



**CALIFORNIA STATE SCIENCE FAIR
2016 PROJECT SUMMARY**

Name(s) Mahnur A. Bharucha	Project Number J0403
Project Title Wonder Pets: The Effects of Animal Assisted Therapy on Children with Autism	
Abstract Objectives/Goals The purpose of this study was to observe the effects of animal-assisted therapy on children with autism disorder. The hypothesis was that the real rabbit would have the most effect on the social abilities of children with autism disorder compared to controls, one being a ball and a stuffed rabbit. Methods/Materials The study was conducted at the Leroy Haynes Autism Center. Four male participants ranging from the ages six to eleven participated in this study. Each participant experienced all three conditions: ball, stuffed rabbit, and real rabbit. Participants experienced all three conditions in ten individual sessions and ten group sessions. A short form version of the Profile of Social Difficulty (PSD) rating scale was used to assess changes in social interaction abilities. The PSD is recognized by the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence as an appropriate assessment measure. Results Results indicate that animal-assisted therapy with real rabbits is more effective in helping autistic children improve social interaction abilities compared to a stuffed rabbit and ball. Trend lines indicate that interaction with real rabbits helped participants improve social interaction abilities across all dimensions of the PSD: fundamental skills, social initiation skills, social response skills, and getting along with others. Conclusions/Discussion Results support my hypothesis and lend further support to the general idea that animal-assisted therapy can significantly improve the social skills of children with autism disorder. Whereas previous research on assisted per therapy has focused mainly on dogs, my project innovatively used rabbits. Rabbits are easier and less costly to keep than dogs. In the future, I would like to test which animal can improve autistic children's social skills most effectively.	
Summary Statement The Effects Of Animal Assisted Therapy On Children With Autism.	
Help Received The Leroy Haynes Autistic Center allowed their students to participate in my study.	