

## Development of a school-based curriculum on humane education and social-emotional learning to nurture children's empathy, respect, and kindness

### An Impact Case by Dr. Joe Tsz Kin NGAI

Dr. Joe Tsz Kin Ngai, Department of Counselling and Psychology, in collaboration with Dr. Paul Wai Ching Wong at The University of Hong Kong, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, received funding from Keswick foundation for the project entitled Development of a school-based curriculum on humane education and social-emotional learning to nurture children's empathy, respect and kindness.

Solitude and distancing in interpersonal relationships, the community, and the natural environment would hinder sustainable city development and eventually deteriorate the well-being of young people. The World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that "One Health" should be the primary focus of education to ensure our future generations can understand and establish healthy codependent relationships among fellow humans, cohabiting animals, and nature. Empathy and social-emotional competence are the fundamental building blocks of the "one health concept." The team, therefore, developed the first animal-assisted humane education program (The CARing Kids) in the Asia region whose aim is to cultivate the empathy and social-emotional competence of primary school students to enhance their mental well-being through direct human-animal-interaction with trained reading dogs to get them to connect with nature. The aim of the CARing Kids program is to prepare children in Hong Kong to be compassionate with regard to self, others, animals, society, and the environment. It helps to enrich the lives of the children, improving the pro-animal atmosphere of the community, and therefore, contributing to the sustainable development of the Asia region.

This program has been implemented in more than 12 schools for four years and has reached thousands of families and teaching professionals. According to the evaluation studies, the research results indicated that the participants have positively changed their attitude towards animals, improved empathy, and cognitive skills. The participating schools have actively engaged in community service activities to promote a culture of compassion within the region. Besides, the teams advocate the importance of education and future development of an animal-human-environment cohabiting society through various media platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the team provided free online workshops for schools and students to understand the impact of lockdown on stray animals. Moreover, the team recently conducted a professional development program on animal care and welfare for school teachers for the Education Bureau. More than 500 teachers were registered.

#### Selected Related Publications

**Ngai, J. T.K.**, Yu, R. W. M., Chau, K. K. Y., Lee, J. C. Y., & Wong, P. W. C. (2021). The implementation process of an animal-assisted humane education programme in Hong Kong. *Journal of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences*, 4(1). <https://meddocsonline.org/journal-of-veterinary-medicine-and-animal-sciences/the-implementation-process-of-an-animal-assisted-humane-education-programme-in-hong-kong.pdf>

**Ngai, J. T.**, Yu, R. W., Chau, K. K., & Wong, P. W. (2021). Effectiveness of a school-based programme of animal-assisted humane education in Hong Kong for the promotion of social and emotional learning: A quasi-experimental pilot study. *Plos one*, 16(3), e0249033.

Wong, P. W. C., Yu, R. W. M., & **Ngai, J. T. K.** (2019). Companion animal ownership and human well-being in a metropolis—The case of Hong Kong. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, 1729. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101729>

Implementation of the face-to-face curriculum of the CARing Kids program



*Online CARing Kids during the  
COVID-19 pandemic*



*Education Bureau Professional Development Program  
on Animal Care and Welfare for school teachers –  
Dr. NGAI, Joe Tsz Kin [second right]*