

Lincoln Education Assistance with Dogs (LEAD) Project

Final report



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Dear All,

We are pleased to let you know that we have now finished all analyses on the dog interventions in schools and we would like to update you on the study results.

The aim of the LEAD study was to find out if dog interventions in schools could help children's learning, reduce their stress levels and support their wellbeing. It was a longitudinal project.

What the project measured

- We took socio-emotional, physiological, cognitive and language measures.
- We measured children's self-esteem and anxiety levels, their cognitive and language abilities and their stress levels (e.g. by collecting saliva from the children for cortisol analysis before and after intervention).

Children were allocated to either a relaxation intervention, dog intervention or control group. Interventions took place for 20 minutes, twice per week, over a 4-week period. Control group children attended school lessons as normal. All 3 groups are important – the control group is important as this group shows us how children's normal learning progresses, so we can compare children in this group to our other 2 groups. All children saw the dogs before intervention and learnt about safe behaviour with dogs and dog body language, so nobody was left out.

- After the 4 weeks, children took part again in the games described above, so we could see their progress.
- We did this also after 6-weeks, 6-months and 1 year to see if any of the interventions have long-lasting effects.

Who funded this research?

Our funder was The Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition.

What did we find?

We would like to share our results with you now.

To answer who benefits and how, we will show the results in overview per school type:

Dog intervention **helps children in mainstream schools** with

- thinking (spatial ability, executive functioning – this is for example, paying attention, self-monitoring, etc.)
- language (sentence comprehension)

Dog intervention **helps children in special needs schools** with

- thinking (picture similarity)
- language comprehension

Dog intervention helps **children in special needs schools, particularly those with higher ability** with

- thinking (pattern construction, matrices)
- language comprehension and production
- behaviour at home
- self-esteem
- anxiety

Importantly, all children benefit from dog intervention regarding stress levels:

- Mainstream schools: No increase in cortisol
- Children with SEN: Decrease in cortisol

Further information

Research publications and more details about the impact of this work will be reported on the LEAD webpage <http://lead.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/> as they become available.

We have so much data, we will be busy for a while writing up our findings!

If you are interested to read in more detail about the results, please keep checking the webpages in 2019.

Please note all school, parent and child data collected remains anonymous and is not shared with third parties.

Again, we would like to thank you and your dog very much indeed for making this research possible!

All of you were so very helpful and all of your dogs were great!

We would also like to stress again that your initiative and your work was much admired and very much appreciated by the research team and the children taking part! And the teachers enjoyed having you all around, too!

We could not have done any of this important research without you and are very grateful indeed for your kind participation and wonderful and reliable support!

As always, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Your LEAD team

Victoria, Mirena, Elise and Kerstin

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