tasks can be drawn from this thesis: cleaning cages (Ch. 5 and 8), bathing Merlin (Ch. 6), health checks (Ch. 6 and 7), chopping vegetables (Ch. 8), washing (Ch. 8 and 9), feeding (Ch. 6-9), and interacting with the animals (Ch. 5-9). In Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story in Chapter 7, during the health check, Holly responds to the physical vulnerability of the guinea pig and the vulnerability of the procedure he is about to endure,

expressing empathetic thoughts out loud: *"Come here little one, I will keep you safe."* As Gorman (2017:326) explains, "animals initiate a change from Care Recipient to Care Giver, enhancing participants' ...self-image, reframing them as capable." This shift is particularly significant for marginalised individuals, who may already experience feelings of vulnerability in traditional care settings and, as a result, choose not to participate—thus contributing to further marginalisation. By positioning animals as needing care, individuals are empowered as caregivers, fostering a sense of capability rather than reinforcing their vulnerability. However, whilst the animals' need for care fosters capability in humans, AAI centres on a reciprocal relationship that positions the animals as capable of caring, which, in turn, fosters a sense of mutual capability. I will discuss shortly how this mutual capability ignites the process of reconsidering marginalisation.

Animals' capacity to influence the practice of care is a recognition of their subjectivity. A lack of shared language focuses acute attentiveness to multisensorial forms of communication. In Chapter 8, this acute attentiveness is conveyed through the specificity of interspecies language used, I will move on to discuss language shortly. But, in an attempt to understand the care needs of the animal, there is a need to become immersed, *"slowing right down….calm and quiet"* (Ch.6) to allow the feelings of the other to get inside your body (Huopalainen, 2023). In Chapter 7, Katie becomes engulfed by a sense of feeling, where an embodied affective connection is articulated through her body and talked about as nervousness. In Chapter 6, Mary explains how experiences of being cared for by the animals become memories of caring that, influence a sense of self and other. She explains how Tyler and Zeke sat with her after she experienced a medical episode during an AAI session. She makes sense of this moment through anthropomorphising their actions. She suggests that Tyler "*almost knew I was in pain ..."* and *"he didn't want to make it worse".* I argue that this is an example of what Bekoff (2002:49) refers to as being "carefully anthropomorphic". The ways in which anthropomorphism is used in organisational contexts is driven by the values of

the organisation and forms parts of the infrastructure of care. I will pick this up in the next section.

Communication is critical in interspecies care practices. Whilst this thesis emphasises the importance of multisensorial forms of communication, I argue that talk should not be disregarded. Despite critiques of talk in human-animal interactions, I suggest that human speech creates a choreography for interspecies relationality. The structure of conversations—especially the use of questions—opens up spaces for animals to contribute to caring practices. Asking questions signals openness to "becoming-with", offering animals opportunities to engage in care encounters. How talk is used is also significant. In human-animal relationships, it is common, and often expected, that the human puts the animal's thoughts into words, this is explored in Chapter 7, where Holly adopts Tyler's voice in an attempt to understand the absurdity of a dog on the table. Such practices are often viewed as problematic. However, in the context of care, this anthropomorphising can be a way of practising understanding the world from the perspective of the other - an experience of being attuned to another's needs. As Barnes (2015:39) notes, forming relationships with "unknown others" requires imaginative attunement to intricate forms of communication, something that is more difficult to experiment with in human relationships. As part of the choreography, I also explored how the pitch and tone of talk are crucial to caring for animals in the moment. Pet-directed speech, influenced by the notion of motherese, with its slower pace and higher pitch, not only slows down interactions but also accommodates the animal's sensory sensitivities, offering a form of care that respects the animal's needs.

In this section, I have discussed the specific nature of interspecies caring and how it is co-constituted, with a focus on relationality, reciprocity, and the multifaceted communication practices involved. This discussion also highlights the importance of the organisational infrastructure that supports these interactions. I now turn to examine how interspecies care

structures an AAI organisation, revealing the complexities of interspecies care within human-animal organisations.

## Question 2: How does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation?

The organisational context is critical in fostering positive care experiences that yield mutual benefits. As I have explained, the “invitation to connect” with animals is powerful within a “nation of animal lovers.” (Fox and Gee, 2019:44) Whilst animals can evoke a sense of capability in humans due to their perceived vulnerability, sustaining caring relationships requires reciprocity. To maintain care, individuals must also feel cared for. In AAI, the assumption is that animals provide a therapeutic experience that is inherently caring, yet animals are independent beings and do not always respond positively to human attempts to care for them. For example, in Chapter 7, Holly prepares Ant for a health check, taking care to create a suitable environment. Her efforts are acknowledged when Ant accepts the peppers she offers. Seeking to reassure Ant and simultaneously find comfort herself, Holly tries to stroke him—a gesture that reflects her desire for a reciprocal exchange of care. However, as is typical with many flight animals, Ant runs away, demonstrating his agency and independence. The ability of animals to choose and express themselves is critical to their care and aligns with the organisation's values. However, given the emotional significance of these relationships, it is crucial for mutual flourishing that memories of care do not reinforce feelings of inadequacy when care is not reciprocated as expected. The organisational context provides an additional layer of care that is vital in fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of interspecies care. It offers support when an animal's response does not meet a person's emotional needs. In such cases, staff and volunteers can step in to mediate these experiences, ensuring that individuals continue to feel valued and cared for.

Human care is often employed to compensate for a perceived lack of interspecies reciprocity. Throughout the data analysis, numerous examples highlight how animals’ non-reciprocity is

met with human acts of care. For instance, in Chapter 7, Tim addresses Katie's disappointment that Tyler, the dog, never sits with her, offering an explanation grounded in his 'dogginess'. Whilst these experiences are rooted in the human-animal relationship, the organisational context offers participants alternative experiences of care. This reflects the organisation's purpose within the realms of social care, supported by its broader values. These alternative experiences of care involve both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Verbal examples include opportunities to share stories (Ch.6), asking questions, and exchanging thoughts and opinions (Ch.7, 8 and 9), along with pleasantries like "*see you next week*," as in the Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages (Ch. 8). Equally significant are non-verbal acts of care, such as attentiveness to body language in The Sticks' Story (Ch. 1), noticing when someone is in pain and offering a hot water bottle (Ch. 6), or simply providing a cup of tea (Ch. 7). These instances illustrate how the organisation fosters a positive yet realistic sense of relationality, relying on both human and animal interactions to embed a holistic experience of care.

Interspecies caring highlights the contrast between care-based and neoliberal interpretations of choice. In care-based practices, the values of care drive organisational actions, with choice playing a pivotal role in establishing the subjectivity of both humans and animals. The Sticks' Story from Chapter 1 illustrates the importance of choice and agency for both species: Dani's non-verbal communication is respected, and when Velvet shows signs of being cold, Sarah respects her needs by allowing her to remain in the vivarium. In Chapter 5, Sarah further emphasises the importance of offering participants the autonomy to choose how they engage, which is similarly reflected in Carrie's approach with volunteers in the animal welfare room.

Whilst care ethics emphasise interconnectedness and shared responsibility, neoliberalism frames choice differently—primarily as a symbol of individual autonomy. Throughout this thesis, I explore how practices reflect these contrasting interpretations of choice. For instance, Miriam's response in Cuddles' Story deflects to market-driven notions of choice,

often associated with competent citizenship in a neoliberal context (Ch. 6). Other stories, such as Merlin's resistance to being in his vivarium (Ch. 8), Tyler's desire to leap over gates (Ch. 8), or Josie's selective engagement with care tasks (Ch. 8), reflect everyday expressions of choice within relational care. These choices, shaped by both human and animal agency, establish different forms of responsibility, grounded in an ethics of care. In contrast, neoliberal interpretations of choice often overlook relational dimensions, focusing on individual autonomy without considering how capability and context shape decision-making. In this sense, interspecies care practices offer a different framework for understanding choice—one that emphasises mutuality, responsibility, and interconnectedness, rather than individualism.

Interspecies care practices emphasise relationality and mutual responsibility through choice, but they also introduce an element of unpredictability. Animals, as active participants in care, often challenge the structured routines and expectations typically found in organisational settings. This unpredictability, rather than being a disadvantage, opens up new ways of engaging with both animals and humans, shifting the focus from rigid protocols to more fluid and responsive interactions.

Interspecies care introduces a sense of disorder in AAI organisations. Whilst guidelines and policies strive to create order, the need to respond to animals' various forms of communication often makes interspecies care feel chaotic and unpredictable. In TSO that support mental health and wellbeing, clear routines, organisation, and structure are commonly cited as essential for engaging service users (Baxter *et al.,* 2022). However, animals establish a welcoming environment (Gorman, 2017), and it is often their capacity to disrupt conventional protocols through their natural behaviour that makes the space feel more accessible. The dogs were pivotal in these disruptions. Whilst they are traditionally admired for their ability to conform and perform in therapy, it was their 'dogginess'—their spontaneous, natural behaviours—that appeared to have the most therapeutic and mutually beneficial impact in this setting. For instance, Tyler's attempt to jump on the table (Ch. 7) or

his frequent decision to parade with his cushion (Ch. 7 and 8) created a shared focus, reducing the intensity of human interactions and sparking conversation. These ongoing interruptions alleviated the pressure on his human companions to conform to societal expectations, allowing both animals and clients to engage authentically. By respecting the animals' autonomy and letting them dominate the space, the organisation fostered an environment where clients could relax, reducing the need for conformity and enabling them to simply be in the moment (Ch. 6-9).

Attentiveness to animals, as discussed throughout the thesis, fosters a sense of being present in the moment. The tension between the busyness and disorder of the environment and moments of calm and quiet is a recurrent theme. In Chapter 6, Miriam describes being in her *"own little bubble"* where she *"mellows and feels,"* whilst in Ant and Herman's Story, there is a sense of *"slowing right down, feeling it in my body, my breath, calm, quiet… I'm with Herman and no-one else."* These moments reflect a form of mindfulness, commonly defined as "the awareness that arises when paying attention to the present moment non-judgmentally" (Schuman-Olivier *et al.,* 2020:371). However, in the chaotic setting of animal-based organisations, mindfulness takes on a different form—one shaped by the interruptions and unpredictability of caring for animals. This type of mindfulness is not about quiet contemplation, which risks "a flight into the futility of total thought" (Dumm, 2008:159), but rather immersion in the present moment, where chaos disrupts thought. In such moments, individuals are freed from external judgments and societal labels—such as mental health or disability—that often shape their perceptions of themselves. The usual power of the self to embody societal categorisations is temporarily forgotten, offering a sense of liberation and the possibility of simply being in the present. I argue that this chaotic environment provides an opportunity to disrupt ingrained self-perceptions, creating space for rewriting one's narrative, with broader implications for how societal categories are understood.

However, the balance between being present with animals and meeting the operational demands of the organisation introduces a tension that is central to the dynamics of care in these settings. There is an inherent conflict between the demands of running an organisation and the experience of being present in caring for animals and humans. For those working in this setting, the pressures of the organisation often make it difficult to fully experience time in the present. As Sarah explains in Chapter 5, *"I try to be present in the sessions, but I'm itching to reply to an email or answer the phone in case we lose a potential client."* This highlights a conflict between different 'timescapes' in operation (Adam, 1995). Whilst care requires being in the present, with a focus on attentiveness, organisational time is linear, fast-paced, and driven by future-oriented tasks and deadlines, especially in the context of neoliberalism (Lynch, 2022). The emotional, financial, and physical costs of caring within a human-animal organisation are amplified under these conditions. I frequently observed this tension upon arriving at the setting, where there was an atmosphere of angst or stress, which I have attempted to convey in the stories throughout this thesis. Founding the organisation was, for Sarah, a response to a "calling" closely tied to her sense of self—a tension explored by Tallberg and Jordan (2023:383). Yet the burden of sustaining it often conflicts with the ideal of present-centred care (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). This tension between present-centred care and organisational demands also extends to the experience of volunteering, which is "the lifeblood" of TSO (Wakeling *et al.,* 2021:3). In Chapters 5 and 8, I focus on the role of volunteering in the neoliberal organisation. Volunteering is synonymous with TSO, often referred to as the voluntary community sector. Engagement as a client, whether in one-to-one sessions or through funded programmes, can often lead to volunteering at Noah's A.R.T. Josie's experience in Chapter 8 highlights how this process can significantly shape a sense of self. Choosing to volunteer and selecting tasks that align with her preferences instilled a sense of agency and capability. Offering time and labour is rewarded through acknowledgment and care. As Sarah explained, *"You let them choose, practice, let them find something they're good at… It doesn't matter [what it is]… seeing it, noticing it… I think you'll be great… It's a catalyst" (Ch. 5).* In the same chapter, Carrie echoes this by saying, *"I just say*

*to them, you choose what animals [they would] prefer to clean… It's about getting to know their characters, what they want, which animals they like… and making it the most pleasant experience you can whilst still getting the work done."* In a neoliberal context, volunteering is often seen as transactional—investment in time now for future employment and personal gain. However, from a care perspective, volunteering offers relational opportunities that foster self-development and provide ongoing experiences of being cared for. A regular commitment to volunteering provides a relational experience that sustains both care for oneself and care for others. For marginalised or isolated individuals, like Ronnie (Poppy's Story, Ch.7), caring for one's own health needs and caring for others, including pets, can be difficult without meaningful relationships. Volunteering thus becomes a way to re-engage with care, providing a vital sense of connectedness and capability. However, this represents another layer of caring responsibility within the organisation, demanding further "emotional labour" (Hochschild, 1983:48).

In this section, I have identified how this thesis responds to the question: "How does interspecies care organise the day-to-day practices in a human-animal organisation?" I have explored how the values of relationality shape practice within an AAI organisation, addressing gaps identified by Blake (2016) and Galardi *et al*., (2021). By examining how caring principles create a space where everyone is both capable and vulnerable, I highlight the centrality of choice for both humans and animals. This relational approach to choice fosters affective experiences that challenge neoliberal notions of autonomy. I also consider how animals' natural behaviours, which may lack reciprocity, are supported by the organisation through the capacity to scaffold experiences, creating positive caring interactions. Interspecies care offers a raw, often chaotic experience that fosters mindfulness and self-reflection, challenging marginalisation. Additionally, I address how volunteering within a caring organisation can be mutually beneficial for humans, animals, the organisation, and society, generating a sense of agency and responsibility within an interspecies network.

I will now consider in more detail, how the conversations thus far have implications for mutual flourishing.

## Question 3: How can interspecies care practices foster mutual benefits for both humans and animals?

In the section above, I have outlined the conditions under which interspecies care provides opportunities for mutual flourishing. I now turn to consider how the practices of care within a relational organisation can be mutually beneficial.

Affective connections foster attentiveness to multisensorial communication, which is crucial in caring relationships—particularly with beings who lack a shared language, such as babies, young children, or animals. Noddings (2013) emphasised the importance of practising care, discussing it, and developing shared responsibility for it, often through caring for animals together. This creates a foundation for relational bonds, where individuals learn to care in ways that are both successful and fulfilling. In many familial contexts, care is scaffolded through everyday practices and shared narratives, allowing children to experience it as reciprocal and meaningful. However, it is important to recognise that ideas of 'the family' are shaped by cultural, political, and economic forces, and caregiving can take many forms beyond traditional family structures. Interspecies care within organisations extends these possibilities, offering participants opportunities to practise care in informal, unconventional ways—like having dogs on tables or bearded dragons wandering freely (Ch.7 and Ch.8). These moments, though seemingly chaotic, reflect the authentic, messy nature of real relationships, providing space for mutual connection. What distinguishes organisational interspecies care from many conventional forms of family care is the centrality of choice in forming kinship. Both humans and animals exercise choice, contributing to a relational environment where mutual flourishing is possible. This choice enhances the sense of agency for both parties, allowing for genuine, reciprocal care that benefits all involved.

Pivotal to mutually beneficial interspecies care practices are affective connections and the centrality of choice. Choosing to participate due to a love for animals fosters a sense of connectedness, responsibility, and openness to "becoming-with." Equally important is the balance between chaos and calm, as present-moment experiences provide an opportunity to shed external pressures and perceptions that often shape one's sense of self. Within the organisational context, the multilayered experience of caring and being cared for allows individuals to engage more deeply in successful caring practices. Whilst care is not always reciprocal or pleasant, experiencing it positively in the early stages is crucial, as it can lead to long-term benefits. However, sustaining this caring experience over time can be challenging, particularly for TSO. Additionally, although human language in interspecies relationships is often critiqued for perpetuating oppression, I argue that communication patterns, including talk and storytelling, can offer mutually beneficial opportunities. These forms of communication establish relationality and provide an ongoing refinement of understanding, reinforcing new perspectives on the self and the other. Engaging in conversations and sharing stories about these relationships holds political significance, advancing the centrality of interspecies care as a pathway toward a mutually flourishing planet.

In Poppy's Story (Ch.7), we see the significance of practice and support in learning how to care. Ronnie loves dogs, but her struggles with caring for them have led to social withdrawal, affecting her mental health and wellbeing, as well as her ability to care for her pets. This highlights how difficult it is to sustain caregiving practices in the absence of support and care for the caregiver. Whilst pets can offer invaluable emotional support, the capacity to sustain that care requires relational connectedness. For marginalised and isolated individuals, this becomes even more important. Within the organisational context, care is not only acknowledged but also scaffolded through human interpretation and guidance. For example, in Chapter 5, Sarah emphasises the importance of recognising people's strengths, whilst in Chapter 6, Tim acknowledges how Miriam has grown more comfortable around the rats, and he explains why Tyler might choose to interact with one person over another. These moments

illustrate how the organisation supports participants in their caregiving, offering the kind of relational scaffolding that helps them to experience care successfully and meaningfully.

Poppy's Story demonstrates the importance of relational support in sustaining caregiving practices, and this extends beyond individual care to broader societal narratives. The process of learning to care, especially when scaffolded by an organisation, allows individuals like Ronnie to navigate their personal struggles and reframe their relationships with animals and themselves. This process is part of a larger, ongoing act of re-storying, where individuals who have experienced marginalisation—whether through mental health issues or other forms of social isolation—find opportunities to reimagine their roles as capable and connected beings. These personal experiences of caregiving provide insight into how society influences stories of identity and care. Just as individuals are supported in their growth through interspecies relationships, societal narratives can also be shifted. The relational scaffolding provided by the organisation enables people to see both themselves and animals in new ways, disrupting the fixed, limiting categories that often define them.

In Chapter 9, the significance of shared marginalisation in fostering mutual flourishing is explored, focusing on stories like Roland's hormonal aggression (Fig. 37) and Hope's rescue (Fig.38). These stories offer a way to reframe the understanding of the self, particularly in relation to mental health and wellbeing, with narrative playing a key role. Whilst Hope was abandoned, the organisation recognised her capability to provide care, and Roland continues to contribute to the organisation through his story. The chapter also examines how societal narratives often position animals as inferior to humans or label certain species—like rats and exotic animals—as dirty. These layers of societal perception shape relationships with animals but also provide an opportunity for choice. Choosing to care for a rat or a bearded dragon becomes a choice not only in kinship but also in how the narrative around these animals is framed. Similarly, individuals can choose how stories frame their own sense of self. By recognising animals as capable, competent, and agentic, the possibility emerges to re-story

personal identities. The key message is that, whilst societal categories are pervasive, they do not permanently define humans or animals. New narratives can be created, offering a renewed sense of being that transcends the limitations of stories traditionally used to define and position both human and animal.

Engagement with the organisation over time is crucial to its impact. As Carrie mentioned in Chapter 5, people often have species preferences, and for some, relationships with certain animals can be uncomfortable or even avoided. Whilst many participants at the AAI organisation felt a connection with animals, they also had specific preferences or aversions, with the rats often being a source of discomfort—even for myself. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the structure of the organisation allows individuals to gradually reshape their perceptions and build connections over time. The busyness and unpredictability of the environment prevents participants from deflecting into the familiar stories they use to frame their sense of self. This disruption extends to how they perceive the 'other', whether that be an animal or another person. Just as the stories that frame the self are constructed, so too are those that define the other. Through interspecies relationships, participants begin to reinterpret these stories, fostering deeper connections that challenge broader societal narratives surrounding identity and difference.

Relationality in human-animal care intersects with broader societal narratives about gender and care. Whilst caring for animals allows individuals to rewrite their own stories, it also facilitates a revisioning of care itself. Caring for animals provides women with a way to practise and redefine care beyond traditional expectations. Although the ontological basis of being is relational, women's biological predisposition for childbearing still holds significant power in societal discourses of care. Certain perceptions continue to frame men as rational and objective, whilst women are seen as emotional and nurturing. Despite feminist efforts to challenge these ideas, women's supposed natural predisposition for care remains deeply embedded in contemporary Western culture. This care, though not financially valued, is

viewed as a core aspect of womanhood—whether through mothering, tending to elderly parents, or shaping career choices. Women who do not conform to these roles often face scepticism, which can contribute to self-doubt and diminished self-worth. TSO, like Noah's A.R.T. provide spaces where women can practise care outside traditional roles, offering alternative forms of kinship. In these settings, women can reconnect with their caring capacities, gaining a sense of security and validation. These organisations also foster relationships and discussions that expose how societal expectations around care can be oppressive. Choosing to care for other kin, such as animals, generates further connectedness, reinforcing the need to resist gendered associations of caring.

Such experiences encourage further reflection on mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to societal expectations of women as caregivers. These roles significantly shape women's self-perception, impacting their mental health and wellbeing. As discussed in Chapter 2 through the concept of "Animaladies" women's caregiving, or lack thereof, is often pathologised under patriarchal forms of mental health assessment (Gruen and Probyn-Rapsey, 2019:1). Whilst there has been a shift toward reinforcing choice for women, opting not to care can still carry certain social costs. Although freeing women from traditional caregiving roles is seen as empowering, giving and receiving care remains fundamental to human wellbeing. Care is central not only to the health of women and men but also to societal perceptions of women. For women, the stakes are higher: establishing themselves as capable of care can be crucial to their sense of value and worth. It is only from this position that they can begin to dismantle the inequalities embedded in these expectations. Caring for animals offers women an opportunity to understand and experience how these gender-based inequalities have been constructed and how they might be challenged.

Theoretically, I suggest that whilst the association of care with mothering and familial experiences has contributed to women's oppression, caregiving for animals shares similar emotional dynamics. As discussed earlier, the fragility and vulnerability of many animals,

particularly small animals used in AAI, evoke an instinctive need to care. Lorenz (1991) highlights that the cuteness of animals, much like that of human babies, is not an evolutionary accident, as it stimulates a nurturing response. The release of oxytocin, commonly associated with parent-child attachment, also occurs in human-animal interactions, reinforcing this emotional bond (Olmert, 2009). Additionally, the use of motherese or pet-directed speech has been observed in human-animal relationships. However, neoliberalism continues to reinforce the idea that caregiving, whether for children or animals, is a woman's responsibility (Cudworth, 2022), shaping how women perceive their own capacity for care. This can perpetuate feelings of pressure and tie self-worth to these expectations. Nevertheless, animal care also offers a space for reflecting on and challenging these entrenched societal roles. Whilst culturally dominant narratives around caregiving often remain tethered to idealised notions of motherhood and family, social structures of care have diversified and dispersed. Animals, in this context, become sources of relational connection and co-constituted identity. I am not suggesting that women should turn to animals as a substitute for roles they feel pressured to adopt within traditional family constructs. Rather, I propose that through the act of caring for animals—particularly when entered into by choice—women can begin to unravel how societal discourses shape their identities and discover alternative ways of being. It is possible to recognise that the role of 'woman as carer' is one of many stories that frame social expectations, often serving broader ideological purposes. In this context, caring for animals becomes a practice that not only challenges traditional narratives about caregiving but also opens up new possibilities for subjectivity, relationality, and resistance.

In summary, this section has explored how care practices foster emotional, psychological, and societal benefits for humans whilst also recognising animals as active participants in these relationships, contributing to mutual flourishing. I examine the interplay of caring practices within an organisational context, highlighting the potential for mutual flourishing. Drawing on care theory, I emphasise how choice in kinship plays a significant role in these benefits and emphasise the primacy of relationality as the foundation for re-storying both the self and the

other. Additionally, I explore how narratives surrounding species, gender, mental health, and care can be reformulated in mutually beneficial ways. I will now consider how such experiences provide a means of challenging neoliberal values.

## Question 4: Can interspecies care help challenge neoliberal values?

Returning to Lynch's quote from the opening of this thesis, I argue that interspecies care in an AAI organisation challenges neoliberal forces, creating the potential for resistance. These challenges, grounded in fostering relationality as both a practice and a value, provide an alternative to the individualism inherent in neoliberalism. As this thesis demonstrates, relationality disrupts neoliberal ideals by emphasising interconnectedness and mutual care. Whilst neoliberalism remains pervasive, the act of challenging its structures through care opens pathways for more sustained forms of resistance.

I now turn back to the foundation of care, as argued by Noddings (2013), to illustrate how interspecies care fosters relationality and mutual dependence, ultimately undermining neoliberal values. Noddings contends that memories of natural caring, experienced in infancy and childhood, form the basis of human capacity to care in future relationships. The caregiving practices experienced in early life—often shaped by parents or close others—help establish an "ethical ideal" for moral functioning, which serves as a model for future care relationships. However, in the context of neoliberalism, the notion of care has been fundamentally reshaped. Neoliberal values emphasise individualism, autonomy, and efficiency, permeating every aspect of human life through institutional practices and cultural norms. This creates tensions between relational care and the drive for self-sufficiency, which manifest not only in organisational practices but also in the everyday dynamics of families—structures that, whilst often idealised as natural sites of care, are themselves shaped by neoliberal ideologies and socio-economic pressures. Whilst familial care remains a significant context for learning how to care, it is also increasingly shaped by neoliberal pressures. Experiences of care within

families are often mediated by the demands of working life, social policy, and the broader economic climate. Family care is supported and fragmented by a wider network—grandparents, friends, nurseries, and childminders—and from an early age, children's experiences of care are segmented into time slots, reflecting the scheduling typical in neoliberal bureaucracies. In this way, dominant constructions of care—both within and beyond the family—have shifted from being deeply rooted in relationality to being conditioned by the pressures of individualism, productivity, and economic self-sufficiency. Time for genuine absorption, affective engagement, and attentiveness to others is increasingly limited. As a result, human experiences of care—from infancy onwards—are embedded in a subjectivity that is torn between the relational ideals of care and the individualistic ideals promoted by neoliberalism. Although human care experiences can still generate an ethical ideal of care, this ideal is often reshaped to serve a neoliberal framework. Rather than fostering relationality at the core of subjectivity, neoliberal care ideals produce fragmented relationships, where fast-paced, technologically saturated environments reduce attentiveness and promote self-reliance. Yet, interspecies care offers a space to disrupt these values. By engaging in relationships with animals—where care is not driven by efficiency or individualism but by a shared sense of relational responsibility—participants can reconnect with forms of care that resonate more fully with the essence of Noddings' vision. Interspecies care allows for immersion in "compassionate time," slowing down interactions and evoking mutual dependence and relationality (Lynch, 2022:81). It provides individuals with the opportunity to experience care that aligns with Noddings' (2013:46) "ethical ideal"—rooted in empathy, shared responsibility, and the recognition of vulnerability. In this way, interspecies care challenges neoliberal values by offering a model of care that prioritises mutual flourishing and relational responsibility over individualism and efficiency.

Staying with Noddings' theory of care, she argued that ongoing practices of caring nurture the ethical ideal, with reciprocity in care helping to sustain the self as caring. If we accept that the ethical ideal is conflicted between relationality and individualism, then life experiences

nourish these different modes of being. In large institutions like the NHS, whilst some interactions may offer relationality, the broader framework often emphasises values like choice, autonomy, and individualism. For people facing mental health difficulties—who often struggle with relationships—such experiences can reinforce an ethical ideal focused on autonomy and self-management. However, this is not limited to those experiencing mental health challenges; across neoliberal societies, daily encounters with institutions, media, and workplaces continually promote individualism and self-reliance. Opportunities for fostering relationality, which are essential for counterbalancing these pressures, are increasingly limited—particularly for marginalised groups, who often lack access to the market-based resources that offer relational connection, albeit at a cost. For instance, in Chapter 7, Holly's experience of caring for guinea pigs leads her to reflect on her broader experiences of care, expressing feelings of neglect: "*It just feels like I get passed from here to there, no one really seems to care…*". Similarly, Katie's reflection on her interactions with Tyler, where she recognises both her need for affection and her struggles in understanding the needs of others, highlights the relational support offered through these practices: *"It's okay … I've got Misty at home, and I know Holly has been struggling today…Tyler's a good boy."* Experiences within TSO like Noah's A.R.T. have the capacity to nurture relationality, offering opportunities to reflect upon and reshape the ethical ideal. This potential to disrupt the dominance of individualism and challenge oppression—benefiting both human and animal flourishing—is depicted within the stories shared throughout the thesis.

I have examined how different practices illustrate various interpretations of choice, derived from distinct moral positions. For instance, in Cuddles' Story, Miriam defers to market-based versions of choice, which are seen as a moral indication of competent citizenship (Ch.6). In other stories, choice emerges in interspecies interactions—Merlin's distaste for his vivarium (Ch.8), Tyler's desire to leap on tables (Ch.7), Josie's autonomy in selecting her care tasks (Ch.8), and Dani's non-verbal communication of his preferred therapy animal (Ch.1). These examples reveal that different interpretations of choice lead to varying degrees of

responsibility. Whilst neoliberalism frames choice as an exercise in individual autonomy, it often fails to acknowledge how structural inequalities constrain those choices. In contrast, interspecies caring fosters affective experiences that emphasise interconnectedness and shared responsibility as key components of choice and responsibility.

Noddings (2013) provides theoretical support for why relational experiences of care are vital within a neoliberal context. Interspecies care offers an alternative means to challenge neoliberal values by fostering mutual benefits for both humans and animals. Collaborative work with rescue organisations, for instance, facilitates such mutual flourishing. To make these collaborations more effective, organisations like IAHAIO need to recognise the value of these benefits. Even if rescue animals cannot be easily integrated into AAI practices, rescue centres could develop programmes that promote an understanding of care, maximising gains for both humans and animals. Yet in saying this I recognise the logistic and financial costs of such endeavours. Furthermore, whilst pets can greatly enhance human wellbeing, their care is often demanding and costly. The dominance of unethical breeding practices in the pet care industry, driven by profitability, continues to present challenges. AAI programmes that partner with rescue organisations could intervene in these practices by meeting the care needs of shelter animals and educating people about species-specific requirements, thus reducing the likelihood of animals being relinquished. In addition, neoliberal organisational precarity often encourages care practices that move away from market-driven provision. As discussed in Chapter 8, Tim's desire to make feed for the rats, illustrates how avoiding commercialism not only reduces costs but also enriches care practices. Organisations that emphasise sustainability, recycling, and creating homemade treats and toys reduce waste and promote environmentally friendly approaches to care, benefitting both animals and aligning with broader social and environmental values.

Interspecies caring provides an embodied experience of care that facilitates ontological shifts beneficial for humans, animals, and society. The feminist origins of care theory highlight the

significance of embodied practices of care between a parent and child. The intimate, proximal relations of infancy provide the choreography for caring, establishing an ethical ideal that guides human capacity to care and drives care-oriented morality. In contemporary neoliberal society, embodied experiences of care resemble a dance, one that has "political potential because it theorises its social context as it practises itself" (Biehl, 2017:45), often portraying the self as independent and autonomous. However, without relational experiences of caring and being cared for, it is difficult to truly care for oneself (Noddings, 2013). Different relational experiences evoke different forms of care that can intervene in neoliberal agendas. At the core of mutual flourishing lies the interconnectedness of humans and animals. This affective connection, which establishes the self as responsible and capable, is central to fostering more ethical and moral approaches to interspecies existence. Whilst Noddings (2013) maintained that it was possible to choose whether or not we complicate our lives with relationships with animals, I argue that there is no real choice; we are inherently connected in an interspecies world. What matters is the active choice to participate—to choose to engage and take responsibility.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations emerge directly from the key findings of this research, which examined how interspecies care is enacted, experienced, and resisted within the context of a therapeutic human-animal organisation. They are designed to inform both practice and theory, offering guidance for organisations engaged in care work—particularly within mental health, education, and animal-assisted interventions—as well as proposing directions for future academic research. Each recommendation is grounded in the insights developed through the stories, practices, and tensions explored throughout the thesis, including how care is shaped by neoliberal structures, how relationality is fostered through interspecies interaction, and how marginalised individuals experience care-based interventions.

Together, these recommendations aim to support more ethical, inclusive, and responsive forms of care across human and more-than-human contexts, whether through revising organisational practices, broadening theoretical frameworks, or reimagining care outside neoliberal constraints.

**Practice-Based Recommendations**

This research offers practical insights for improving AAI at both organisational and policy levels. The findings highlight that interspecies care can support mutual flourishing—but only when care is embedded at the heart of both practice and structure. These recommendations are grounded in the everyday realities of care at Noah's A.R.T.—not only observed, but also felt, enacted, and discussed through daily interactions, routines, and reflections. They are intended to inform ethical, sustainable, and inclusive approaches across a range of settings, from AAI-specific organisations to broader human care institutions.

**Practice Recommendation 1: Centring Care as the Core of AAI Organisations:** AAI organisations should place care at the core of their work, both as a guiding value and as a daily practice. Embedding care in this way ensures mutual benefit for humans and animals, offering a moral and ethical foundation that recognises animal agency whilst enhancing therapeutic impact. These mutually beneficial encounters have the potential to transform relationships, identities, and practices beyond the immediate intervention.

This recommendation is grounded in findings that show care is not incidental but foundational to AAI. Across the data, care emerged as a relational, embodied, and reciprocal process that enables connection, capability, and mutual flourishing. The stories illustrate the emotional resonance of touch and the moral weight of caregiving practices—such as feeding, grooming, and interpreting animals' behaviour—as central to clients' experiences. Staff and volunteers play a key role in sustaining these practices. Their support helps participants navigate challenges and recognise animals' responses as meaningful rather than rejecting (Ch. 7).

Organisational practices that match people to roles and tasks—such as Carrie's approach to listening to and accommodating volunteers' preferences (Ch. 5)—further demonstrate how care is structured relationally at every level. Interspecies care also challenges neoliberal ideals of individualism and efficiency. Practices like preparing food for animals, spending "compassionate time" (Lynch, 2022), and embracing supported participation offer alternative models of capability and responsibility. These everyday actions foster sustainable, ethical care that is not only therapeutic but also transformative.

A care-centric approach relies on "becoming-with"—the idea that learning and transformation arise through relational, interspecies encounters. Care emerges through attentiveness to animals' needs, not from predetermined outcomes. Supervised caregiving—such as feeding, grooming, or interpreting behaviour—supports participants to grow in relational awareness. For example, Tina's interaction with Tim whilst brushing Merlin (Ch. 6) illustrates how asking questions and seeking reassurance can deepen a sense of shared responsibility. Employees and volunteers model these interactions, helping to position animal care as integral to therapeutic practice rather than an instrumental task. In doing so, they broaden the scope of relational experience and address the limits of reciprocity, fostering mutual flourishing within interspecies networks.

**Addressing Costs and Sustainability:** Whilst centring care supports ethical practice, organisations must also recognise the psychological and economic demands this work entails. Sustained participant involvement—through avenues like structured volunteering—supports long-term success. For instance, Josie's role in The Story of Kales, Carrots and Cabbages (Ch. 8) shows how defined volunteer roles foster relational engagement, offering both care and recognition. Similarly, Sarah and Carrie's emphasis on matching tasks to individual strengths (Ch. 5) ensures volunteers experience meaningful and sustainable relationships.

Transparent recognition of emotional and financial costs is crucial. Volunteer support, staff supervision, and funding for emotional labour should be viewed as essential organisational resources. As seen in The Story of Merlin's Beard (Ch. 8), where Tim engages in time-intensive practices—such as allowing Merlin extended exploration outside his vivarium—these acts embody the values of care, even as they stretch operational capacity. Addressing these demands is key to sustaining ethical care practices.

**Ensuring Sustained Participation**: The data suggest that the success of AAI—particularly in mental health contexts—relies on opportunities for sustained engagement. Stories such as Kales, Carrots and Cabbages (Ch. 8) and Moose's Story (Ch. 6) show how, over time, participants began to reconfigure their sense of self through interspecies relationships and meaningful care roles. These long-term interactions enabled deeper connection, growth, and the re-storying of identities. However, sustaining this kind of participation is increasingly difficult under neoliberal pressures. As third sector organisations are pushed toward financial sustainability, there is a risk that relational continuity is compromised. Care-led sustainability—where relational outcomes, rather than short-term targets, guide decision-making—must therefore be prioritised (Ferreira et al., 2024).

**Practice Recommendation 2: Implementing Care-Centred Practices in Other Organisational Spaces:** This recommendation is aimed at organisations beyond the research setting—such as schools, nursing homes, and other care institutions—that incorporate animals into their provision for human wellbeing. In these contexts, embedding care as a foundational component of interventions is essential. Caring for the animal should not be treated as an adjunct to the human intervention, but as a core element of the therapeutic process (Tammi and Hohti, 2020). This requires a shared understanding of both humans and animals as care workers. Acknowledging the mutual contributions of each affirms the value of their labour and helps shape how animals are positioned within the organisational context (Coulter, 2016).

It also establishes a shared sense of capability, supporting mutual flourishing and resisting commodified, neoliberal models that may compromise care quality.

This recommendation draws on findings from Chapters 5–8, where participants' caring experiences with animals were often scaffolded through organisational support, reflection, and relational attentiveness. For example, in Moose's Story (Ch. 6), Tim recognises Miriam's progress with her fear of rats, and in Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story (Ch. 7), staff help Holly interpret Tyler's social choices, demonstrating how relational support enhances the depth and ethics of interspecies connection. Likewise, in the Story of Merlin's Beard (Ch. 8), Tim's preparation of homemade rat food shows how prioritising animal care can disrupt commercial logics and reinforce relational responsibility.

To manage this effectively, organisations should regularly assess how their structures and practices either support or constrain the capacities of the animals involved. These assessments should be informed by care ethics. Whilst checklists and forms may provide a starting point, meaningful care is cultivated through dialogue, reflection, and critical conversations (Barnes, 2015). By fostering a culture of relational attentiveness and continuous learning, organisations can enhance the care experience for both human and animal participants.

**Practice Recommendation 3: Revisions to AAI Guidelines:** This is a practice-based recommendation aimed at influencing the guidance provided by organisations such as Society for Companion Animals Species (SCAS) and International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO), whose frameworks shape practice across the AAI sector. Research on AAI that adopts a relational perspective should be more fully incorporated into formal guidelines. The current guidelines, which often reflect a positivist orientation, risk reinforcing discriminatory perceptions of animals, including colonial and anthropocentric assumptions. For example, the exclusion of so-called 'exotic' species such as reptiles or rodents from AAI work can marginalise both the animals and the humans who form bonds

with them. This recommendation is directly informed by findings from Chapters 6–9, where participants described meaningful, reciprocal relationships with animals typically excluded from formal AAI practice. In the Wild and Exotics Story (Ch. 9), Millie's careful stroking, swaddling, and embodied interaction illustrate the depth of human-animal connection that emerges from interspecies care, regardless of species status. Similarly, the stories of the Fancy Rats, whilst not considered exotic, emphasise how species often perceived as unclean or "lesser", like exotics, become central to care work and therapeutic connection. These stories demonstrate that the species hierarchy embedded in current guidelines does not align with the lived realities of mutually beneficial interspecies relationships.

In this context, offering choice and species diversity within AAI interventions becomes a way to challenge dominant narratives of worth, hygiene, and appropriateness—narratives that often reflect broader societal structures of exclusion and oppression. Evidence-based assessments of zoonotic risk should be critically examined and situated within a relational ethics of care, rather than used as a blanket rationale for species exclusion. I therefore recommend that guidance from national and international AAI bodies be revised to acknowledge the importance of species diversity, and that best practices be developed in relation to the ethical inclusion of so-called exotic animals, rather than their prohibition.

**Theoretical Recommendations**

Alongside the empirical and practice-based contributions of this research, the findings also point to several theoretical directions that merit further exploration. These recommendations aim to deepen understandings of care within interspecies settings, particularly where care is shaped by broader social, political, and cultural forces. Each builds on the tensions and possibilities revealed through the empirical work, highlighting opportunities to reframe or extend care theory in relation to neoliberalism, neurodivergence, and postcolonial perspectives. The three theoretical recommendations that follow move from specific considerations of empathy and autism, through a reflexive postcolonial lens, to broader implications for how care is conceptualised under neoliberalism.

**Theory Recommendation 1: Caring Relationships and Empathy in Autism:** This is a theory-based recommendation that builds on existing literature and empirical insights from this thesis. Whilst there is a well-established evidence base supporting the use of AAI with young people with autism (O'Haire, 2017), this thesis raises new questions about how empathy and care are understood and experienced in these interspecies relationships. In particular, I propose further research into how caring practices manifest in AAI with autistic individuals, and how these challenge normative assumptions around empathy—particularly those grounded in theory of mind paradigms.

This recommendation is informed by the data chapters, which feature participants with experiences of mental health marginalisation—many of whom express feeling misjudged, devalued, or pathologised. These experiences reflect a broader societal tendency to view individuals experiencing cognitive or emotional difference as lacking a sound moral perspective or relational capacity (Carlson, 2007). Such assumptions are especially pronounced in autism research, where traditional framings often position autistic people as deficient in empathy (Baron-Cohen, 1995). However, as Grandin and Johnson (2005) and more recent scholars (e.g., Taylor et al., 2021) argue, neurodivergent ways of being may offer different—often more attuned—relational perspectives, particularly in interspecies contexts.

At Noah's A.R.T., emerging practices point to a growing emphasis on mental health support for children and young people, including those diagnosed with autism, many of whom demonstrate a strong affinity with animals—hence their engagement with the service. These affinities, alongside the organisation's emphasis on relational care, suggest the need for theoretical work that explores how empathy, care, and affectivity operate in these interspecies encounters. Such work might also contribute to queer and neurodivergent understandings of relationality (Grandin and Johnson, 2005; Despret, 2013).

Additionally, this focus could be extended to consider how autistic individuals engage with environmental sustainability, particularly given the role that affective connection and empathy play in developing a sense of ecological responsibility (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this way, future research could not only enhance AAI practice but also broaden theoretical conceptions of empathy, moral agency, and care in neurodivergent and multispecies contexts.

**Theory Recommendation 2: Exploring Ethical Care Through Postcolonial Lenses:** This research has shown how interspecies care is shaped not only by individual practices of attentiveness and responsiveness, but also by broader structural and cultural frameworks that influence how care is recognised, organised, and valued. As with all research, this study is shaped by specific ontological and epistemological assumptions, which frame the questions asked and the insights produced. Adopting a relational ontology grounded in care ethics, this thesis offers a care-based alternative to dominant AAI research, which is often underpinned by positivist psychological paradigms. However, this approach also aligns with Western conceptual models—both theoretically and empirically. The use of care ethics, combined with the organisation's limited access to minority ethnic groups across both staffing and client base, may inadvertently privilege one partial account of care over others. Applying a postcolonial perspective could therefore help extend and challenge existing care ethics frameworks, illuminating alternative ways of knowing and relating to animals. This includes models of care rooted in Indigenous, relational, and more-than-human worldviews (Manivannan *et al.,* 2023; Raghuram *et al.,* 2009), which may be better attuned to the diverse cultural understandings found in many communities.

By recognising that this research is itself situated within a Western conceptualisation of care —shaped by my position as a white, UK-based researcher using care ethics—I acknowledge the partiality and positionality that underpin the study. Adopting a postcolonial lens would allow both researchers and organisations like Noah's A.R.T. to critically reflect on these

influences and consider how culturally diverse and alternative relational understandings of animals and care might be better integrated into their practices. This is particularly important for third-sector organisations operating in multicultural communities—or those seeking to increase participation from such communities—where participants may bring varied cultural perspectives on animals, nature, and wellbeing. A more reflexive, postcolonial approach could support ethical inclusivity, not only in how interspecies care is enacted, but in how it is understood, valued, and narrated.

**Theory Recommendation 3: The Neoliberal 'Ethical Ideal' of Care:** Although this recommendation does not fall strictly within the field of human–animal studies, it draws on empirical insights from interspecies care settings to inform broader theoretical understandings of care under neoliberalism. It relates to future research that critically explores how neoliberal values—particularly individualism, autonomy, and productivity—shape relationality and care across a range of human and interspecies contexts (Lynch, 2022). Future work should explore how affective experiences of care, especially those that nurture relationality, offer mutual benefits whilst also being shaped and constrained by neoliberal frameworks.

This recommendation is grounded in the empirical findings of this thesis, which illuminate the tensions between neoliberal ideals and the relational ethics of care enacted within the AAI organisation. Stories such as Sarah's struggle to remain present amid the relentless demands of funding and administration (Ch. 5), and Miriam's market-driven interpretation of choice (Ch. 6), illustrate how neoliberal logics infiltrate everyday care practices. The significance of choosing animal companions—such as in the Sticks' Story (Ch. 1) and the Wild and Exotics Story (Ch. 9)—also reflects how ideas of choice, agency, and capability are entangled with broader societal expectations around care and competence. At the same time, these stories demonstrate how interspecies care offers an alternative experience—what Lynch (2022) terms "compassionate time." These moments of affective connection and relational

responsibility resist the temporal and moral logics of neoliberalism: logics driven by speed, competition, and self-sufficiency. The data suggest that care, capability, and choice are co-constructed within these tensions and therefore require deeper theoretical investigation.

Such research is vital in revealing the limitations of current care structures across sectors—from education and healthcare to interspecies interventions—and identifying possibilities for building more relational, empathetic care practices that actively resist dominant neoliberal pressures. Ultimately, this work could inform both policy and practice, helping to cultivate more ethical, inclusive, and compassionate care environments.

## Reflections

Organisations evolve in response to local and societal needs. During my fieldwork, I had many conversations with the team, and I was consistently overwhelmed by their drive to adapt to changing times and their 'can-do' approach. Whilst long-term planning is necessary, the team often forged ahead, responding to immediate needs without overthinking, balancing the demands of the present with the practicalities of the future. My role within the organisation evolved as well. I led some of the 'teaching' sessions on animal welfare courses, and my background in education led to my becoming a board member. Since completing my fieldwork, I have remained involved on a voluntary basis.

As I mentioned in Chapter 5, in March this year, the organisation expanded, acquiring new premises and establishing an alternative education provision service. Whilst the focus on education was not originally my idea, my background in education helped the organisation further explore the potential of interspecies care as a valuable educational tool. Their decision to focus on children and young people reflects a broader recognition of the current funding landscape: although support for children's mental health is growing, funding for adult services remains challenging. The organisation's outreach provision is increasingly dependent on local

schools and care homes, which are also facing budget cuts. The new education provision aligns with the findings of this thesis, emphasising the mutual benefits of interspecies care. Additionally, the new premises provide more spacious accommodations for the animals, a factor highlighted as important in relational interspecies caring in Chapter 8.

As the organisation expanded, I also discussed broadening its reach within the local community. Although the majority of participants are white British, there was a clear desire to make the programmes more accessible to all community groups. Whilst this wasn't the focus of my doctoral thesis, in liaison with Sarah, the organisational lead, I developed a project proposal for undergraduate students to research how Noah's A.R.T. can better meet the needs of the diverse local community, specifically focusing on the needs of Asian, mixed, black, and other ethnic groups, as well as the barriers that may prevent them from accessing Noah's A.R.T. services. The research report provided the organisation with a literature review, recommendations, and suggestions for further research. Additionally, two future intervention projects emerged from our discussions—one focusing on the wellbeing of pregnant women through the practice of interspecies care, and another exploring how interspecies care can support understanding of the shifts in caring identities for women during menopause, impacting their sense of self.

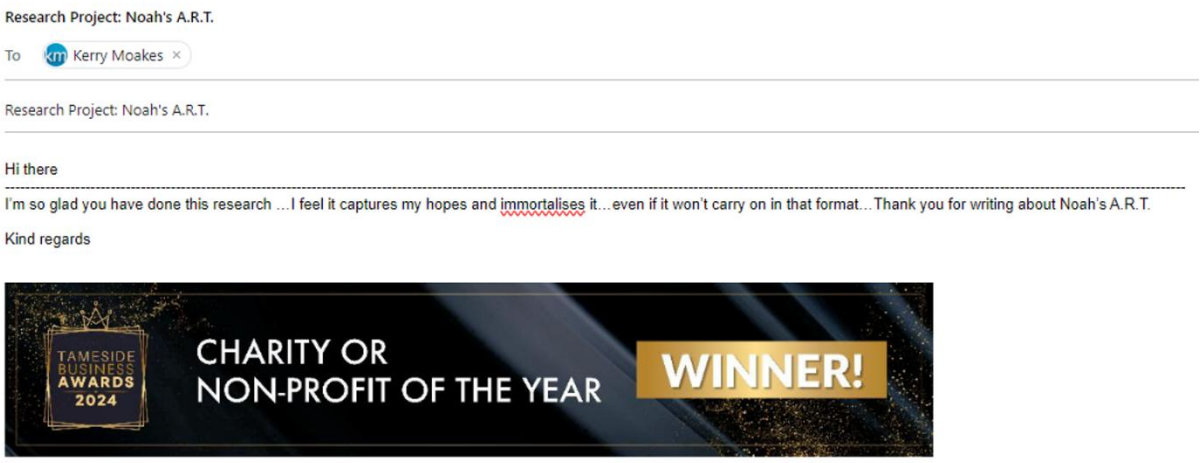
Whilst the organisation has seen growth, care work within interspecies organisations remains challenging, as explored throughout this thesis. I often heard stories of the psychological and organisational challenges of this work. Sarah's Story in Chapter 5 and Roland's Story in Chapter 9 highlight the emotional demands on staff and volunteers. Peer supervision is provided, but such services are costly, and in an increasingly competitive funding environment, including supervision in commissioning bids is difficult. Sadly, the organisation recently faced a significant setback, failing to secure a major funding bid. The financial pressures, combined with leadership transitions, are forcing the organisation to downsize and possibly wind down in the next few years.

This news has been difficult to process, particularly given my involvement over the past three years. It reflects the broader challenges faced by many care organisations operating within precarious funding structures. Throughout my fieldwork, I often found myself wanting to care more—adding extra research days, bringing resources, and leading teaching sessions. At times, this came at the cost of my wellbeing. As explained in Chapter 4, caring for others is deeply embedded in my identity, but I have become more attuned to the limits of care. Whilst the potential closure of the organisation is saddening, it cements the reality that "staying with the trouble" is demanding work. This experience has provided valuable insights into the limits of care work, particularly in a neoliberal context, and will inform my approach to care in the future.

## Final Words

Whilst it would be lovely to end with the sentiment "and they all lived happily ever after"—life isn't a fairy tale. Many of the animals in this thesis are sadly no longer with us. But an openness to "becoming-with" ensures that their being in this world has contributed to mutual flourishing in multiple and often unknowable ways. This is an email sent from the organisational lead in September 2024.

*Fig.42. Email: Immortalising Caring Intentions*



I set out with the intention of storying otherwise – taking into account the stories of animals in organisations and the risks of exploitation together with stories of the human benefits of AAI, I sought to provide another story, a story which started from care. The stories of Noah's A.R.T. provide an opportunity to put into words the micro-moments of interspecies caring whilst also unravelling the entanglement of the social, cultural, and political, factors they embody, generating other stories about the world. Research has the capacity to dig deeper, make connections, and expose challenges which in turn help to provide another story—a story which offers a future richer in possibilities (Despret, 2015). For a life that is lived happily ever after, there must be recognition in the powers of interspecies care in organisational contexts, in spite of the challenges, the practices of interspecies care can intervene in neoliberal values by establishing relationality at the heart of being and knowing which fosters mutual flourishing for humans and animals.

In summary, this research stories the transformative potential of interspecies care within organisational contexts. By prioritising relationality and mutual flourishing, interspecies care offers a powerful counter-narrative to neoliberal values of individualism and efficiency. Although challenges remain, the insights from this study highlight the importance of embedding care at the heart of organisational practices, providing a model for ethical and compassionate engagement with both humans and animals. In future, recognising and embracing the possibilities of interspecies care will be crucial in fostering more humane and just environments for all species.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: All Stories

Fig.3. The Sticks' Story

### The Sticks' Story

On the other sofa we have Dani. *"What are you thinking?"* Sarah asks. Dani shrugs. *"Rat?"* Dani looks to the floor. *"Guinea?"* Still no positive response from Dani. *"How about Velvet?"* She slides open the cage and reaches towards her. *"Oh dear, she seems a bit cold…I might have to leave her where she is today… how about one of the Sticks?"* Sarah says, walking towards the octagonal tank outside the kitchen. Dani looks across and nods. Sarah places the stick insect on Dani's hand. *"Are you okay?"* She asks. Dani nods intently watching the stick crawl up her arm, twisting and contorting her body to allow the stick to move safely and steadily. Sarah talks words at Dani, *"watching carefully", "responsive", "calm", "careful", "flexible", "tickles".* Dani is unperturbed by the chatter; her eyes do not stray from the stick. *"Shall we get some bramble leaves and see if he's hungry?"*

Fig.14. Sarah's Story

### Sarah's Story

People come for the animals… Having a reason to get well was a big thing. Mums have their babies, that made a difference. Noah's A.R.T. definitely comes from a place of madness!

Rescuing the animals was important… I've done that since I was a child, mum and dad always brought home waifs and strays…

I just feel peaceful with them, I can be myself… I feel they understand me and I understand them… so I just took a leap…

I paid someone to teach me how to write bids…best money I ever spent.

We started taking the dogs and guineas to the wards, because I knew people there… then when we had the base we were able to grow…

Most people are kind, loving and caring… they want to care for the animals, you let them choose, practice, let them find something that they are good at, it might be feeding a guinea pig, it might be making treats, it might be playing with Tyler, or brushing up.. it doesn't matter, seeing it, noticing it …

*"I think you'll be great"*…. It's a catalyst… on the courses now we use Pack Types® too, that helps give people positive feedback about themselves… I suppose it is like a family, not just because we are family… but because it is chaotic… people come as they are… they can fade into the background… or muck in… the focus is on the animals which makes people want to change, to help, to do stuff, volunteer…

people stay for the people…

Fig.15. Merlin's Story

Fig.16. Carrie's Story

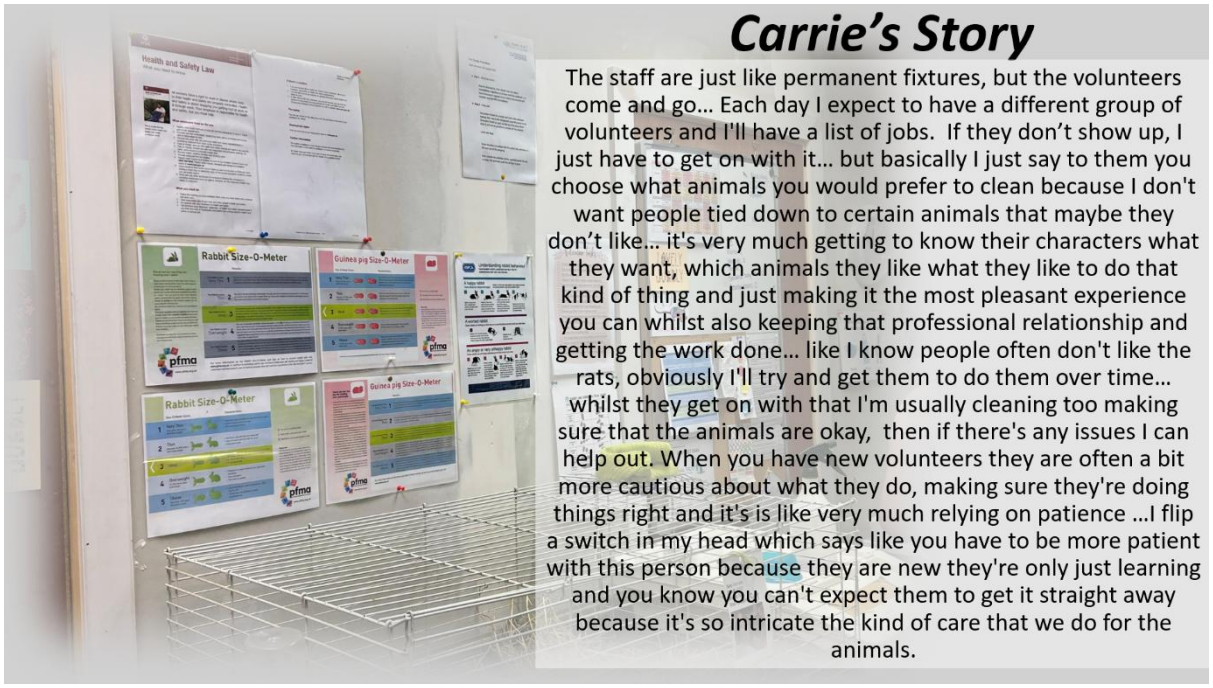


Fig.17. Sarah's Story Continued

Fig.18. Moose's Story

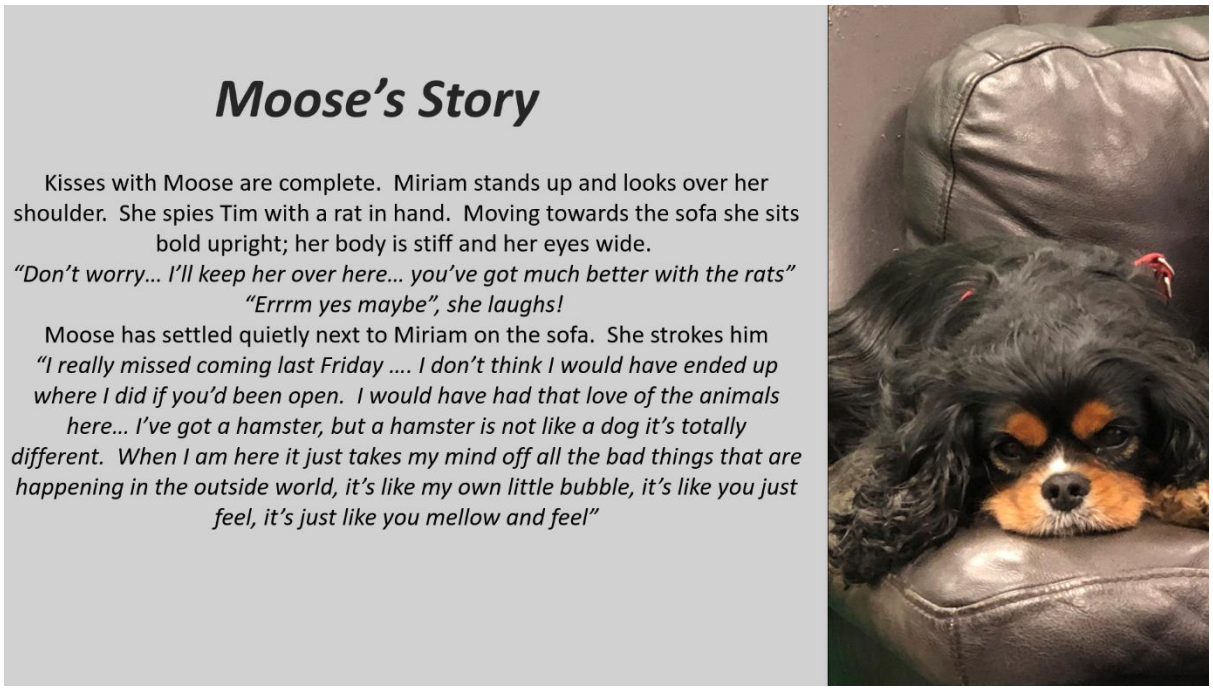


Fig.19. Cuddles' Story

## *Cuddles' Story*

Miriam explains how she looks after her hamster, Cuddles. She shows Tina a picture of her hamster on her phone.
"She's got cork base for her nails, a wooden wheel, cost more than £20, two hammocks and potties! She is toilet trained!"
Tina is focussed on brushing Merlin's back gently with a toothbrush. "Like this?" she asks.
Miriam continues, in full flow, "I have a routine, with Cuddles, each day, she has filtered water, fresh bedding every day and if I forget her treat, she stands on her bridge till I get it... once a week she gets a mousse bath. It's from Pets at Home, it's therapeutic for her - obviously, I wear gloves".
She flashes her hands in front of her, donned with blue plastic gloves. "I am very funny like that, even with my own...she's got a little brush like that one but special for hamsters....and I brush her with it... the mousse makes sure that nothing sticks to her back end... people don't think about that, do they?"

Fig.20. Ant and Herman's Story

## *Ant and Herman's Story*

Tap the bars, health check time! Swoosh, I try grabbing, but he's running, hiding, squeaking. Got him, time for cuddles. Wanting and needing to cuddle him so tight. Ant, a skinny guinea. Stroking, not stroking, feeling cold, electric and itchy, not good enough, find something soft and warm. Herman, he's hard on his shell, you can't cuddle him up. He chews the cabbage; I stroke his shell. He loves it, they love the feel, I feel myself slow right down, I feel it in my body, my breath, calm, quiet, he guides me to touch, too feed, to love. I'm with Herman and no-one else. But it's noisy and busy, baking tuna treats, fetching tea, hot water bottles, but you can see she's in pain. It really hurts, please. Massage, breathe, deeply breathe. Hold hands, massage. Pushing, sniffing, determined, I'm here, Tyler, I know something isn't okay. Let me sit here. Let me be with you.

Fig.21. Ant's Story

Fig.24. Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story

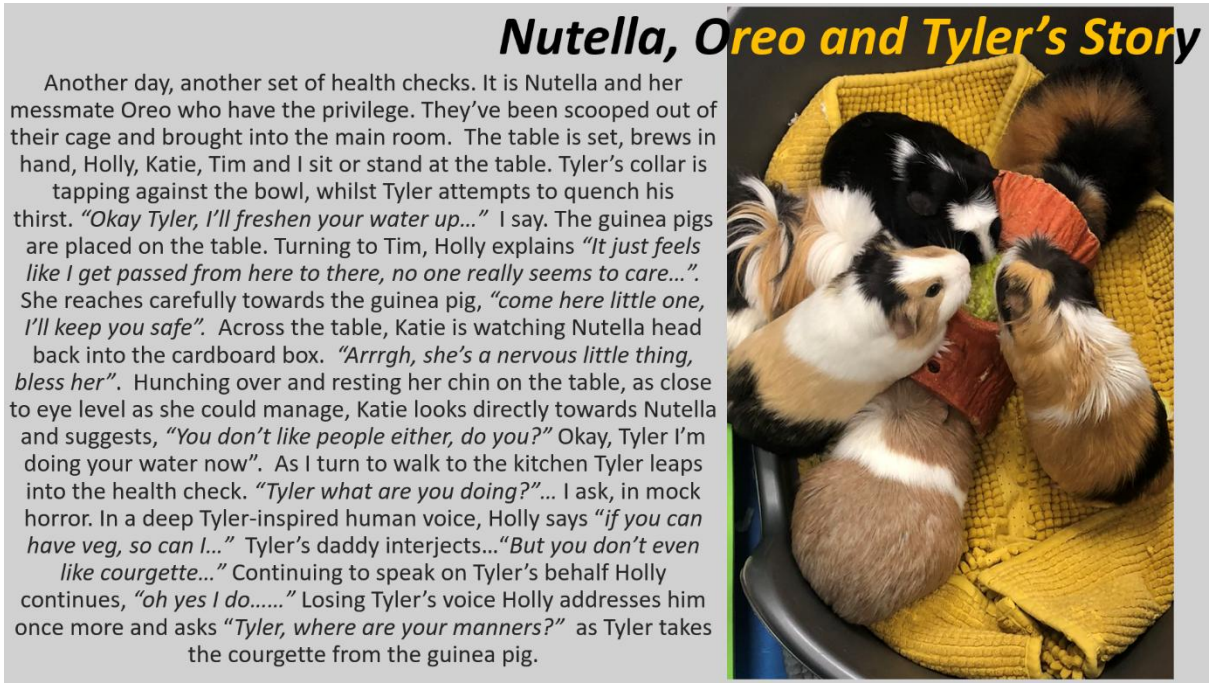
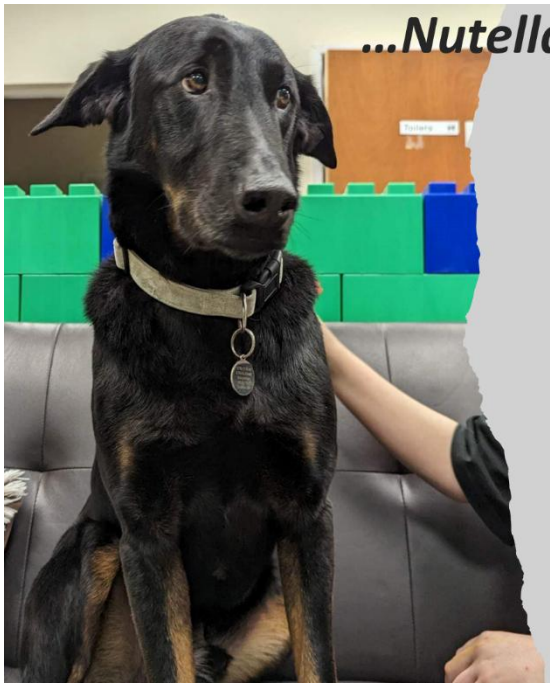


Fig.26. Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story Continued



## …Nutella, Oreo and Tyler's Story… continued…

Moving from the table to the sofa area, Tyler mooches off to fetch a cushion to give to Holly. Holly reaches towards Tyler to receive her gift, Tim intervenes *"he is giving you a present, he likes you – now he won't actually give you the cushion, but this is his way of saying, I like you Holly, you are okay here with me!"* Holly leaned over to fuss Tyler, resisting his advances to take the cushion. *"Tyler never comes to sit with me…"* interjects Katie. *"We could get some treats out and play some games with him?* I suggest. *"I'm not bribing him with food,"* said Katie. Attempting to explain Tyler's actions, Tim says *"Holly has been coming to here for nearly a year now, Tyler has just got used to her, he will get used to you… Tyler's just like us, he needs time to get to know people, to build trust…and what you don't know is that Holly baked treats for Tyler last week… so you can see why he's bringing her gifts today!"*

Fig.28. Poppy's Story

## Poppy's Story

*"After I lost Lilly, I was broken, mum got me a Frenchie, she was free… look she was gorgeous… but I don't really know what happened…"*

Sarah interrupts and explains that she'd been overbred, she was really, really, poorly… Ronnie looks to Sarah and nods. Moving back to her phone, flashing it towards me,

*"I've got Poppy now, look, she beams. She's crazy, she's got so much energy, but she just loves being with me and doesn't like being left on her own or with anyone else."*

For several weeks, Ronnie didn't show up to the weekly group session. Sarah would call her. Ronnie would talk about Poppy's antics. Over the weeks she relays her experience with Poppy.

*"Poppy doesn't like me leaving the flat"...*
*"she just destroys it when I'm out"...*
*"she's upset the neighbours upstairs and downstairs"...*
*"she wouldn't eat any of the food I give her"...*
*"she's not even fussed about playing".*

Sarah explains to me that Poppy is affecting Ronnie's health – eating, sleeping and this is affecting her meds. Just before Christmas, Sarah tells me that Ronnie has become unwell, leading to hospital admission. One of the other staff at Noah's A.R.T, had offered to take care of Poppy whilst Ronnie was in hospital with a view to adopting her in the future.

Fig.29. Story of Merlin's Beard

## Story of Merlin's Beard…

"Why is Merlin's beard so black?" …. The Animal Welfare Room is busy, it feels a bit overwhelming, chaotic. I am squeezing in between Princess Leia's cage and Merlin's Viv. Tim is focussed on the rats and shares his intentions *"It's a lack of calcium, I'll make a different feed today"*. A volunteer sweeps through the door, *"They're new, what are they for?"* she asks looking back at the thermal door shields which are fitted over the entrance to the animal welfare room. Addressing Tim, Carrie explains *"They've helped and not helped! I can't hear the rats crackling when breathing so the respiratory difficulties have decreased, thank goodness, … but…"* pirouetting to face the quarantine cages, she continues *"we have at least two guineas' with fungals … it will be more, they share the water containers, and she had it around her mouth… I think it's partly the humidity"*. Negotiating the haystacks, bedding bins, dirty washing trolley, Tim edges across the room, turning to ask *"Have they been taken off the weekly rota?"* Peering into Merlin's Viv, tapping gently on the glass, Tim slides open the glass door and takes hold of him.

Fig.30. Story of Hutches and Cages

## Story of Hutches and Cages

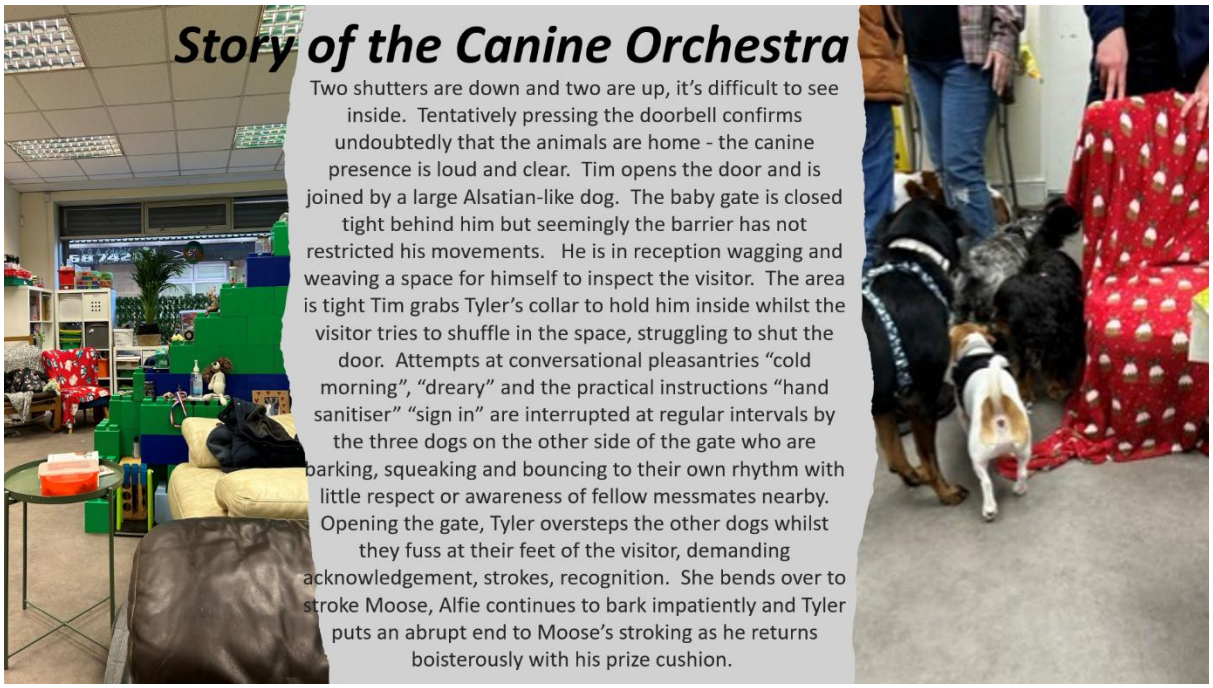
Contributing to the chaos in the Animal Welfare Room Anya addresses a group of volunteers.
*"So… what are you noticing about the animal cages?".*
*"Looks like they pooh a lot at night, they need cleaning?"*
Turning to inspect the rabbit cage, another volunteer offers,
*"Why is she on her own?"*
Whilst another voice chips in *"Don't they need more room to popcorn and binky?!"*

Fig.31. Story of Merlin's Beard Continued

## *Story of Merlin's Beard continued…*

*"Am I doing the piggy pit as usual today?"* asks Stacey, a veteran volunteer in the animal welfare room. Pushing back out through the thermal door cover, Tim emerges, and places Merlin on the floor. Merlin sets off … he's lummoxy, his movements are laboured, as he writhes and rustles his way across the floor… Tyler stretches off the wicker chair and half-heartedly peers over Merlin's bobbing head. Picking up pace, Merlin heads straight to the kitchen. By desire or coincidence, I don't know, but his beard is lighter now. Tim leans over and closes the kitchen door, but Merlin seems determined to plough through it. After allowing him several attempts, Tim, scoops him up and swizzles him round, his beard blackens almost instantly, *"see, Tom says, he doesn't like being told what to do"…* off he trots again, with increased speed and a hint of indignation.

Fig.33. Story of the Canine Orchestra



## *Story of the Canine Orchestra*

Two shutters are down and two are up, it's difficult to see inside. Tentatively pressing the doorbell confirms undoubtedly that the animals are home - the canine presence is loud and clear. Tim opens the door and is joined by a large Alsatian-like dog. The baby gate is closed tight behind him but seemingly the barrier has not restricted his movements. He is in reception wagging and weaving a space for himself to inspect the visitor. The area is tight Tim grabs Tyler's collar to hold him inside whilst the visitor tries to shuffle in the space, struggling to shut the door. Attempts at conversational pleasantries "cold morning", "dreary" and the practical instructions "hand sanitiser" "sign in" are interrupted at regular intervals by the three dogs on the other side of the gate who are barking, squeaking and bouncing to their own rhythm with little respect or awareness of fellow messmates nearby. Opening the gate, Tyler oversteps the other dogs whilst they fuss at their feet of the visitor, demanding acknowledgement, strokes, recognition. She bends over to stroke Moose, Alfie continues to bark impatiently and Tyler puts an abrupt end to Moose's stroking as he returns boisterously with his prize cushion.

Fig.35. Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages

## *Story of Kale, Carrots and Cabbages*

Peace and quiet reins. A pungent smell of mint fills the room. Rats, mice, exotics, guineas and sticks have been caged and have left for outreach visits. Kale, carrots, cabbage, apples, pears, peppers and tomatoes have been laid out on the table in the Animal Welfare room. Intent on the task in hand, Josie begins chopping and placing produce orderly in the containers. A work experience student is cleaning out one of the mice cages. Sarah pops her head round the door.

*"Josie, tell Ben how you got involved with us here…"*

Josie sighs and mouths *"do I have to…?"* a wry smile fades in …. Looking down, carefully chopping, she says, *"Well I did the Art group and then the animal welfare courses…I think people kept telling me I could…"* Taking a deep breath she continues

*"There was this one day when I made like a den for the guinea pigs, and she said it was good… And the fact she said my name and let me put it in the piggy pit and they started nibbling the box and the veg, squeaking loads, I was dead chuffed, I didn't think they would and then cos she said she would see me next week … I felt I wanted to come back and help… so I said okay, I'll do Thursday as long as I can do the treats, and the veg … and now I'm doing some Wednesday afternoons with clients at the one-to-ones"*

Sarah returns with a stack of clean towels… *"see…"* with a hint of cheekiness she continues "we can't get rid of her now! She's part of the furniture!"

Fig.36. Fancy Rats' Story

Moose, sofa-bathing and snoring loudly. The washing machine is whirring and I am steeling myself in readiness for the array of dirty pots in the kitchen. *"They've asked if we can take two baby fancy rats…?"* Sarah looks up, shaking her head. Tim closes his eyes tightly and grimaces, quietly he squeaks "I said yes". Now kitchen-bound, water running, organising the pots, the frisson of chatter is tinged with fluctuating frustration and excitement.

## *Fancy Rats' Story*

*where?... which cage?*
*help the shelter*
*love the rats*
*short of space*
*especially babies*
*love being with people*
*Retiring*
*need to wait*
*Pockets*
*Died*
*hard work*
*long hair*
*Numbers*
*mischief*

Fig.37. Roland's Story

Fig.38. Hope's Story

Fig.39. Cloud's Story

Fig.40. Wild and Exotics Story

Fig.41. Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story

## *Remi, Rolo and Rhubarb's Story*

For the final 30 minutes, Laura, Kelly and Lyn have chosen to spend time with a guinea pig. Whilst I patiently attempt to collect the rostered Rhubarb for cuddles and cabbage, Carrie is in the animal welfare room explaining her work to a new volunteer *"it's very much like having a child when they give off a negative emotion you immediately tend to that emotion"* opening the cage door she swings Remi into the pouch of her hoodie *"… and try to make things better…"* pushing a tuna treat into her pouch *"here there is just a bunch of children that all need your attention at once and you are just trying to feed each need – and more".* Scrunching my body down the side of the cage where I've spotted Rhubarb *"Come here baby, I've got you"* I hold Rhubarb tightly to my chest, she wheeks. Towels on laps, I place the cuddle cup, safely housing Rhubarb onto Laura's knee. I pass over the veg for them to feed their guineas. Focussed intently on the guinea pigs, the sofa is alive with chatter. *"He will start school in September, I can't believe how quickly time goes, I remember when he was this tiny"* Lyn nods towards Rolo, who is gnawing a carrot in her lap. Attentively absorbed in Oreo's exploration of the sofa cushions Kelly adds *"Nope! Definitely not for me, guinea pigs yes, dogs yes, in fact animals yes, 100% yes, but babies! Hmmmm …Nope!" Reaching for some pepper,* Laura says *"arrrgghhh really, they are so cute, it takes me back to when they were small, frightened of dropping them, never sure what they wanted or needed. Thankfully my mum was around then …they're grown up now, with babies of their own"*

## Appendix 2: Advert for PhD Scholarship

# Interspecies care work in theory & practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

**Funded PhD Scholarship**

**Research Study**

Summary

Care work is an interspecies matter. However, the significant role of animals – particularly domestic animals like dogs and cats – in taking care of others is often overlooked (Coulter 2016). The project will address this gap by taking a relational and interspecies approach to explore how care is understood and experienced by elderly people, care workers and companion animals within both home-based and residential settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted what Porcher (2011) calls the "shared suffering" of these three groups. Elderly people and care workers have suffered higher death rates than the general population (Health Foundation 2020), while companion animals have faced threats such as increasing levels of theft and relinquishment owing to wider socioeconomic changes driven by lockdown (Guardian 2021). Nonetheless, as we emerge into a post-COVID world, this project leans towards what Donati (2019) calls a politics of hope: It places companion animals at the heart of wider public and academic conversations about how we might understand and value care in new and diverse ways. The research will be co-created with northwest-based care providers in order to ensure its relevance and generate research impact.

This project builds on Manchester Metropolitan University's reputation for excellence in this sector by generating a fresh way of looking at social care. It will bring beneficial social impact, specifically by adding an interspecies dimension to the Faculty of Business and Law's mission of "Transforming lives, businesses and communities." In addition, its collaborative and interdisciplinary character is very much in keeping with Manchester Met's identifiable approach to ideas, questions and challenges.

Aims and objectives

**Aim:**

To reframe our understanding of care work as a relational and interspecies experience, which is shaped by elderly people, care workers and companion animals (and others).

**Objectives:**

(i) To expand the concepts of "care work" and "care ethic" theoretically by including nonhuman animals

(ii) To explore in practice how elderly people, care workers and companion animals (and others) *do* care and co-create the experience of "living well" together

iii) To identify the implications this raises with regard to adult social care provision and develop appropriate recommendations for policymakers, commissioning bodies, home-based and residential care providers and researchers.

Specific requirements of the project

Candidates should have an interest in both human-animal relations and social care.

Student eligibility

This opportunity is open to UK, EU and overseas applicants, and includes funding for the equivalent of UK fees (£4500 for 2021/22), plus a stipend in line with UKRI rates (£15,609 for 2021/2022).

Contacts

Informal enquiries can be made to:

Supervisory team: Dr. Helen Wadham **h.wadham@mmu.ac.uk** and Dr. Louise Platt **l.platt@mmu.ac.uk**

## Appendix 3: Overview and Timeline of Data Collection Activities

| Dates | Activity | Familiarisation Phase |
|---|---|---|
| 29/11/21 – 3/11/21 | 5 days on site engaging in all activities | |
| 4/01/22 | Staff training | |
| 11/01/22 – 20/09/22 | Approx 1 day per week as a volunteer<br><br>Total 38 days | |
| University Ethical Consent Granted Date 26/09/22 | | |

| Research Phase | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
| 29/09/22 | Volunteer led art group | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 30/09/22 | Support One-to-One | ✓ | ✓ | | 39 |
| 4/10/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | |
| 11/10/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | 8 |
| 18/10/22 | Volunteer led art group | ✓ | ✓ | | 12 |
| 21/10/22 | Additional Outreach | | ✓ | | |
| 25/10/22 | Volunteer led art group | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 28/10/22 | Open Day | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 1/11/22 | Volunteer led art group | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 8/11/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | 7 |
| 15/11/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | |
| 22/11/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | |
| 29/11/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | 2 |

| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6/12/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | 4 |
| 13/12/22 | Volunteer led art group | | ✓ | | 13 |
| 20/12/22 | Christmas Party | | | | 12 |
| 10/01/23 | Training | | ✓ | | |
| 17/01/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Mary Client & Volunteer 19:36<br><br>Holly Client & Volunteer 27:12 | 8 |
| 24/01/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 19 |
| 29/01/23 | Additional Support Session | | ✓ | | 2 |
| 31/01/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 6 |
| 7/02/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 18 |
| 8/02/23 | Additional Support Session | | ✓ | | |
| 14/02/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 14 |
| 21/02/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 26 |

| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28/02/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Miriam Client 47:01 | 8 |
| 7/03/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 41 |
| 14/03/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 24 |
| 21/03/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 30 |
| 28/03/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 28 |
| 4/04/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 24 |
| 11/04/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 28 |
| 14/04/23 | Dog Café | ✓ | ✓ | | 13 |
| 18/04/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Lyn Client 22:29<br>Ronnie Client and Volunteer 51:09 | |

| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25/04/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 45 |
| 2/05/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 20 |
| 9/05/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | Katie Client & Volunteer 33:29 | 4 |
| 16/05/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 32 |
| 23/05/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 44 |
| 30/05/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Millie Client 21:17 | 22 |
| 6/06/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 6 |
| 09/06/23 | Additional Outreach | | ✓ | Tim Staff 55:22 | |

| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13/06/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Josie<br><br>Client and Volunteer<br><br>61:46 | 8 |
| 20/06/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 5 |
| 27/06/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 5 |
| 4/07/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | |
| 11/07/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Tina<br>Client and Volunteer<br>25:00<br>Casey<br>Client<br>14:04 | |
| | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 18/07/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Carrie<br>Staff<br>36:11 | 29 |
| 1/08/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 23 |

| Dates | Activity | Field Site Jottings | Reflective Writing | Interviews:<br><br>Length | No. of Photographs Taken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8/08/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 5 |
| 15/08/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 5 |
| 22/08/23 | Project 9: Henry Smith Level 1 | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 5/09/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | | 5 |
| 12/09/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | ✓ | ✓ | Sarah<br><br>Staff<br><br>74:15 | |
| 19/09/23 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | |
| 26/09/24 | Animal Welfare Courses<br><br>Henry Smith | | ✓ | | 11 |

## Appendix 4: Noah's A.R.T. Research Poster

### Who am I?

My name is Kerry and I am a researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University.
I am doing research at Noah's A.R.T.

### What is the project about?

I am interested to find out how animals care for humans and how humans care for animals. I am particularly interested in understanding how animals can support mental health and well-being.

### As a Researcher, what will I do?

I will observe what happens during the sessions, I will talk to people and take photographs (without human faces), I will write things in my journal. I will not write down your name or anything that could identify you. I will look at everything I collect and make connections that help me to understand how animals and humans care for each other and how this supports mental health and well-being.

If you have any questions, I am very happy to speak to you. You can also talk to other staff at Noah's A.R.T.
You can contact me by email at kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Manchester Metropolitan University

If you have concerns about how I am doing the project, you can contact people at the university: -

**Project Supervisor**

Dr Helen Wadham, PhD Principal Supervisor @ Manchester Metropolitan University Email: h.wadham@mmu.ac.uk; Telephone Number: 0161 247 6652;

**Ethical Approval and Governance**

Prof. Kevin Alberston, Chair of Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law Ethics and Governance Committee, Manchester Metropolitan University Email: foblethicsenquiries@mmu.ac.uk

## Appendix 5: Project Information Sheet (Client: Graphics)

Manchester Metropolitan University

### I Need Your Help?

Hello … My name is Kerry and I am a researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. I am doing research at Noah's A.R.T. and I would like you to help. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and think about taking part in the project! If you have any questions, I am very happy to speak to you. You can also talk to other staff at Noah's A.R.T. or the people who support you outside of Noah's A.R.T., this may be a parent or carer.

### What do I need to do?

| STEP 1 | STEP 2 | STEP 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Read this information sheet | Think about if you want to take part | Talk to your parent, carer or someone outside of Noah's A.R.T. who helps you to make decisions |
| **STEP 4** | **STEP 5** | **STEP 6** |
| Ask me questions – you can do this face-to-face or via email | Decide if you wish to take part in the research | Fill in and sign the consent form |

### What is the project about?

I am interested to find out how animals care for humans and how humans care for animals. I am particularly interested in understanding how animals can support our mental health and well-being. I want to understand how the place, the objects, smells and feelings influence care between human and animals.

Version: 3.0 App 9. Client PIS [Graphics] V3 Date: Sept. 2022. Ethical Approval Number (EthOs): 41732

## As a Researcher, what will I do?

| Interview | Photographs | Observe | Journal | Analyse |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Talk to people who spend time with the animals at Noah's A.R.T. | Take photographs of the animals and the environment (not human faces) | Observe what happens in the sessions at Noah's A.R.T. and write about this in my journal | I will write down my observations, thoughts and feelings in my journal | I will then look at all the data together and make connections. I will then write about these connections |

## What does this mean for you?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| You will participate in the animal assisted intervention session as normal. You will feed and stroke the animals and chat with staff and volunteers normally | I will participate in the sessions too. I will be watching interactions with the animals and thinking about how animals care for human and humans care for animals | I will take photographs of the animals and the spaces but no human faces! | After the session at Noah's A.R.T. I will go home and write about what I saw and how I felt about what happened that day. |
| | I will suggest some days and times for the interview. The interview will take place at Noah's A.R.T. It would be approximately an hour long. The interview can be done in one week after a session or across a number of weeks. I will provide a list of questions in advance. | | |

## Are there any risks to taking part?

There are minimal risks to you if you participate in the research

**Care**

Knowing the research is looking at care might make you feel emotional, you may feel angry, sad or scared. It is okay to have these feelings

If you are worried or concerned you can...

Talk to Kerry or staff at Noah's A.R.T.

Stop participating in the research

## Do I have to take part?

No. It is completely up to you. I will help you read through the information sheet. I will answer any questions you have and ask you to think about if you want to take part.

If you decide you want to take part, then you will need to complete the consent form.

If you decide you don't want to take part, you don't need to do anything. You don't need to explain or give any reasons for not participating.

## If you decide to participate, what happens next...?

I will

- arrange a suitable time for the interview
- make your information anonymous by giving you a different name
- write and talk to people about the research
- save all of the writings and audio recordings in a safe digital space at the University
- safely destroy and dispose of observations and interviews one year after the project is completed

## Important things to know?

You can stop participating in the project at any time

You will be given a different name, so that no-one will know that I am writing about what you did or what you said.

Everything you say will be confidential. This means I will not tell anybody what you have told me. The only time I would tell someone else what you have said is if I think you or another person or animal is in danger.

The people who have helped me to make sure this project is safe are:
Dr Helen Wadham and Dr Louise Platt (Project Supervisors)
Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee
Noah's A.R.T.

If you have a question, comment, concern or complaint about the project please contact the best person from the list below: -

Researcher and principal investigator

Kerry-Jane Moakes
PhD Student and Principal Investigator
E-mail: kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Ethical Approval and Governance

Prof. Kevin Alberston, Chair of Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law Ethics and Governance Committee, Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: foblethicsenquiries@mmu.ac.uk

Project Supervisors

Dr Helen Wadham, PhD Principal Supervisor @ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: h.wadham@mmu.ac.uk; Telephone Number: 0161 247 6652;

Dr Louise Platt, PhD Second Supervisor@ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: l.platt@mmu.ac.uk; Telephone Number: 0161 247 2623

The safety of participants within research is ethically and legally important. There are groups of people in the university and outside who you can get in touch with if you are worried about how I am looking after your personal information.

Manchester Metropolitan Data Protection Officer dataprotection@mmu.ac.uk
Tel: 0161 247 3331 Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester, M15 6BH

UK Information Commissioner's Office
You have the right to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office if you would like to complain about how we process your personal data: https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT**

Version: 3.0 App 9. Client PIS [Graphics] V3 Date: Sept. 2022. Ethical Approval Number (EthOs): 41732

# Appendix 6: Project Information Sheet (Employees)

Manchester Metropolitan University

## Information Sheet (employees)

**Research Project Title**

Interspecies care work in theory/practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

**Invitation to research**

My name is Kerry Moakes, and I am a PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. The research is focussing on interspecies care work. This means that I will be looking at how animals care for humans and how humans care for animals. I am particularly interested in understanding how interspecies caring relations can support mental health and well-being. I will be focussing upon what is happening around moments of care and how the place, the environment, the objects, smells and emotions influence care.

**Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to participate as you are an employee at Noah's A.R.T. and you work with the animals.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you do not have to take part. It is up to you to decide. I will talk through the Information Sheet which explains the project. You can ask questions face-to-face or via email. I will then ask you to sign a 'Consent Form' to show you have agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

**What will I be asked to do?**

The research will involve me observing what happens at your place of work, taking photographs of animals/spaces and carrying out face-to-face interviews.

I will observe how animals care for humans and how humans care for animals. I will write down what I see, smell, feel and hear.

I will take photographs of the spaces and animals at Noah's A.R.T. I will not photograph human faces.

The interview will last up to an hour and will be done in a private space at your place of work. You can choose to do the interview over a number of weeks or all in one go. A week before the interview I will provide you with some questions so that you know what we will be discussing.

With your permission, I will audiorecord the interview. This will ensure that I write down everything you have said accurately. I also want to have a recording of any other sounds, such as the animal noises that happen during the interview. If during the interview you say anything that makes you identifiable, this will not be transcribed or saved on the audio file.

**How will you use my information?**

I will not use any personal data that would make you identifiable.

The observations and interviews will help me to write about the caring encounters between human and animals. This is for my PhD thesis.

**Will my data be sent anywhere else, or shared with other people or organisations?**

The data collected will not be shared with anyone else.

**When will you destroy my information?**

The data collected from this project will be safely destroyed and disposed of one year after the project is completed.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The project will culminate in an 80,000 word PhD Thesis.

I will produce a report and Infographic for Noah's A.R.T. which provides a summary of the findings and experiences of the project.

I will present elements of the research findings at academic conferences, and to relevant stakeholders who are interested in interspecies care. I will write articles for publication in appropriate peer-reviewed journals. All individual data will be anonymised.

The organisation where you work will be acknowledged in the thesis, the publications, and presentations.

I will acknowledge and thank animals, clients, volunteers and employees for their help and support with the research. Clients, volunteers and employees will not be named.

**Who has reviewed this research project?**

This project has been reviewed by the MMU Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

**Data Protection Law**

The way we look after your information is ruled by UK law. Under UK law, we need to have a very good reason for using your information (this is called a 'lawful basis').

You have the right to make choices about your information under UK law. If you have any questions or would like to ask us to do something with your information, you can ask the researcher, or someone else at the University. Contact details are shown towards the bottom of this document.

**How will you use my information?**

I will not use any personal data that would make you identifiable.

The observations and interviews will help me to write about the caring encounters between human and animals. This is for my PhD thesis.

**Will my data be sent anywhere else, or shared with other people or organisations?**

The data collected will not be shared with anyone else.

**When will you destroy my information?**

The data collected from this project will be safely destroyed and disposed of one year after the project is completed.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The project will culminate in an 80,000 word PhD Thesis.

I will produce a report and Infographic for Noah's A.R.T. which provides a summary of the findings and experiences of the project.

I will present elements of the research findings at academic conferences, and to relevant stakeholders who are interested in interspecies care. I will write articles for publication in appropriate peer-reviewed journals. All individual data will be anonymised.

The organisation where you work will be acknowledged in the thesis, the publications, and presentations.

I will acknowledge and thank animals, clients, volunteers and employees for their help and support with the research. Clients, volunteers and employees will not be named.

**Who has reviewed this research project?**

This project has been reviewed by the MMU Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

**Data Protection Law**

The way we look after your information is ruled by UK law. Under UK law, we need to have a very good reason for using your information (this is called a 'lawful basis').

You have the right to make choices about your information under UK law. If you have any questions or would like to ask us to do something with your information, you can ask the researcher, or someone else at the University. Contact details are shown towards the bottom of this document.

You can stop being a part of the study at any time, without giving a reason. You can ask me to delete your data at any time, but it might not always be possible. If you ask me to delete information ***within 8 weeks of the interview,*** I will make sure this is done. If you ask me to delete data after this point, I will not be able to delete your data as it will have been anonymised (where we take out your name and any other information that lets us know the information is about you) and combined with other data, and therefore it will not be possible to identify your individual data.

**Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?**

Researcher and principal investigator

Kerry-Jane Moakes
PhD Student and Principal Investigator
E-mail: **kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk**

Ethical Approval and Governance

Prof. Kevin Albertson, Chair of Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law Ethics and Governance Committee, Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: **foblethicsenquiries@mmu.ac.uk**

Project Supervisors

Dr Helen Wadham, PhD Principal Supervisor @ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: **h.wadham@mmu.ac.uk;** Telephone Number: 0161 247 6652;

Dr Louise Platt, PhD Second Supervisor@ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: **l.platt@mmu.ac.uk**; Telephone Number: 0161 247 2623

The safety of participants within research is ethically and legally important. There are groups of people in the university and outside who you can get in touch with if you are worried about how I am looking after your personal information.

Manchester Metropolitan Data Protection Officer **dataprotection@mmu.ac.uk**
Tel: 0161 247 3331 Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester, M15 6BH

UK Information Commissioner's Office

You have the right to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office if you would like to complain about how we process your personal data:
**https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/**

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT**

## Appendix 7: Client Consent Form (Graphics)

Manchester Metropolitan University

### Consent Form

Consent means that you are saying yes to something. You are giving your permission for something to happen.

Participant Identification Number:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | I have read the participant information sheet about the interspecies care project<br><br>(dated: September 2022 ) (version 3.0) | | |
| | I have had time to think about if I want to take part | | |
| | If I have had any questions about the project, I have been able to ask someone and they have given me an answer which I understood | | |
| | I have spoken about the project with the people who help me make decisions outside of Noah's A.R.T. | | |
| | I understand that it is okay to say no and stop taking part in the project at any time. | | |
| <br> | I want to take part in the project and this means<br>• Kerry will watch me whilst participating in the animal assisted intervention sessions at Noah's A.R.T.<br>• Kerry will take photographs of the animals and spaces | | |



**Version:** 2.0 App. 11. Client Consent Form [Graphics] V2 **Date:** Sept 2022
**Ethical approval number (EthOS):** **41732**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | • Kerry will write about what she sees in her journal | | |
| | I would like to have the opportunity to be interviewed. This would involve talking to Kerry about care and animals. | | |
| | I am happy for my interview to be recorded. No audio clips of me will be published. | | |
| | I understand and agree that my words may be quoted anonymously in research outputs | | |
| | I understand that Kerry will talk and write about the project. When she does this she will make sure that I am anonymous – this means that no-one will know it was about me. | | |
| | I understand that Kerry will write a report for Noah's A.R.T. which summarises what she found out. This will be made available at Noah's A.R.T. and summarised on social media. | | |

Signed:

Full Name:

Date:

Name/Signature of person taking consent:

Date

## Appendix 8: Consent Form (employees)

Manchester Metropolitan University

**CONSENT FORM**

Project Title: Interspecies care work in theory/practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

Participant Identification Number:

| | **Please tick your chosen answer** | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet version for the above study.<br><br>(version 3.0) (dated: Sept. 2022) | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 | I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 | I agree to participate in the project to the extent of the activities described to me in the above participant information sheet. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. | I would like to be interviewed as part of the project. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. | If I am interviewed, I agree to my interview participation being audio recorded for analysis. No audio clips of me will be published. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. | I understand and agree that my words may be quoted anonymously in research outputs. | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of participant | Date | Signature |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name of person taking consent | Date | Signature |

When completed: 1 for researcher, 1 for participant to keep with the PIS
EthOS ID number, 41732. Version 1.0 App 6. Consent Form [standard] V1 Date: May 2022

# Appendix 9: Interview Questions (Client)

## Possible Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in an interview. I have identified a few possible questions that we can discuss in the interview. You can choose which question you would like to start with or you can start with a thought or share an experience with me.

If you have any questions about the interview or you are worried about any of the questions listed below you can email me (details below).

Before I do the interview next week at Noah's A.R.T., I will check that you are happy to participate. At any point you can say no. You do not have to participate in the interview.

## Clients

1. Can you tell me how you became involved with Noah's A.R.T.?
2. Can you talk to me about animals and how they have been part of your life?
3. Can you talk to me about what you like about Noah's A.R.T., which animals you enjoy spending time with and why?
4. I am interested in caring relationships between animals and humans. Can you talk to me about what care means to you? Do animals care for humans? How? Do you have any examples?
5. I am thinking a lot about the sensory experiences of care, care through sound, touch, space, place, smell. Do you have thoughts about care between animals and humans from a sensory perspective?

Kerry-Jane Moakes
PhD Student and Principal Investigator
E-mail: kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk

# Appendix 10: Interview Questions (Employees)

## Possible Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in an interview. I have identified a few possible questions that we can discuss in the interview. You can choose which question you would like to start with or you can start with a thought or share an experience with me.

If you have any questions about the interview or you are worried about any of the questions listed below you can email me (details below).

Before I do the interview next week at Noah's A.R.T., I will check that you are happy to participate. At any point you can say no. You do not have to participate in the interview.

## Employees

1. Can you tell me how you became involved with Noah's A.R.T.?
2. Can you talk to me about animals and how they have been part of your life?
3. Can you talk to me about how you see care within the work you do at Noah's A.R.T.?
4. I am interested in caring relationships between animals and humans. Can you talk to me about what care means to you? Do animals care for humans? How? Do you have any examples?
5. I am thinking a lot about the sensory experiences of care, care through sound, touch, space, place, smell. Do you have thoughts about care between animals and humans from a sensory perspective?
6. A large proportion of the work you do involves caring for the animals, what kinds of things does this involve? Are there any particular parts which you enjoy or find challenging?

Kerry-Jane Moakes
PhD Student and Principal Investigator
E-mail: kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk

## Appendix 11: The Process of Storying

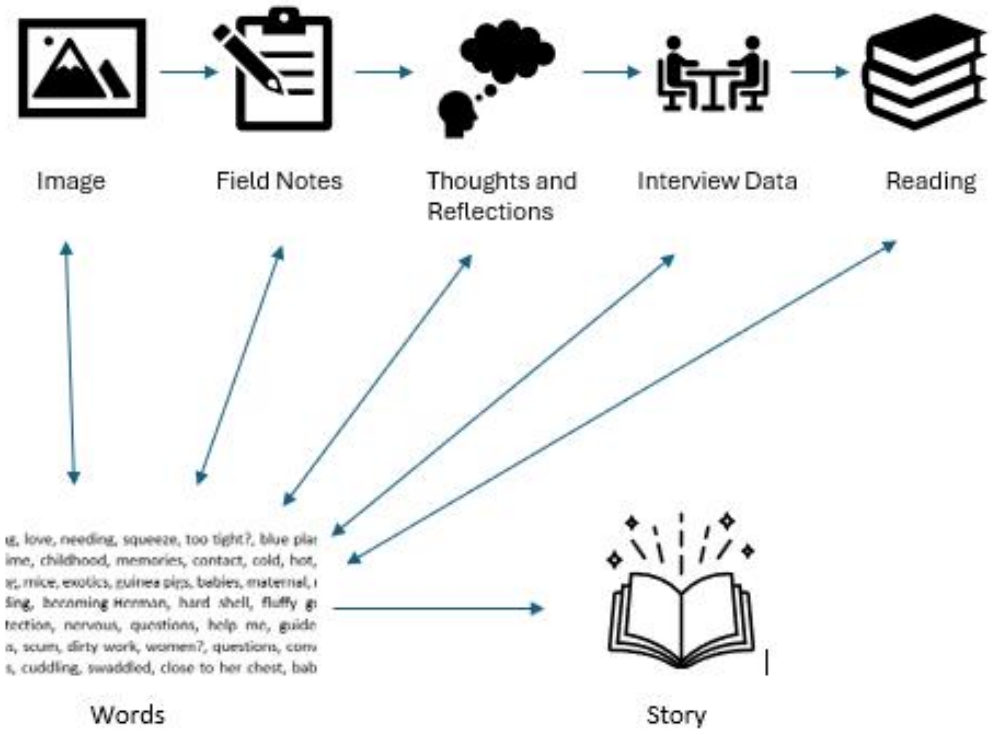
I have outlined in Chapter 5, the reasons for adopting story and the process of developing the stories. In this appendix, I provide an explicit and detailed account of how I engaged with the different sources of data and how these led to the formation of rough chapter themes. I have constructed this account by referring back to jottings in my journal where I documented the construction of the first analysis chapter and how this sparked other chapters. As Maclure explains:

> "there comes a point in the research, and in the writing of it, where the reading, writing, thinking and seeing do not really feel like distinct activities or modes. They connect and bounce off one another in ways that seem indifferent to their inherent differences (MacLure, 2024, p. 1652).

Here, I attempt to explain the tangled relationship between empirical research, the reading, writing, thinking and seeing that led to story-making as a way to represent this entanglement. Whilst I adopt some sense of linearity, I recognise the process became disorderly and non-chronological, as Barad explains "the past and the future are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through one another" (Barad, 2007:383). Chapter 5 focuses on touch, and whilst the chapter begins with the story of Moose, leading onto Cuddles' story, the first story I actually constructed in the analytical process was Ant and Herman's. In this section, I illustrate how Ant and Herman's story came about, opening up more and more stories for exploration.

As I explained in chapter 5, I recognised the imperative to feel in the research process. Data can spark intense feelings of wonder, as MacLure (2001:228) suggests "a comment in an interview, a fragment of a field note, an anecdote, an object, or a strange facial expression—seems to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us". The wonder within the glowing data led to the process of story-making. In the first instance I turned to the many photographs I had taken during the research phase, as a means of moving away from the primacy of language and attending to the affective connections sparked in the images. Flicking through them, I became familiar with a repetitious postural silhouette that somehow conveyed an affective interspecies connectedness through the conjoined shape of a human-animal interaction. Of course, the recognition of this shape, is also informed by the knowledge of AAI practices gained through reading and experience in the organisation. Whilst being overwhelmed by the number of photos that shared a similar encounter, I selected three images and arranged them alongside extracts from my field notes from the day the image was taken. The words and image together sparked movement in thinking, contextualising each other and sparking further thoughts and questions (Pink, 2021).

This flow chart illustrates the process of analysing the data and creating stories.




In this table, I provide an illustration of this approach in more detail.

| | |
|---|---|
| Image | |
| Field Notes 7/2/23 | You could see the pain and discomfort in her face. Sarah went and got her a hot water bottle. When we were in the animal room, she had been really interested in the Skinny Guineas, she was looking at them – she asked if she might be able to hold one today, she said "I feel like I just need to squeeze him sooooo soooo tight". Anya said that if there was time we would get the animals out later on in the day. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Thoughts/ Questions | Fetching a hot water bottle was an act of caring something I recalled from childhood. I considered how needing to touch an animal physically was important to people in the space.<br>It makes me think about how cold it always is in the building. |
| Image | |
| Field Notes 14/02/23 | In the afternoon session, the group were learning about guinea pig health checks with Anya. Carrie was there too.<br>Holly asked Anya if certain people preferred certain. Anya said it depended more on how they were feeling on that day. Someone with ADHD might want the busyness of the rats and mice one week but then in another week want to sit with the dog. She said often the elderly care home residents don't take to the exotics, like Herman or Merlin, but they like the guinea pigs and the dogs. The guinea pigs, Anya said, remind them of babies, "it's a maternal thing for the women". Holly said that she finds sitting with Herman really helps her to regulate her emotions.<br>Connie said, "Sitting with Herman, I have not thoughts... If I'm having a bad day, I just sit with him, he guides me to feed him, he always wants food and I'm just at that minute, just becoming Herman... You are just becoming Herman in that moment" |
| Thoughts/ Questions | There is something about having lots of different animals. Lots of AAI focuses on dogs. Touching a hard shell? Isn't like touching the guinea pig? Soft? |
| Image | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Field Notes 7/03/23 | They were carrying out the health checks, Carrie was explaining the anal sack expression and the grease gland. Helen was really nervous about doing this, she said "you will have to help me, guide me, I really don't want to hurt him, she was really gentle, very attentive to little Fred, asking questions calmly. After she had removed some of the scum from inside his gland Fred proceeded to clean himself and try to make friends with Roland the rat. |
| Thoughts/ Questions | I look at the centrality of caring such as health checks and how engaging in practice of caring prompts questions and conversations.<br>I consider how these people are volunteers<br>I consider how doing this work allows someone to ask questions, perhaps making them vulnerable. |
| Image | |
| Field Notes 14/02/23 | She watched the guinea pigs really closely, she said that were staying close together, following each other. They seemed quite nervy, and Sarah explained that they are prey animals and that they had just been moved from their home to a new environment so they were a bit nervous – like we would be. Candie said that her dog had been nervous when she moved from her house into her new accommodation, but she had to get rid of her dog because they aren't allowed them. Candie noticed that the guinea pigs were sniffing a lot and sometimes looking up at us watching then. Once wrapped tightly and placed in her arms, Candie said to the guinea pigs "Your my baby, I love you, don't worry, I am not going to hurt you… I just wish I could take you home with me". Sarah explained that next week was the last week. Candie said that she loved coming, she loves volunteering and wants to join again, she loves the animals and "you lot" (the staff!) |
| Thoughts/ Questions | I am struck by how Sarah explains the guinea pig's nervousness connecting this with how people experience the world. Too-ing and fro-ing? I consider how Candie is able to share memories of having pets, and how people become connected with the animals, experiencing a sense of love and belonging as a volunteer or participant at the setting.<br>I consider the mother and baby connectedness through touch and how talking about the guinea pig being her baby might trigger memories of being a child or being a mum? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Readings | AAI centres upon the practice of touch (Fine, 2015), built upon scientific evidence that touch produced oxytocin (Olmert, 2009) which derives positive benefit for human well-being (Reading Notes 15/01/22)<br>I noted that in the IAHAIO document, there is no direct mention of touch (Reading Notes 31/05/23)<br>Hamington (2017) explains that different relationships with animals can contribute to both individual and collective moral progress. (Reading Notes 01/07/23)<br>I consider the importance of practice caring (Noddings, 1986) and question how this is harder to access for marginalised groups (e.g. Brannelly, 2015)<br>I question the importance of caring in the parent-child and how this is difficult for people who aren't parents or who struggle to have relationships.<br>The importance of talking about memories of caring for animals (Gorman, 2019)<br>The importance of having these experiences alongside others in organisational contexts where people feel seen and cared for (Newbigging, 2020) |

I bring together what I see in the images, words from fieldnotes and thoughts, questions or readings that come to mind, mostly in single word or short form, to evoke something more, spark new connections and foster a different rhythm. Like, in poetry the use of words in this way, creates a space in which the connections are not already determined in language, they have the potential to connect differently with things that are not already written but are already part of the story.

> Skinny Guinea, touching, cold, seeing, pain, discomfort, facial expressions, hot water bottle, keeping warm, being cared for, skinny guinea, stroking, seeing, wanting to touch, feeling, love, needing, squeeze, too tight?, blue plastic gloves, barrier, messy, dirty work time, childhood, memories, contact, cold, hot, health checks, practicing care, rats, dog, mice, exotics, guinea pigs, babies, maternal, regulate, calming, mindful, guides, feeding, becoming-Herman, hard shell, fluffy guinea, skin-to-skin skinny guinea, protection, nervous, questions, help me, guide me, hurt, gentle, calm, attentiveness, scum, dirty work, women?, questions, conversation, talk, volunteers, make friends, cuddling, swaddled, close to her chest, babies, vulnerable, sanitiser, watching, closeness, nervousness, prey animals, 'like you', stories, memories, prohibition, watching you watching me, connectedness, my baby, love you, home, safe, endings, connections, volunteering, love animals, love people, belonging, marginalisation, mental health, women, too-ing and fro-ing, mother and child, memories, oxytocin, moral progress, Mutal Flourishing.

This initial set of words was embryonic to the formation of the thesis. Whilst, in the process of writing down the words, I thought I was formulating the first story and the first chapter what I came to realise was that this would become the starting point for the story of the thesis as a whole. Before moving onto explain this further, I will stay with the first chapter and

what I came to realise was that this would become the starting point for the story of the thesis as a whole. Before moving onto explain this further, I will stay with the first chapter and illustrate how I used these words to prompt further engagement with data which lead to the first story, Ant's story.

With these words whirling around my mind, I revisit my data jotting down brief summaries of instances which link back to elements of my thinking. This table summarises some examples, I omit the detail at this juncture on ethical grounds.

| | |
|---|---|
| Field Notes 28/10/22 | Open day. Hattie and the Tortoise. Tyler and the cushion! |
| Field Notes 8/11/22 | Massage Mary. Seeing her in pain. Asking to be massaged. Feeling vulnerable. |
| Field Notes 17/01/23 | Observation in Animal Welfare<br>Animals produce overwhelming emotion - they could burst. |
| Interview Data 17/01/23 | Tyler and Zeke caring for Mary after an episode. |
| Field Notes 31/01/23 | Being licked and kissed by the dogs. Needing to touch them or the cushions on the sofa. Arriving |
| Field Notes 8/02/23 | Practice of caring, health checks, preparing food important to understanding of self and other |
| Field Notes 14/02/23 | Guinea pig swaddling, cold (homelessness)<br><br>atmosphere, expectations, bare feet, arrivals, chaos, talking, not talking, needing to shake, guinea pig swaddling, |
| Interview Data 28/02/23 | Miriam, hamsters and dogs. |
| Field Notes 7/03/23 | Observation, illness, 5 welfare needs<br>Decoding behaviour, dog fight, illicit feeding, |
| Field Notes 21/03/23 | Animal Therapy time, talking about babies |
| Field Notes 18/04/23 | Health Check. Gloves, food, watching, |
| Field Notes 09/05/23 | Chatter in Animal Welfare Room, the different textures of material. |
| Field Notes 8/08/23 | Merlin's story, he doesn't talk |

At each juncture, I became further saturated in the detail of the data, I am immersed in the affective experiences and have brought together elements of significance which culminate in the construction of Ant and Herman's story

'Tap the bars, health check time! Swoosh…

# Appendix 12: Letter of Ethical Approval

Good luck with your very interesting research project.

Regards,

Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee
26/09/2022
**Project Title:** Interspecies care work

**EthOS Reference Number:** 41732

**Ethical Opinion**

Dear Kerry-Jane Moakes,

The above application was reviewed by the Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee and, on the 26/09/2022, was given a favourable ethical opinion. The approval is in place until 31/08/2024 .

**Conditions of favourable ethical opinion**

Application Documents

| Document Type | File Name | Date | Version |
|---|---|---|---|
| Additional Documentation | Appendix 15. Withdrawal Form V1 | 22/05/2022 | 1.0 |
| Additional Documentation | App. 16. File Storage and Naming Conventions V1 | 22/05/2022 | 1.0 |
| Additional Documentation | App. 18 MMU-Research-Insurance-Checklist-Interspecies Care V1 | 22/05/2022 | 1.0 |
| Consent Form | App 6. Consent Form [standard] V1 | 22/05/2022 | 1.0 |
| Additional Documentation | Appendix 17 Project Plan in Week Format Version 3 Sept 2022 | 05/09/2022 | 3.0 |
| Letter to Gatekeeper | App 3. Organisation Information Sheet V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Consent Form | App. 4 Organisation Consent Form V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Consent Form | App. 11. Client Consent Form [Graphics] V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Consent Form | App. 12. Client Assent Form [Graphics] V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Consent Form | App.14. Parent Carer Consent V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App 9. Client PIS [Graphics] V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App 10. Client PIS [Graphics Assent] V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Additional Documentation | App. 1. Profile of Noah's Art V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Additional Documentation | App. 2. Possible interview questions V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App. 13. Parent Carer Letter V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App. 5 PIS employees V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App. 7 PIS Volunteers V3 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Information Sheet | App. 8 Client PIS [standard] V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |
| Project Protocol | KM Protocol V4.0 Sept 2022 | 16/09/2022 | 4.0 |
| Additional Documentation | Changes to ETHOS Application 41732 V2 | 16/09/2022 | 2.0 |

The Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is granted with the following conditions

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies and procedures

This ethical approval is conditional on adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies, Procedures, guidance and Standard Operating procedures. These can be found on the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages.

Amendments

If you wish to make a change to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment. Please visit the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages or contact your Faculty research officer for advice around how to do this.

Page 1 of 2

We wish you every success with your project.

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

For help with this application, please first contact your Faculty Research Officer. Their details can be found here

# Appendix 13: Organisation Information Sheet

Manchester Metropolitan University

**Information Sheet for Organisation**

**Research Project Title**
Interspecies Care: Interspecies care work in theory/practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

**Invitation to research**
My name is Kerry Moakes, and I am a PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. The research is focussing on interspecies care work. This means that I will be looking at how animals care for humans and how humans care for animals. I am particularly interested in understanding how interspecies caring relations can support mental health and well-being. I will be focussing upon what is happening around moments of care and how the place, the environment, the objects, smells and emotions influence care.

**Why have I been invited?**
I want to carry out the research with your organisation because I feel that there is something about the work which resonates 'care'. I have observed this through family connections with the project and through social media posts. I also want the research to have real-life impact. I want to use the findings from the research study to help and support the development of practices and provision in your organisation and within the wider academic and policy field around Animal Assisted Intervention work and mental health and well-being.

**Do I have to take part?**
No, as an organisation you are not under any obligation to take part. It is up to you to decide. I will talk through the proposed project outlined in this information sheet. You can ask questions. I will then ask you to sign a 'Organisation Consent Form' to show you have agreed that your organisation is happy to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

**What will I be asked to do?**
A detailed breakdown is available at the end of this document. In summary, the research will involve observations, photographs and face-to-face interviews with some employees, volunteers, and clients.

I would like to display a picture with information about the research in the reception space.

As an organisation, you are agreeing to allocate me to a minimum of three, Animal Assisted Intervention Projects (AAIPs) between September 2022 and September 2023. I will work as part of the team on the AAIPs you allocate me to. Whilst doing so, I will be carrying out observations that make me think about care within animal and human relationships. I will record these at home after the AAIP session.

I will take photographs of animals and spaces, but not human faces during the project.

I will make arrangements to carry out interviews with 5 x employees, 5 x volunteers and 5 x clients during the course of the project. Interviews will be undertaken at your premises at a time when you or other staff members are on site. Interviews will be transcribed.

**Are there any risks if I participate?**
I do not envisage any risks to the organisation if you agree to participate.

**Are there any advantages if I participate?**
There are no direct advantages or rewards.

However, the research will generate new ways of understanding interspecies care which, as an organisation, you can use to generate new provision and promote current projects. As a researcher, I have links with Manchester Metropolitan University and the research community. I will share information and ideas with you which may be beneficial to your organisation. I will present findings at conferences or network events, and I will celebrate and promote the work of your organisation.

**Informed consent**
I will fully inform all individual participants of the project aim and objectives. I will provide time and space for participants to ask questions. All participants have the right to withdraw at any time.

The consent process will provide specified and required legal information in respect of data protection law and the processing of personal data.

**How will information about the organisation be stored and how will you look after it?**
All information about the organisation and the data collected for this project will be stored and backed up on Manchester Metropolitan University's OneDrive platform. OneDrive is secure and resilient and is compliant with Data Protection Legislation.

**How will you use my information?**
The data I collect from being at your organisation will help me to write about the caring encounters between human and animals. This is for my PhD thesis.

**Will my data be sent anywhere else, or shared with other people or organisations?**
The data collected will not be shared with anyone else.

**When will you destroy my information?**
The data collected will be destroyed one year after the project is completed.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**
The project will culminate in an 80,000 word PhD Thesis.

I will produce a report and Infographic for your organisation which provides a summary of the findings and experiences of the project. The contents of this will be summarised on your social media (e.g. Facebook/Instagram) and in your community magazine to communicate findings to the broader Noah's A.R.T. community. The report and the infographic will be available in a physical format for clients to take away from the Base.

I will present elements of the research findings at academic conferences, and with relevant stakeholders who are interested in interspecies care. I will write articles for publication in appropriate peer-reviewed journals. All individual data will be anonymised.

Your organisation will be acknowledged as an organisation in the thesis, the publications, and presentations.

I will acknowledge and thank animals, clients, volunteers and employees for their help and support with the research. Clients, volunteers and employees will not be named.

**Who has reviewed this research project?**

This project has been reviewed by the MMU Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

**Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?**

Researcher and principal investigator

Kerry-Jane Moakes
PhD Student and Principal Investigator
E-mail: **kerry-jane.moakes@stu.mmu.ac.uk**

Ethical Approval and Governance

Prof. Kevin Albertson, Chair of Manchester Metropolitan University Faculty of Business and Law Ethics and Governance Committee, Manchester Metropolitan University;
Email: foblethicsenquiries@mmu.ac.uk

Project Supervisors

Dr Helen Wadham, PhD Principal Supervisor @ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: **h.wadham@mmu.ac.uk;** Telephone Number: 0161 247 6652;

Dr Louise Platt, PhD Second Supervisor@ Manchester Metropolitan University
Email: **l.platt@mmu.ac.uk**; Telephone Number: 0161 247 2623

The safety of participants within research is ethically and legally important. There are groups of people in the university and outside who you can get in touch with if you are worried about how I am looking after your personal information.

Manchester Metropolitan Data Protection Officer **dataprotection@mmu.ac.uk**
Tel: 0161 247 3331 Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester, M15 6BH

UK Information Commissioner's Office
You have the right to complain directly to the Information Commissioner's Office if you would like to complain about how we process your personal data:
**https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/**

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT**

**This table provides a breakdown of the requirements of the project and the time frame.**

| Phase & Dates | Activity | I will | Your organisation will |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1<br>Sept – Oct 2022 | Permissions and Planning | Discuss with you which Animal Assisted Intervention Projects (AAIP) you would like me to support over the next 12 months.<br><br>Secure permission for observations/interviews with staff and volunteers<br><br>Interview 1 employee | Identify and agree which Animal Assisted Intervention Projects (AAIP) you would like me to support over the next 12 months*.<br><br>Allow me to talk to staff and volunteers to secure permission to observe/ interview<br><br>Allow me to display a picture with information about the research in the reception space |
| Phase 2 3 & 4 AAIP<br><br>Phase 2<br>Oct -Dec 2022<br><br>Phase 3<br>Jan–March 2023<br><br>Phase 4<br>April- Jun 2023 | Data Collection | Secure permission for observations/interviews with volunteers and clients<br><br>Carry out observations each week. Take photographs (of animals and spaces no human faces)<br><br>Interview 1 employee, 1 volunteer, 1 client | Allow me to talk to staff/ volunteers/clients to secure permission to observe/ interview in each AAIP<br><br>Allow me to carry out observations and take photographs<br><br>Allow me to use the space in the organisation to interview:<br>1 employee<br>1 volunteer<br>1 client. |
| Phase 5 | Contingency | Discuss with you in March/April 2023 if it is possible that I will need to carry out research on an additional AAIP | Assign me to an appropriate AAIP during Summer 2023 |
| | | | |

*AAIPs are subject to external funding and therefore assigned project may change

## Appendix 14: Organisation Consent Form

Manchester Metropolitan University

**Organisation Consent Form**

**Title of Project:**

Interspecies care work in theory/practice: From shared marginalisation to mutual flourishing

Researcher Information:

Kerry-Jane Moakes, PhD Student, Faculty of Business and Law, Strategy, Enterprise and Sustainability

Please tick to confirm your understanding of the study and that you are happy for your organisation to take part and your facilities to be used as part of the project

*This PhD research project will explore how care occurs through relational and interspecies encounters. Over the course of 12 months, I will participate in animal assisted intervention projects at Noah's A.R.T. I will carry out observations and interviews. I will take photographs of the spaces and animals. I will audio record the interviews, transcribe them and save them securely. All the data collected will be saved in a research journal. I will then review the data making connections between different pieces of data and write about what these make me think about interspecies caring relations in the context of animal assisted intervention work.*

If you are in agreement with the statements listed, please tick the boxes and sign the form overleaf.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that participation of my organisation in the research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw the organisation at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect legal rights ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐
4. I agree for our organisation to take part in the above study ☐
5. I agree that the organisation, 'Noah's A.R.T.' can be named in the research ☐

When completed: 1 for researcher, 1 for organisation to keep with the PIS
EthOS 41732

Manchester Metropolitan University

Name of Organisation Gatekeeper:

Signature: .....

Date: .....

Name of Researcher: Kerry Moakes

Signature: .....

Date: .....

When completed: 1 for researcher, 1 for organisation to keep with the PIS
EthOS 41732

## Appendix 15: Table: Attending to Movements in the Story of Merlin's Beard

The table below provides a quantitative breakdown of the frequency of each word, as recorded in my research journal. It identifies how many times the word was used by a client, a member of staff, or when I used it to describe the movements of humans and animals. The figures also include instances where a derivative of the word was used, such as stretches/stretching/stretched.

| **Animal Movements** | Client word choice | Staff word choice | My word choice | **Human Movements** | Client word choice | Staff word choice | My word choice |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Lummoxy* | 2 | - | - | *Push* | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| *Writhes* | 2 | - | - | *Emerges* | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| *Rustles* | 2 | 1 | - | *Places* | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| *Stretches* | 4 | 6 | 3 | *Leans* | 4 | - | 2 |
| *Peers* | 2 | 3 | 4 | *Closes* | - | 4 | 4 |
| *Bobbing* | 3 | 2 | 3 | *Scoops* | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| *Heads* | - | 2 | 1 | *Hunches* | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| *Plough* | - | 1 | 2 | | | | |
| *Swizzles* | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| *Trots* | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | | |