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New Research to Investigate the Effect of Shelter Cat Adoption on Stress and Anxiety in Children with Autism

Human Animal Bond Research Institute and Winn Feline Foundation Award Grants to University of Missouri

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) announced today it has awarded a \$52,204 grant to the University of Missouri for a new study, *Shelter Cat Adoption in Families of Children with Autism: Impact on Children's Social Skills and Anxiety as well as Cat Stress*. This study will examine the effect of the introduction of a shelter cat on social skills and anxiety in children with autism, and on stress levels for the cats themselves.

“Preliminary research demonstrates the effectiveness of companion animal interaction on alleviating social skills deficits and anxiety in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD),” said the study’s Principal Investigator, Gretchen Carlisle, PhD, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Missouri. “While many studies have focused on the impact of dogs on children with ASD, this study aims to determine the beneficial impacts of a pet cat on children with autism and their families, as the temperament and the ease of care for cats compared to other animals may increase the likelihood of a positive outcome for the children, the cats and the family as a whole.”

In addition to HABRI's grant award, the PIs have also received funding from the Winn Feline Foundation in the amount of \$25,000. The combined funding from Winn Feline and HABRI have enabled the PIs to expand the sample size and add the support of a statistician, which will greatly enhance the power of the study and hopefully result in more definitive and robust findings.

"Winn Feline Foundation is thrilled to have initially supported this important study on the human-cat bond and to hear of HABRI's grant award. Their additional support will strengthen the study's findings", commented Winn's Executive Director Dr. Vicki Thayer. "This significant project evaluating the effects and benefits of adoption of cats by children and families with ASD fits our mission and values".

Using a two-group, randomized, repeated measures design with a delayed treatment control group, this 18-month study will recruit participants through a Mid-western autism diagnostic and treatment center. Shelter cats from two local animal shelters will be screened for temperament and then enrolled. Dr. Carlisle, and co-PI Rebecca Johnson, PhD, Professor and Director, Research Center for Human Animal Interaction, College of Veterinary Medicine, and Co-Investigators Jessica Bibbo, PhD, Colleen Koch, DVM, Leslie Lyons, PhD, and Nancy Cheak-Zamora, PhD, will pre-screen the human participants and families will be randomized into the treatment or delayed treatment control groups. Cat stress will be measured through fecal cortisol. Caregivers will complete a 19-item demographic questionnaire and children's social skills and ASD symptoms will be measured using several instruments. Families randomized into the treatment group will adopt a cat first while those in the control group will adopt a cat after 18 weeks. The investigators expect to find that children of families with an adopted shelter cat will have increased social skills, decreased anxiety and that they will become bonded with their cat. It is also expected that cats will adjust to their new homes without significant stress.

"This study has great potential to advance our knowledge of the benefits of the human-animal bond for children and families with ASD," said HABRI Executive Director Steven Feldman. "Caregivers and parents should select the pet that is best suited for their family and for the well-being of the animal – maybe that's a cat."

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) maintains the world's largest online library of human-animal bond research and information; funds innovative

research projects to scientifically document the health benefits of companion animals; and informs the public about human-animal bond research and the beneficial role of companion animals in society. For more information about HABRI, visit www.habri.org.

The **University of Missouri** was founded in 1839 in Columbia as the first public university west of the Mississippi River. Today, with an enrollment of more than 33,000 students, 13,000 full-time employees and 305,000 alumni, Mizzou is a \$2.2 billion enterprise and an important investment for the state and nation.

Winn Feline Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1968 that supports studies to improve cat health. Since 1968, the Winn Feline Foundation has funded more than \$6 million in health research for cats at more than 30 partner institutions world-wide. This funding is made possible through the support of dedicated donors and partners. Research supported by Winn Feline Foundation helps veterinarians to improve treatment of common feline health problems and prevent many diseases. For further information, go to www.winnfelinefoundation.org.

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[Tailgate starts at 9 A.M.](#)

INTERIM DEAN DR. CAROLYN HENRY INVITES YOU TO A HOMECOMING TAILGATE



October 21, 2017
2 hours prior to kick-off

Park near the College of Vet Med, attend Homecoming Tailgate, then walk to Memorial Stadium to watch the Mizzou vs. Idaho game.

RSVP by October 13
mucvmevents@missouri.edu

Barbecue and lawn games provided for CVM alumni, students, faculty and staff. Coolers welcome. Please bring your own seating.

Sponsored by Best Pet RX as a complimentary tailgate.

BIOMED ONLINE

In addition to the four-year professional curriculum leading to the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree, the college offers a variety of online (BIOMED) courses. Courses serve as electives for other degree programs, a component to the online health science and bachelor of general studies degrees, as partial requirements in the MU Pre-veterinary Medicine Scholars Program, and to earn either a thesis or non-thesis master's degree. BIOMED courses are also recommended electives in meeting the requirements to apply for a DVM program.

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