

# Animal Assisted Therapy



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**Contents**

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| Contents.....              | 2  |
| Overview.....              | 3  |
| Marketing Plan.....        | 5  |
| Financial Plan.....        | 7  |
| SWOT Analysis Summary..... | 9  |
| Research.....              | 10 |
| References.....            | 14 |

## **Business Plan**

### **Overview**

My business venture is to develop an Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) centre for children, whether they have additional needs or none, or any other experience, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). I believe that the use of AAT is overlooked and that children with any additional needs, as listed above, within a rural area do not have the same opportunity to access AAT as those in larger towns and cities. The business would begin with using horses for therapy, known as equine therapy; however, this is only the beginning to see how popular the therapy would be before extending to use other animals, such as dogs, rabbits, cats and many more. The amazing feature of AAT is that any animal can be used. Currently, Gwersyll yr Urdd in Llangrannog provide weekend holidays for children with additional needs and their families. Through working alongside Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog, this business venture of using horses for therapy sessions can be offered to children during term time, whilst the holiday opportunities can continue for these families where they can engage in activities that are inclusive for all.

### **Why?**

I have a passionate hobby in regards to horses as I have been riding since the age of four, which is twenty-three years and continuing! Horse riding has assisted me throughout the years to cope with stress and anxiety among many other situations and feelings. These feelings were felt within my life experiences, such as exams and pregnancy. The fascinating experience that a horse can adapt to the individual was clearly shown to me during my pregnancy, my own horse would stay very still and not move until I was ready to begin the ride. This allowed me to ride until I was eight months pregnant. Additionally, whilst working with my horses either on the ground, through stable management, or riding, enabled me to relax and feel free. This is a feeling I would like children to feel, giving them the opportunity to be a child and learn their own independence. From my experience of working with the horses at Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog provided me with the opportunity to work alongside children with additional needs and supporting their right to participate within the horse riding activity. Observing these children with the horses for an hour I could see the benefit it brought them, however, this was only for a short period of time, the thought of what could happen and how much impact it would have on the children if

they were able to access this therapy on a consistent basis. Currently in Ceredigion there are two Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA); these are seen to be equine therapy session for the children to attend. Parents/carers can attend theses therapy sessions, which allows parents/carers' to see how independent and relaxed their children are feeling which will promote not only the children's wellbeing but additionally the whole families'.

**Marketing Plan**

In order to market the business to the local community and tourists on holiday I will need to develop publicity advertisements. This can be leaflets or posters, which can be placed in local shops, schools, tourist centres and any other areas where the posters and leaflets can be seen. Additionally, there will be a social media page created, one can be done for the generic individuals using Facebook for information, although no pictures will be placed on this in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) under the new Data Protection Act 2018. However, to promote the activities children have done to families using the animal therapy centre and to support the families' socialisation together a private Facebook page can be developed for them, if they require, with the parents' consent pictures of their children can be included onto this page for them to share. In order to raise awareness of this venture I will be creating a website to place on the internet. Within the website there will be information on the benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) as well as a way for families to contact the business directly.

The aim is to develop an AAT centre in mid-Ceredigion as currently there is one in the South and one in the North. The therapy centre that is currently running within the South of the county is very popular, this shows there is enough demand within the area to develop a new therapy centre. Through developing an AAT centre in mid-Ceredigion will also reflect the development of the new additional needs centres within Ceredigion. The new additional needs centre that is currently being developed will be located in Aberaeron and therefore both the AAT centre and new additional needs centre will compliment each other and can work closely together. Within Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog there is an option to further develop and extend the opportunities they already have to offer the children and their families. There are clear benefits for all organisations and individuals involved with this new venture, for example for Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog, there can be a financial benefit as the individuals attending the centre can book a room in order to stay or they may like to attend during the school holiday period. Whilst the benefit for myself would be the ability to use the horses that Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog already have as well as the indoor school, with options to either go for a hack on the roads or walk around the track. This would lessen the start up costs of the business venture significantly.

When considering the marketing element there are distinctive unique selling points for the AAT centre. Due to myself being completely bilingual this service can promote the use of Welsh Language which will support Welsh Governments' plan to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Additionally, the Urdd has several sites all over Wales and are known for promoting the Welsh language through the activities offered to children. Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog has a positive reputation, which through development of this business venture will promote their reputation even more and enhance their inclusion of children from all backgrounds, which is in-line with the Equality Act 2010.

Additionally, through adding offers and discounts to the families using the service and also new families, would ensure everyone can use the AAT centre, for example, the first session would be free to ensure children enjoyed the session or if children were to attend five sessions they would get the sixth at half price. Again, this would be in line with the Equality Act 2010. Ensuring that families are aware they can use payment plans would also be a key feature for the business venture as this would ensure all families can access the AAT centre, regardless of their history and financial background.

**Financial Plan**

The initial financial cost could be expensive at the beginning, however, this business venture would need to be planned with a long-term vision in mind, as with effective financial planning the account could be even or profitable. Through using Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog this lessens the financial start up costs to the business venture as Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog already have a purpose built indoor school and track for horses as well as horses of various sizes. However, there will be a need for more horses in case one of the horses was ill, they require a rest as this is important for the horses' health or if there is high demand the additional horses would support this demand. This would increase the financial costs because there will be a requirement for more than one horse and additionally they would take time to train. The horses' training may require them to go to another location, for example if they require to be broken in for riding this would need to be done by a trained professional who would require payment, again this would depend on the duration the horse was there. Once staff have been appointed they would additionally need training to ensure they understand the requirements of the children and the horses.

Social Care Wales list the requirements for children under the age of eight whilst Skills Active list the requirements for children over eight. Whilst, they would also need to be qualified to understand horses. However, for all these qualifications there are apprentices available which would not cost, although, I would need to ensure that they met the criteria, for example, working the required number of hours with horses. There are also mandatory courses that staff would have to attend, such as First Aid, Child Protection and Hygiene, however, if some of the staff who are already employed by Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog would like to also work within the AAT centre then they would already have gained these qualifications. However, if they had not then this would be an additional cost of £130 per person for a level 3 paediatric first aid and £68 per person for a level 3 emergency first aid at work, this is from Coleg Ceredigion who is a local provider. More research would need to be carried to see who the best and most cost-effective training provider would be.

However, there is financial support available for business who are beginning their venture. Business Wales are funded by Welsh Government to support new business ventures, they are able to not only fund new business ventures but also have highly

skilled individuals who can provide advice and guidance. In order to ensure safety of staff and the families at the AAT centre there will be a requirement to buy the resources, such as appropriate clothing, riding helmets or spare saddles and bridles. As long as the venture complies with requirements a grant application can be done to Awards for All grant from the National Lottery Fund, this is a small grant, however, there are larger grants available which can be applied for if they are required to fund the start up costs and view of this venture. Additionally, observing the Community Foundation in Wales page would provide various grant opportunities which can be applied for to support their business venture.

**SWOT Analysis Summary****Strengths**

- Bilingual service with fluent Welsh speakers.
- Available for all children and families.
- Mid-Ceredigion in line with new Additional Needs Units.
- Financial Plans available for all families.

**Weakness**

- Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog is rural therefore the families who can not drive may not be able to attend.

**Obstacles**

- Horses becoming ill and therefore needing new horses to train.
- Funding.

**Threats**

- Gwersyll yr Urdd, Llangrannog could become busy and therefore the therapy centre may not be able to operate.
- There is already an equine therapy centre in Aberystwyth and Cardigan.

## **Research**

Within any new business venture, the individual driving the project would have to have strong entrepreneurial way of thinking. Obschonka (2013) cited in Obschonka et al. (2016: 488) agrees as entrepreneurial thinking is seen as the way forward and the children who are raised within the twenty-first century will need this skill in order to be successful within their lives. In order for the above business venture to be successful the individual operating the service would need to be a social entrepreneur. Additionally, Obschonka et al. (2016: 487) state that today many policy makers and researchers agree that entrepreneurship is 'highly relevant' to ensure success within society today. This success will correspond with the 'economic and technological development' and as stated by Obschonka et al. (2016: 487) the employment opportunities available today is from new businesses rather than the ones that have already been established.

However, Obschonka et al. (2017: 13) states that even if an individual has an entrepreneurship way of thinking they additionally will require the personality in order to support and attract organisations to their business venture. Hisrich et al. (2007); Schumpeter (1934) cited in Obschonka et al. (2017: 13) support and add that the personality approach is often the most common approach used by the individual entrepreneur in the society today. Additionally, Obschonka et al. (2017: 14) states that in order for an individual to have the correct personality to be an entrepreneur they required what is known as the 'Big Five' which are;

Openness (being open to new ideas and new experiences),  
Extraversion (feeling energized and uplifted when interacting with  
others or engaging in activity), Conscientiousness (being reliable),  
Agreeableness (inclined to please others), and Neuroticism  
(expressing strong negative emotions).

(Obschonka et al., 2017)

However, alongside the entrepreneurial thinking and personality a passion on the specific business venture would be advantageous. Bierly et al. (2000); Bird (1989); Chen et al. (2009) cited in Cardon et al. (2017) state that the academic press has proven that passion is an important factor to consider in relation to entrepreneurship. Additionally, Cardon et al. (2009); Cardon and Kirk (2015); Drnovsek et al. (2016); Vallerand et al. (2003) state;

Passion increases entrepreneurs' dedication and commitment to their ventures, their persistence in pursuing venture-related goals and activities, and their ability to get and stay fully engaged in their actions

(Cardon et al., 2015)

Having passion and understanding for the business venture will support and attract key stakeholders and becomes a contagious feeling which will lead to attracting employees to work within the business venture as well as additional stakeholders. However, with all the relevant information being provided that entrepreneurial passion is required, what makes an individual have entrepreneurial passion has yet to be made completely clear as stated by Cardon et al. (2009); Murnieks et al. (2012) cited in Cardon et al. (2017).

Any entrepreneur who wants to begin their own business venture would need to carry all the traits stated above, as well as be willing to be an innovative individual, because all children are different, however, all children need to be given the same opportunities even if they have been adapted slightly to suit their needs, as stated within the Equality Act 2010 (2010) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (2004), which is being amended to be the Draft Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code (2015) in line with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (2018). This innovation and adaptability is reflected within Altschiller (2011) because the idea of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) was first introduced accidentally in 1961 by Dr. Boris Levinson. Altschiller (2011) continued that the concept of AAT was discovered when Dr. Levinson left his dog in a room with a child that would not communicate, once he returned to the same room he saw that the child was communicating clearly to the dog, and therefore from this Dr. Levinson cited in Altschiller (2011) adapted the practice in-line with this innovation and discovery. However, Altschiller (2011) states that Dr. Levinson may have been the first to place a name to this type of therapy although this method has been used by various psychologists over the years, however, none were making others aware. An example of this would be in 1792 the Society of Friends would offer animals such as rabbits to individuals within the mental asylum as an opportunity to peacefully communicate with the animal. Even though AAT has been happening for years, Borgi et al. (2016: 2) states that recently there has been an increase in the number

of studies being undertaken in order to see what the results are and what are the beneficial effect of 'including animals in both recreational and therapeutic intervention'.

Additionally, Venngage (2011) shows the results of a research done when questioning parents or carers of children accessing AAT. Within their research they report that eighty-three per cent of parents or carers have reported that they saw an improvement from their children after AAT. However, Venngage (2011) states that not all therapists are open to using AAT because there has not been enough research conducted to justify the use of animals within therapy for either children or adults. Whilst Dimitrijević (2009: 236) disagrees because there are various authors who have made a clear connection between the importance of AAT and in particular the noticeable improvement to the quality of life of the children, adults and families who access the AAT. Dimitrijević (2009: 236) continues that AAT also has positive effects on the 'physical, mental, educational and motivational' of the individuals accessing. Additionally, with AAT, especially horses there is no need to limit the therapy to one area, for example instead of riding the horses, individuals may want to paint the horses, groom or talk to the horses. This will have significant affect on all children, for example, children who are depressed or anxious, children with additionally needs or children who have or had experienced any Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can attend the AAT centre and not feel under pressure that they must complete a task, they can simple relax.

Donnelly (2017) states that within the last two years there has been a sixty per cent raise in children accessing counselling. Additionally, Hughes et al. (2018) have reported within their research on resilience that sixty per cent of children who have four or more ACEs and low resilience within their lives will have a mental illness as they develop. However, Hughes et al. (2018) promote that through providing children with opportunities to build resilience, for example through AAT, sports or any out of school activities will significantly provide gains for the mental health sector and in the long-term it is more cost effective to provide early intervention. Borgi et al. (2016) supports Hughes et al. (2018) because the positive aspect of AAT is recognised for the animal and the ability they have to positively engage with people,

therefore potentially counteracting the social withdrawal that children or adults may have encountered.

..horseback riding, as well as goal-oriented interaction with horses, have both been reported to result in a temporary improvement in mental well-being, sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, thus positively affecting individuals' quality of life and global functioning...  
(Borgi et al. 2016)

Through involving the children in grooming as well as riding activities it has been recognised 'as one of the most effective animal-assisted rehabilitative activities for children and adults.' As a result, the AAT improves the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals which is clearly complimented and is one of the key aims of the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (2014) and additionally the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (2015). However, Borgi et al. (2016: 2) states that there is a need for further investigation into AAT, especially the use of horses, in order to confirm that equine-assisted programmes do provide a positive outcome for individuals with additional needs.

The media and professionals are emphasising the importance of having programs in place to counteract the cardiovascular and weight of children. However, with anxiety and depression increasing as well as the importance to breaking the ACEs cycle among children and young people today, there needs to be at least equal awareness if not more awareness of mental health promotional programmes that will support resilience within children, young people and adults. As stated by the Peter Wanless, chief executive of the NSPCC cited in Donnally (2018) organisations need to provide children and young people with ways to cope with anxiety and depression and ensure they do not dismiss them as an overreaction to a situation. Through providing children with these opportunities, such as AAT, it will enhance the wellbeing, purpose and quality of life of children and provide them with an opportunity to feel independent and free from any situations they currently may be experiencing within their lives and just simply be a child.

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