

Lincoln Education Assistance with Dogs (LEAD) Project

End of Study Report for Parents

22.1.2019

Dear Parent,

We would like to thank you and your child/children for participating in our education project!

What was the aim of the project?

The aim was to find out if a dog or a relaxation intervention can help children learn, relax and improve their wellbeing. The project was longitudinal, that is, we measured first what children know, then the intervention took place over 4 weeks. After that, we measured the same again immediately after intervention, after 6-weeks, 6-months and 1-year. This allowed us to find out how long the effects of the dog or relaxation intervention lasted.

Who funded this research?

Our funder was The Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition.

What did we measure?

We measured if dog and relaxation interventions in schools are useful for children and if they help them learn and concentrate. We used mostly standardised tests to measure this, and for the children, these assessments were like games to play. Interventions were 20 minute sessions either with a dog and their handler and the researcher, or 20 minutes spent taking part in a relaxation exercise. These took place twice/week over 4 weeks. We did this in small groups or individually.

We looked at thinking, language and maths skills before and after intervention. We also measured if children were less stressed and anxious after interventions, and have more self-esteem.

We also included no treatment control groups – this allows us to see if our intervention results are significantly different from “school as normal”.

Our experience has been very positive and all children and parents and schools were very helpful indeed!

What did we find?

We would like to share our first results with you.

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 over the year 2019.

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

Finally, we would like to thank you and your child again!

We could not do any of this valuable research without you and are very grateful for your participation and support!

As always, please don't hesitate to contact us at our email address: lead@lincoln.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Your LEAD team

Prof. Kerstin Meints (Project Lead),
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