

"Dedicated to caring for animals and the people who care for them"



## Abstracts for How Are You? Understanding the Sorrows and Joys of Caring for Animals, Sweden 2020

### Workshop Abstract

How are you? Providing care for wild animals in zoos and aquariums brings many joys and positive experiences but can also leave you emotionally drained or numb by negative experiences. Animal caregivers, curators, veterinarians, researchers, and other animal welfare staff often have high levels of compassion, empathy, and drive to care for others and affect change. This workshop provides you with a theoretical and practical overview of strategies related to compassion awareness, including preventing and addressing compassion fatigue, and enhancing compassion satisfaction and resilience. We will be drawing on experiences and research literature and include a wide variety of practical activities and tools for you, including resources for you to take home.

### Day One

#### When Caring Too Much Can Hurt: Compassion Fatigue in Animal Welfare Work

Presented by: Patricia Smith

Studies show animal caregivers experience very high levels of compassion fatigue, stress and burnout. Day One includes a comprehensive overview of compassion fatigue: definition, symptoms, causes and how it manifests in those committed to animal welfare. We will look at both Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how they shape who we become as adults. We will broaden our knowledge with information about organizational compassion fatigue, how it manifests, how it affects teamwork, how the visitors to our facilities might create additional stress, and how organizational compassion fatigue helps deplete the bottom line of the organization. It is no secret that as animal caregivers we live in a perpetual state of grief. In order to continue each day, we bottle up our disillusionment and sadness, sometimes forgetting how our negative emotions profoundly affect the animals in our care. We'll begin our healing journey by taking self-tests aimed at helping us better understand ourselves, our behaviors and actions. Strategies will be presented to help cope with stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue in the work we care so deeply about.

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## Day Two

### **Self-Compassion: The Key to Resiliency, Authenticity and Wellness**

Presented by: Patricia Smith

On Day Two, we will answer some challenging questions. How can we care for ourselves with the same level of kindness and attention that we give those in our care? How can we lessen feelings of selfishness, shame and guilt when we attempt to meet our own needs? How can we learn to put ourselves first in order to feel empowered and allow us to continue doing the work that we choose to do? With practice and self-discipline, we can hone the skills necessary to live a highly functional quality of life. Coping skills include how to stop our critical inner voice, put uncomfortable emotions to rest, and say no to dysfunctional personal and professional relationships that sap our time and energy. By adopting self-compassion as our caregiving core, we usher in resiliency, authenticity and wellness – the benchmarks for a healthy and happy life.

Participants will leave with a blueprint for creating a Self-Care Plan and resources to aid in continuing to educate themselves and grow in the area of self-care.

### **Human and Animal Wellness in Environments such as Zoos, Aquariums, and Sanctuaries**

Presented by: Sabrina Brando MSc

Providing care for wild animals in zoos and aquariums (henceforth zoos), as well as wildlife centres and sanctuaries, brings many joys and positive experiences, but can also leave someone emotionally drained or numb by negative experiences. Animal caregivers, curators, veterinarians, researchers, and other animal welfare staff (henceforth zoo professionals), often have high levels of compassion, empathy, and drive to care for others and effect change. Caring for and serving others gives a sense of joy and achievement, creating compassion satisfaction. Recruitment of and access to social support, working in an effective team, supervising and directing positive outcomes, gaining professional experience, and using self-care strategies promote compassion satisfaction. Yet, these positive experiences often are combined with painful ethical dilemmas, where optimal solutions are not feasible, and decisions must be from among a variety of sub-optimal alternatives; this creates moral stress. Repeated exposure to distressing events such as neglect, inaction, and animal euthanasia, can leave zoo professionals at risk of compassion fatigue or burnout. Common symptoms of compassion fatigue can include feeling mentally and physically tired, with sadness and apathy, bottled-up emotions, and an inability to get pleasure from activities that previously were enjoyable, as well as a

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lack of self-care. These serious problems have been well-documented among workers in settings such as veterinary practice, laboratory animal care facilities, and animal shelters, but they have scarcely been addressed in zoo environments.

Based on survey and interview data, this paper will provide specific examples of challenging circumstances facing zoo professionals. A brief overview of strategies for preventing and addressing compassion fatigue and enhancing compassion satisfaction will be presented, drawing on current experiences and research literature. It will also outline various approaches and frameworks and conclude with future directions and recommendations to further the study and practice of zoo professional wellbeing.

### **The Role of Nature and Animals in Self-Care**

Presented by: Anna Blinkowski

Abstract forthcoming