

**Anne-Elizabeth Straub, LCSW**  
**SWAHAB Vice Chair**

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice. I am also trained as a teacher of sensory motor education, the Feldenkrais Method<sup>®</sup>.

I am also person with a disability, who has some difficulty with mobility and other issues due to MS. To ameliorate some of the effects of my disability, I have worked for the past 12 years with two different assistance dogs.

The process of developing these partnerships has brought me much more than simple assistance with activities of daily living, important though that is. I have learned many things about dogs, behavior, health, training, and about myself and other people, in a way that was different from my earlier experiences. As those relationships have grown and matured, my relationship with my assistance animals has been enhanced and has, in turn, enhanced my life as a whole.

My first dog, Meka was an ambassador of his species, in addition to being my constant companion and helper for eight years until his death due to cancer.

Since Meka was with me the longest period of time, he was frequently present in client sessions; sometimes, specifically a part of the session. Even when that was not the case, his presence brought an additional quality to those sessions, a benign, observing, witnessing presence.

I have been partnered a new assistance dog, Tindall, since last November. We are still in the process of consolidating our relationship. She has a totally different energy and presence. We are finding our way with regard to working in sessions with clients.

My status as part of a working partnership provides me the opportunity to inform and educate a wide variety of people about service and assistance animals in general, dogs in particular. Sometimes these encounters are formal verbal presentations, with audiences as varied as, graduate students, colleagues, business people and school children; sometimes in

written form, as magazine or newsletter articles, and sometimes (most frequently) they are spontaneous discussions that arise during my daily activities.

If you would like to see one of the articles that I have written on assistance dogs, [click here](#)

My involvement in Social Workers Advancing the Animal-Human Bond (SWAHAB) began after a presentation given by the founding members, early in its development and have remained a member ever since.

My current role, in addition to sharing the responsibility for meeting planning, is that of assisting members to communicate and network via the group's listserv, website and social media.

I am proud to be a member of SWAHAB. It has given me the opportunity to sharpen my own practice, increase my awareness and to assist other social workers to see how the acknowledgment and understanding of the human-animal bond can enhance their practices, giving them a new prism through which to view their work, thus allowing them further enhance their knowledge of and relationship with clients and of that which exists between animals and human beings.