



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



UNITED WAY
Whatcom County

2025 Community Impact Grants Common Application

PART A: COVER PAGE

Please fill out this form completely. Note that individual funding agencies have specific grant requirements and will require supplemental materials. Please check the agency website below for details.

To which source are you applying?

- City of Bellingham’s Housing or Human/Social Services NOFA:
<https://cob.org/services/housing/funding-opportunities-2/partnerships-funding>
- United Way of Whatcom County’s Community Impact Fund:
<https://www.unitedwaywhatcom.org/help-for-organizations/>
- Whatcom County Health and Community Services:
<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/Bids.aspx>

Agency Contact Information:

Agency Name: Animals as Natural Therapy (ANT)

DBA (if applicable): Click here to enter text.

EIN: 91-1939165 UEID (from SAM.gov): SKU7KJVV1936

Mailing address: PO Box 31595 Bellingham, WA 98228

Website: www.animalsasnaturaltherapy.org

General phone: 360-671-3509

State of Washington Business License Number(s): 601 925 133

Executive Director (or authorized representative):

Name: Jaime Arnett

Title (if not ED): Click here to enter text.

Email: jaime@animalsasnaturaltherapy.org

Phone: 360-671-3509

Application Contact (If different):

Name: Click here to enter text.

Title: Click here to enter text.

Email: Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text.

Program Information:

Program Name: Organizational Support

Program Address: 284 Kline Rd. Bellingham, WA 98226

Are all program services delivered at this address? Yes No



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Funding Request: The award amount is dependent on the funding organization. Please see individual funder's supplemental materials for more information about the funds available.

How much funding per year are you requesting for this program?

\$ 28,700

Total Annual Project Budget:

\$ 574,000

Annual Organizational Budget:

\$ 574,000

PART B: AGENCY INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 1-5.

1. **Agency Mission.** Please paste or copy your agency's mission statement below.

Our Mission

Improving mental and behavioral health through animal-guided programs and mentorship with special attention to youth and veterans in Northwest Washington.

Our Vision

We envision a community...

- Of hopeful, resilient individuals equipped with the life skills needed to thrive and be fulfilled in their lives and relationships.
- A community where animals are recognized for their intuitive gifts and valued as therapeutic partners and healers.
- Rooted in a culture of compassion for the benefit of all beings.

2. **Agency Beneficiaries.** Briefly describe the intent of your agency's programs and who primarily benefits from them. Please describe your organization's impact, specifying the number of beneficiaries or clients served per year and their demographics.

ANT offers a ANT offers diverse programs supporting individuals with mental and behavioral health challenges:

- **Equine Assisted Learning (EAL):** Social and emotional learning for youth (ages 8–18), including 12 Whatcom County schools.
- **Veterans Program (EAGLE):** Support for veterans and families transitioning to civilian life, addressing PTSD, depression, and anxiety.
- **Stable Ground:** A partnership with local organizations providing Equine Assisted Therapy for individuals with acute mental health needs, including collaboration with Lydia Place's behavioral health clinic.



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- **Rainbow Bridge:** Partnership with Whatcom Hospice, supporting hospice patients and their families through loss.
- **Mobile ANT:** Bringing support to elders in assisted care facilities.
- **Day Camps:** Summer programming that serves a diverse range of young people from 8-18.

3. **Qualifications and expertise.** Briefly summarize your agency's qualifications and expertise (e.g., years of operation, accreditations, experience of staff members, and number of volunteers). Please mention any recent major organizational changes.

ANT has offered innovative programs since 1999 when Catholic Community Services (CCS) first sent "at-risk" youth to Windy Acres Farm. What began as simple animal and youth encounters developed into a far-reaching, highly effective and sought-after experiential learning model. Our twenty-six-year history of collaboration with local agencies and schools shows the depth of our experience in the field of mentoring and reflects the increasing demand for our services.

ANT employs a team of nine staff members and engages more than 200 volunteers annually. These volunteers take on a diverse range of responsibilities, including tasks such as mucking stalls & animal care to mentoring youth and handling animals during mobile visits, contributing to the organization's mission and impact.

ACCREDITATION

Animals as Natural Therapy is a PATH Premier Accredited Center, *one of only 5 in the state of Washington*, and employs both PATH-certified CTRIs (Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors) and ESMHLs (Equine Specialists in Mental Health and Learning). PATH Intl. (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) is committed to the advancement of equine-assisted services for lifelong impact. PATH certifies and accredits centers, instructors, and equine specialists according to a set of field-tested standards to ensure the highest levels of safety, ethics, and effectiveness in the equine-assisted services industry. Instructors must complete workshops and pass both written and practical exams to become certified to teach equine-assisted services. Participants and their families can be confident that PATH Intl. Member Centers and Professionals deliver safe and effective Equine Assisted Services (EAS).

CTRI (Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor)

ANT employs 2 CTRI's. Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding is an activity in which the student performs mounted and unmounted work on or around the horse. CTRIs are equine-assisted services professionals providing riding instruction of therapeutic value to riders with disabilities. This includes mounted or unmounted work ethically partnering with an equine.

ESMHL(Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning

ANT employs 2 ESMHLs, with 2 additional employees seeking certification in 2025. A PATH Intl. ESMHL ensures the safety and well-being of the equine participating in mental health or equine-assisted learning sessions and serves as the equine expert during equine-human interactions.

The ESMHL *works alongside a mental health professional or educator* in typically unmounted activities.



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Mental Health Professional (LMFT)

ANT contracts with multiple Licensed Mental Health Therapists from community health organizations and private practices to work alongside both CTRIs and ESMHLs. Most of our therapists have a background working with equines, for those that don't, we offer advanced equine handling courses prior to their working with clients at our facility.

4. **Racial Equity and Social Justice.** What steps has your organization taken to address issues of racial equity and social justice within your agency? Which steps are complete, and which are planned or ongoing?

ANT is committed to advancing racial and social justice while recognizing this as an ongoing process. As a woman-led organization for over two decades, we strive to deepen our commitment to equity and diversity. Since 2020, our Board has prioritized DEI, implementing a Board Development Plan and holding monthly JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) meetings, often facilitated by local consultants.

We actively evaluate our leadership's representation, ensure inclusivity without tokenization, and collaborate with Lisa Page, founder of The Common Goodness Project, to better serve the LGBTQ+ community. This includes hosting an annual Pride on the Farm camp for queer youth, tabling at Pride events, and continually reviewing policies for inclusivity.

We also dedicate two weeks of day camp to Swinomish and Lummi tribal youth, reflecting our commitment to serving diverse communities.

5. **Agency Funding.** List your organization's most significant funding sources from greatest to least (including the United Way, Whatcom County Health and Community Services and City of Bellingham); dollar amounts are not necessary. Significant funding sources can be defined as sources that make up more than 15% of your program budget. If you have many funding sources, you may list them by category (i.e., federal, state, foundations, individual donors). Please mention any anticipated or recent changes in your future funding or financial position.

Individual Donors
Events
Program Income
Foundation Grants

PART C: PROGRAM INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 6-8.



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6. **Program Summary.** Briefly summarize the program and its core activities in one or two sentences.

Animals as Natural Therapy provides hands-on healing for youth, veterans, and elders through Equine Assisted Learning and Equine Assisted Therapy programs and workshops.

7. **Program Purpose.** Identify the community need(s) that the program addresses. What are the measurable outcomes that will result from the services provided?

Animals as Natural Therapy (ANT) is a trusted therapeutic space where youth, veterans, and seniors heal from mental and behavioral health challenges such as anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, and PTSD through animal-assisted programming. Partnerships with Whatcom County schools (e.g., Blaine, Bellingham, Ferndale, and Meridian), Skagit and Whatcom Tribes (Swinomish, Lummi), local agencies (e.g., DSHS, SeaMar Visions, Northwest Youth Services, Dorothy Place, Road 2 Home), and assisted-care facilities bring thousands of participants to ANT annually, most of whom are recovering from trauma, including abuse, loss, addiction, or chemical dependency.

Founded in 1999, ANT has evolved from simple animal-human encounters into a nationally recognized experiential learning model. Using animals like bunnies, dogs, chickens, goats, and horses, ANT helps participants process difficult emotions when traditional therapies fall short. Many youth participants, often living below federal poverty guidelines, attend on scholarships.

ANT offers two core programs:

1. **Equine-Assisted Therapy at the Farm:** Therapeutic sessions for youth and veterans.
2. **Mobile ANT:** On-site animal-assisted visits tailored to specific needs:
 - **Seniors:** Visits to care facilities foster intergenerational connection, relaxation, and comfort through animal interactions, which lower cortisol and promote serotonin release.
 - **Schools:** Preventative and responsive mental health visits with animals promote social-emotional learning, reduce bullying, and combat suicidal ideation. Mobile ANT also supports the Bellingham School District's Crisis Response Team, offering comfort after traumatic events.
 - **Hospice (Rainbow Bridge):** A partnership with Whatcom Hospice providing animal-assisted support to patients, families, and staff navigating end-of-life care and grief.

On the farm and during mobile visits, ANT's PATH-certified (Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship) facilitators use animal-assisted interactions to foster connection, empathy, confidence, and resilience. Participants process emotions in real-time, developing skills to overcome challenges and build self-awareness and self-acceptance.

ANT is a Premier Accredited Center with PATH International and has received numerous community honors, including the Community Peace-builder Award (2011), the Ken Gass Community Building Award, and Bellingham Chamber of Commerce's Nonprofit of the Year (2019). Through its innovative approach, ANT continues to create meaningful change in the lives of those it serves.



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8. **Program Status.** How long has this program been in operation in Whatcom County? Since your last application, have you made any changes in how you offer services? If this is a new program, how far along is your agency in the planning process? What resources has your organization already invested?

ANT is now in its 26th year of programming in Whatcom County. We have continually evolved to meet the needs of our community. In 2024, we launched Stable Ground (an Equine Assisted Psychotherapy program) and Rainbow Bridge (a hospice program).



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UNITED WAY FOCUS AREAS

1. To support financial stability in Whatcom County, we have identified three funding priorities below, basic needs, economic mobility, and breaking the cycle of poverty. Choose **one** category below that best aligns with your agency/program:

Basic Needs

- Food security
- Stable, attainable, affordable housing
- Health and mental health care access

Economic Mobility

- Financial literacy and training
- Vocational readiness training and support
- Adult education programs

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

- Affordable child care and early learning programs
- Academic programs to increase student attendance and achievement
- Parenting support
- Addiction treatment and recovery
- Abuse prevention

2. Please describe how your program/agency services align with the category you selected above.

Animals as Natural Therapy (ANT) provides a safe and supportive environment where youth, veterans, and seniors can heal from mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, and PTSD through animal-assisted programs. Each year, ANT works with thousands of individuals referred by local school districts, tribes, social service agencies, and assisted-care facilities, many of whom are recovering from trauma, including abuse, addiction, loss, and more. ANT partners with educators, counselors, caseworkers, and families to serve these participants, with many youth coming from low-income backgrounds and attending through scholarships. What began in 1999 as simple animal interactions for at-risk youth has grown into a widely respected program that uses animals like bunnies, dogs, chickens, goats, and horses to help people process their experiences and emotions when other treatments have not been enough.



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ANT offers two major programs: (1) equine-assisted therapeutic sessions at our farm for youth and veterans and (2) on-site sessions with farm animals through our mobile program, including:

Mobile ANT for Seniors: The mobile program is intergenerational and community-centered. Youth and adult volunteers bring animals to visit seniors in care facilities around Whatcom County, building friendships and bringing comfort. Physiologically, petting animals supports relaxation by releasing serotonin, lowering the heart rate, and inhibiting the production of cortisol.

Mobile ANT for Schools: ANT conducts preventative and responsive mental health visits to local schools with our animals to provide comfort and stress relief, promote social and emotional learning, reduce bullying, and combat suicidal ideation through low-barrier “fuzz therapy.” Mobile ANT was recently incorporated into the Bellingham School District’s Crisis Response Team and will be on stand-by to support youth and staff after trauma. ANT’s animals may be used during official debriefs and/or to provide general comfort and anxiety relief.

Mobile ANT for Hospice: Rainbow Bridge is a special Mobile ANT program, offered in partnership with Whatcom Hospice, that is focused on providing animal-assisted care and support to hospice patients, bereaved families, and hospice staff.

On the farm and during mobile visits, ANT staff use their expertise to create an environment of connection and healing by harnessing animals’ power to foster empathic connection to self and others. Animals have a scientifically proven yet still striking power to facilitate healing. They encourage people to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or rejection while requiring people to interact with authenticity in the moment, not focused on the past or worrying about the future.

ANT’s model—our social-emotional-learning focus augmented by one-on-one mentoring to support hands-on animal interactions that are led by PATH-certified (Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship) facilitators—invites participants to develop emotional and physical awareness, empathy, acceptance, confidence, and respect for self and others. Participants process difficult emotions in real-time and develop new skills to handle challenges, creating a powerful sense of resiliency and self-confidence that they can take into their own lives.

ACCREDITATION

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ethics, and effectiveness in the equine-assisted services industry. Instructors must complete workshops and pass both written and practical exams to become certified to teach equine-assisted services. Participants and their families can be confident that PATH Intl. Member Centers and Professionals deliver safe and effective Equine Assisted Services (EAS).

CTRI (Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor) - ANT employs 2 CTRI's. Therapeutic/Adaptive Riding is an activity in which the student performs mounted and unmounted work on or around the horse. CTRIs are equine-assisted services professionals providing riding instruction of therapeutic value to riders with disabilities. This includes mounted or unmounted work ethically partnering with an equine.

ESMHL(Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning) - ANT employs 2 ESMHLs, with 2 additional employees seeking certification in 2025. A PATH Intl. ESHML ensures the safety and well-being of the equine participating in mental health or equine-assisted learning sessions and serves as the equine expert during equine-human interactions.

The ESMHL works alongside a mental health professional or educator in typically unmounted activities.

Mental Health Professional (LMFT) - ANT contracts with multiple Licensed Mental Health Therapists from community health organizations and private practices to work alongside both CTRIs and ESMHLs. Most of our therapists have a background working with equines, for those that don't, we offer advanced equine handling courses prior to their working with clients at our facility.

OUR PROCESS

Utilizing animals for experiential learning and healing/therapy is supported by scientific research. In the article, Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin, researchers examined 69 original studies on Human-Animal Interaction and concluded the following positive effects:

- improvement of social attention, behavior, interpersonal interaction, and mood
- reduction of stress-related parameters such as cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure
- reduction of self-reported fear and anxiety
- improvement of mental and physical health, especially cardiovascular health



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Using human-animal interaction as the basis of our work, ANT has developed a proven model supported by certified staff holding PATH (Professional Association for Therapeutic Horsemanship) Equine Specialists in Mental Health and Learning designations and supported by highly trained and committed mentors, each of whom volunteers for at least nine months in our programs. The presence of animals is central to our model. Animal participation helps youth build trust, respect, and self-confidence as they take risks and experience growth toward self-identified goals. Youth, parents, and teachers share that animal-assisted experiences help youth manage their own behaviors and negotiate healthy relationships.

ANT's theory of change rests on the understanding that participants gain confidence as they physically explore their own strengths, weaknesses, and options while handling challenging situations animals present. This sense of efficacy and confidence ultimately shifts their beliefs in their own capabilities and sense of self. And while participants turn inward to find the resolve and courage to work with 1,000-pound animals, they are never without wise and compassionate counsel in the form of staff and mentors.

Youth (ages 8-18) struggling with depression, anxiety, anger, grief, communication, trust, trauma, and other social and emotional challenges are supported in weekly 90-minute group sessions with our horses and staff. Sessions begin with a physical and emotional check-in which builds awareness of a participant's present state and leads to the identification of immediate needs. In this phase, participants note their individual challenges and obstacles, set clear and attainable goals, and review their progress toward meeting these goals. Lesson topics include leadership, trust, boundaries, respect, clear communication, and goal setting. When the action moves to the animals, participants learn to tune in to the animal's experience in order to work with them to lead activities.

At session's end, participants identify how they can use what they learned that day to be successful at school and home. ANT uses metaphors (adapted from the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association [EAGALA] model) to capture what is learned with animals and apply it to daily life and current challenges.

3. Please provide two or three key outcomes you measure that indicate progress toward your mission. List the number of clients being served, what you track, and the most recent results.

In 2024, ANT served 5036 people across all our programs, which includes, Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) for schools and after-school participants, our EAGLE Veterans program, Rainbow Bridge (hospice), Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) programs, Day Camps, New Horizons (SeaMar partnership) and Mobile ANT. Due to the varied nature of our programs, outcomes, outputs and indicators are not one-size-fits-all. Many of our programs, such as Mobile ANT for hospice, assisted-care facilities & schools, do not have formalized assessment tools and we rely on anecdotal data from participants,



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families, and staff (this can include quotes, photos and stories). For our formalized farm-based EAL programs, school workshops and after-school, we use pre- and post-evaluations rooted in self-efficacy and parent and teacher evaluations. For our Equine-Assisted Therapy programs outcomes and evaluations are determined by their healthcare provider and we do not compile and share that data for privacy purposes.

I am including an outcome matrix that we use for our EAL youth programs, to give you a better look at how we track the success of our youth programs.

Farm-Based Project Goals (Youth)			
<i>Create a healthier community by guiding our most at-risk youth to develop a belief in their own ability to change the course of their lives</i>			
Outcome 1	Indicator	Means of verification	Results
Day Camp Sessions provide 100 participants improved skills for building healthy relationships with others and/or will have improved school performance	80 participants attend ANT day camps	Attendance sheets	95 participants
	60% of parents or guardians report improved social skills on behalf of the participant	Phone surveys with parents or care providers	79% parents or guardians reported improvement in social skills
	60% of participants have improved school performance after attending at least five sessions of ANT programming	Phone surveys with parents or care providers	59% of parents or guardians reported improved school performance
	ANT staff will report improved self-awareness and confidence on behalf of 60% of the participants	Evaluations/Observations	96% participant increase in self-awareness and confidence as demonstrated by physical and emotional check-ins, safety within horse areas, and ability to handle their horses
Outcome 2	Indicator	Means of verification	Results
After School Programs provide more than 100 participants skills for building healthy relationships with others and/or will have improved school performance	100 participants attend ANT After School Programs	Attendance sheets	86 participants
	60% of teachers, parents or guardians report improved social skills on behalf of the participant	Phone surveys with parents or care providers	67% parents or guardians reported improvement in social skills in their child
	60% of participants have improved school performance after attending at least five sessions of ANT programming	Phone surveys with parents or care providers	60% of parents reported improved school performance
	ANT staff will report improved self-awareness and confidence on behalf of 60% of the participants	Evaluations	98% participant increase in self-awareness and confidence as demonstrated by physical and emotional check-ins, safety within horse areas, and ability to handle their horses
Outcome 3	Indicator	Means of verification	Results
Service-Learning Component provides 40 middle and high school students the belief in their ability to make a difference in their community	20 students will have participated in visits with elders and 20 students will have mentored younger youth or volunteered at ANT	Attendance	88 students
	60% of participants report improved confidence in their ability to make a difference in their community	ANT staff reporting and student presentations	100% of students report improved confidence in their ability to make a difference in their community
Outcome 4	Indicator	Means of verification	Results
Direct school workshops make 40 students less likely to bully or be bullied	40 students will have participated in workshops	Attendance sheets	40 middle school participants between two workshops



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	60% of participants can identify bullying behavior in themselves and others, and can demonstrate skills for prevention	Follow up surveys	37% can identify bullying behavior in themselves and demonstrate skills for prevention <i>Post-surveys from one workshop were never collected by the partnering school. Results reflect incomplete feedback.</i>
Outcome 5	Indicator	Means of verification	Results
Workshops for high school teens result in teens having skills for goal setting and identifying personal needs for safety and anxiety management	10 students will have participated in workshops	Attendance	17 high school teens attended
	60% of participants report ability to identify their personal anxiety level and demonstrate the ability to both prevent and manage anxiety and /or depression	Follow up surveys	75% learned how to identify, manage and prevent anxiety

4. How does United Way’s investment help meet the funding needs of the organization or program? Please give specific examples of how United Way funds are/will be utilized.

United Way’s investment helps meet the funding needs of our organization by covering critical costs related to both service delivery and animal care. Specifically, funds will support the provision of equine-assisted therapy to low-income families, as this service requires specialized training for therapists and equine specialists, along with costly care for the horses and maintenance of our facilities. In 2024, 70% of our private clients received discounted or “scholarshipped” services, totaling \$41,120. United Way’s investment will allow us to continue offering these discounted services and even expand our reach.

Additionally, animal care is a major expense, with \$43,000 allocated in 2024 for the feed and care of our animals, who serve as co-facilitators in therapy. United Way’s funding ensures that we can maintain and enhance the therapeutic benefits of our programs for clients in need.

5. Briefly describe how your agency/program will utilize community partnerships or coordinate with other agencies (UW partner agencies, other community non-profits, government agencies, local companies, schools, etc.) to advance your work/mission.



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ANT has established meaningful partnerships with a variety of community organizations to build a robust "Safety Net" for those in need. These collaborations allow us to provide immediate interventions and meet the growing demand for our services. ANT works closely with 12 schools in Whatcom County, where school counselors enroll struggling youth in Equine Assisted Learning workshops or mobile visits. We also partner with organizations like Catholic Community Services, DSHS, and Brigid Collins to assist youth who have not responded to traditional treatments.

Additionally, ANT collaborates with Kaylee's Kamp to support LGBTQ youth, Blue Skies for Children to boost self-esteem in children, and SeaMar Visions for therapeutic sessions with teens in recovery. We partner with Northwest Therapeutic Riding Center to offer mental health services to veterans and work with Northwest Youth Services to support homeless youth. ANT also collaborates with Whatcom Hospice to provide animal comfort for patients and families and with Vamos Outdoor Project to offer social-emotional learning for Latine and migrant youth.

Furthermore, we work with Lydia Place to offer therapy for families in transitional housing and with the Max Higbee Center to provide animal-assisted therapy for individuals with developmental disabilities. These partnerships demonstrate ANT's commitment to collaborating with other organizations to meet the diverse needs of youth and families.

6. United Way focuses on ALICE households in Whatcom County. ALICE refers to households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but not enough to afford the basic cost of living in our community.
 - a. What percentage of your program recipients are below the ALICE threshold based on the survival budget for Whatcom County? ANT uses a sliding scale based on Area Median Income in Whatcom County when pricing services for private clients (those not receiving services from schools or other agencies). When we converted this into the ALICE households chart, it shows that 57% of our clients are below that ALICE threshold.
 - b. What percentage of your program recipients are ALICE (above FPL but below the ALICE threshold)? 16%
 - c. Do you collect client data by zip code? No. We would have that data, but it isn't specifically collected for tracking purposes.

Visit the [United for ALICE](#) website for the most recent (2024 report) Whatcom County data to determine the survival budget guidelines for ALICE households.

7. Please share an example of a client who was helped by your services.



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**Note: if you receive a 2025 Community Impact Grant, this story may be shared on your behalf by United Way for the purpose of our community fundraising. Names and details may be altered for privacy.*

The letter below is a good example of the type of clients we serve through Equine-Assisted Therapy at Animals as Natural Therapy. The stories are real and raw, and for many, we are a provider of last resort. The author of this letter has been receiving therapy services free of charge at ANT for the past 18 months. They have been paired with a Licensed Mental Health Therapist and an Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning, and I have been informed that they will soon be graduating from their sessions here at the farm.

Dear ANT,

I am applying for Animals as Natural Therapy because I think this unique therapy can help me with the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression that I have been dealing with over the last 2+ years.

I am almost 20 years old and have been struggling with mental health, learning and developmental disabilities my whole life. I could not have written this letter without help from an advocate.

My biological sister and I were taken from my biological mother for neglect before my first birthday. We were adopted around the age of 4. In preschool and elementary school I was diagnosed with a number of developmental and learning disabilities including ADHD and impulse control issues. As a result, I have always struggled in a school classroom setting, making my teen years particularly rocky. When my sister and I were 16 and 17, we ran away from our adoptive mom several times because we felt emotionally and verbally abused. During that time we were frequently homeless living on friend's couches, in cars and RVs, which led us to seek assistance through Northwest Youth Services (NWYS). During this time I also stopped attending school and struggled with addiction so have not yet earned my GED.

Due to these struggles, I have become somewhat estranged from my adoptive mother and one of my adoptive siblings. This estrangement and the guilt and shame I feel about my teen decisions is contributing to my current anxiety and depression.

Although I have been trying to manage my anxiety and depression through all of my teen years, I have most recently been struggling with PTSD because of two significant events that occurred in the last two years. When I was 17, I was sexually assaulted by an extended family member. I am currently working with police to prevent him from harming



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someone else. The whole process has been extremely stressful and confusing, making my anxiety and depression worse.

A year ago, when I was 18, my biological sister died in front of me of fentanyl poisoning. Shortly after her memorial service, I had an emotional break down that caused me to lose my NWYS apartment, making me homeless again. I have been staying on couches, in tents, cars, and RVs ever since and although I have applied for emergency and subsidized housing, the demand is high and the wait is long. Housing and financial instability are incredibly stressful and I often feel hopeless about the possibility of living a "normal" life.

Because of occasional severe depression and anxiety and my developmental delays and learning disabilities, I have not been able to get or hold a job, and am currently getting help to apply for disability (SSI) but that process is also slow and involved. I could not accomplish it without help.

In September 2023 I was briefly hospitalized to stabilize my mental health medication and am proud to say that I have been sober and in Alcoholics Anonymous since June 2023. With help of an advocate, I have recently started seeing a counselor and am working hard to take control of the chaos in my life. I am working to obtain my high school diploma and am applying to programs that will help me with the skills I need in order to find work that I will be successful at.

I believe Animals as Natural Therapy can help me heal from the many forms of trauma I've experienced over the years and bring back some of the hopefulness that has been missing in my life for so long. I love animals, having grown up with cats and dogs. I'm excited to learn more about the animals of ANT, including the chickens, bunnies, horses and goats, and to learn how they might help me heal just a little bit so that I can improve my life from here forward.

Thank you for considering me for this program.

Sincerely,

J.L.

Application Checklist:

The United Way Addendum and all materials listed below must be submitted by **5pm on Thursday, March 6, 2025.**