

Physical and behavioural health of dogs belonging to homeless people

C King, T J Smith, K Kabrick, A Dzur, T Grandin
Canine Education Center, LLC, Colorado et al.

Framework Sc. 2

Type: Case Study | 03/04/25

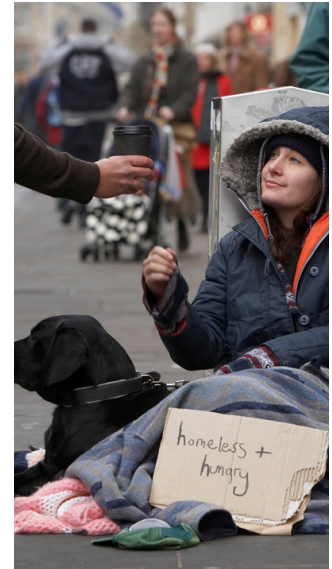
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SUMMARY

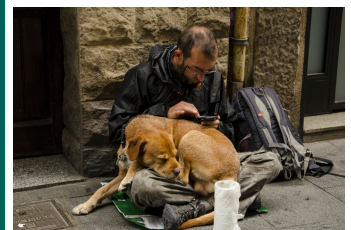
While some studies have examined how dog ownership benefits homeless people, few have focused on the welfare of the dogs. This study analysed the health and behaviour of dogs belonging to homeless persons and the homeless persons' perspectives on dog ownership.

The study surveyed 100 homeless persons who owned dogs in the Western U.S., drawing on similar UK research. Results showed that bully/toy breeds were most common, 50% of the dogs were not spayed, and 95% of owners had a dog as a child. Despite their difficult circumstances in which they lived, the dogs' welfare was generally good. The dogs were well socialised and behaved, generally healthy, and well exercised. Few dogs were overweight compared to the wider owned dog population. The close dog-owner bond meant that in many cases dogs exhibited high levels of anxiety when provision of services to homeless persons resulted in temporary separation.

The study shows how a One Welfare approach could support homeless persons and their dogs – for example, by promoting policies that emphasize the human-animal bond, providing free veterinary care, and offering better shelter, especially during extreme weather. Allowing homeless individuals to stay with their dogs in shelters could help alleviate separation anxiety. The study also addresses the prevalent view among the non-homeless population that homeless persons should not own pet dogs and suggests that raising public awareness would counter this view showing that both homeless persons and their animals have and deserve a “life worth living.”



Homeless person with dog



Case study impacts

- Improvements in support services for homeless persons to better recognise the benefits of pet dog ownership on both human and animal welfare
- Increased awareness of the human-animal bond in relation to homeless people among the general population may have wider societal benefits



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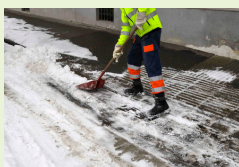
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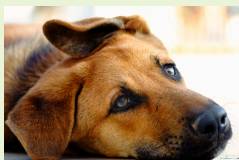
One Welfare Pillars

ANIMAL WELFARE



- Increasing awareness of pet ownership among homeless persons and better services for these individuals supports improvements to the health and welfare of their dogs. Such services could reduce separation distress behaviours such as vocalisation or destruction.
- Thermal discomfort is reported as an additional welfare issue specific to this population.

HUMAN WELLBEING



- Better physical and mental health for homeless persons owning pet dogs.
- Reduction in dog vocalisation noise.

ENVIRONMENT



Physical

- Improved support services and shelter provision. Reduced destruction of cars/tents due to separation anxiety.

Social environment

- Better quality of human-animal relationships, raising public awareness.

Multidisciplinary relevant areas

Animal welfare professionals, animal behaviour professionals, social services, shelter personnel, citizen street care/control services.

References / Source

- King C, Smith TJ, Kabrick K, Dzur A, Grandin T. Physical and behavioural health of dogs belonging to homeless people. *Anim Welf*. 2024 Feb 26;33:e11. doi: 10.1017/awf.2024.12. PMID: 38510424; PMCID: PMC10951669 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10951669/>

