



Human services professionals invited to enrol in introductory animal assisted therapy course

(May 27, 2009 – Vermilion, Alta.) People in the human services field are invited to expand their skills by taking an animal assisted therapy course this fall at Lakeland College.

Introduction to Animal Assisted Therapy is the only course of its kind in Western Canada. Eileen Bona, a provisional psychologist and owner of Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy Ltd. of Ardrossan, developed and instructs the course. Previously offered only to second-year students in the child and youth care program, the course attracted enough attention from people in the industry that Lakeland has opened up the fall intake to the public.

“We’re accepting registrations from people in the human services field so they can learn more about animal assisted therapy and explore additional methods to help individuals,” said Joanne McDonald, an instructor in the child and youth care program. Tuition is \$500 + GST and classes are from 9:30 am – 4:30 pm on Sept. 11 and 25, Oct. 2, 16 and 30, and Nov. 6. All but one of the classes is at the Lakeland College Vermilion campus. Participants will travel to Ardrossan one day to take part in a field trip at Dreamcatcher.

Bona has operated Dreamcatcher for six years and serves about 300 families each year. Using animals such as horses, dogs, cats, llamas, donkeys and a turkey, Dreamcatcher personnel are able to help people with brain injury, emotional issues, behavioral concerns, mental health diagnoses, addictions, physical impairments and much more.

“Animals help us connect with people who are often hard to reach. I was a clinical therapist for 17 years and I have seen greater results with animal assisted therapy than any other medium I have used,” said Bona.

During the course, various aspects of animal assisted therapy will be explored such as the bond between animals and humans, pet visitation programs, the role of health care providers in animal assisted therapy, ethical obligations, animal care and welfare and more. Research and case studies will also be examined and people will have a chance to live the learning using animals at the Lakeland College farm.

Successfully completing Introduction to Animal Assisted Therapy doesn’t qualify people to be an animal assisted therapist. The intent is to make people aware of another means to help others, said McDonald. “For some of our child and youth care students, this course altered their career path. Every one of the evaluations we received on this course last fall was very positive,” she said.

Leslie Dakin was one of the students in the course. “It was an excellent class and Eileen is a great instructor. Using animals as a medium in therapy is a fairly new concept so it was great to learn more about it,” she said.

For details contact Joanne McDonald at 1 800 661 6490, ext. 8641. Prerequisites are a certificate in a human services discipline or a minimum of three years work experience in a related field.

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