



THE SCIENCE BEHIND...

What research says about human-animal interaction, walking, and brief shelter-dog outings.

BENEFITS & SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY

MOVEMENT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Dog walking is a practical way to add regular movement and walking to the day.
- Greater physical activity is associated with cardiovascular and overall health benefits.

CONNECTION & WELL-BEING

- Human-animal interaction can provide companionship, comfort, and opportunities for positive social connection.
- Research on animal-assisted interventions reports potential benefits for anxiety and other mental-health outcomes, although effects vary by population and study design.

STRUCTURE, PURPOSE & RECOVERY

- Recovery programs commonly benefit from meaningful routines, responsibility, service, and social connection.
- For people in recovery, walking and caring for a shelter dog can create a structured opportunity to practice those behaviors.
- This program should be viewed as a supportive recovery activity - not as treatment or a substitute for clinical care.

WHAT WE CAN CLAIM - AND WHAT WE CANNOT

- Evidence supports the underlying ingredients of Recovery Walks: physical activity, human-animal interaction, purposeful activity, and community connection.
- Direct research on this exact Recovery Walks model is not yet available; outcomes should therefore be measured rather than assumed.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS FOR SHELTER DOGS

HUMAN INTERACTION & SHELTER-DOG WELFARE

- Shelter environments can be stressful, and social isolation is one contributor.
- Studies show that human interaction can affect shelter dogs' stress and behavior, but the effect depends on the type, duration, and setting of the interaction.

BRIEF OUTINGS: A NUANCED FINDING

- A multi-shelter study of approximately 2.5-hour outings found increased cortisol and activity during the outing, with both returning to baseline by the following day.
- That means brief outings should not be described simply as 'reducing cortisol.' They may be stimulating or arousing as well as enriching.

TEMPORARY FOSTERING

- One- and two-night foster stays have been associated with lower cortisol and longer uninterrupted rest while dogs are away from the shelter.
- Those physiological benefits generally diminish after dogs return to the shelter.

ADOPTION VISIBILITY & OUTCOMES

- A 2023 analysis of 51 U.S. shelters found that dogs receiving brief outings were 5.0 times as likely to be adopted as control dogs.
- Dogs receiving one- to two-night foster stays were 14.3 times as likely to be adopted as controls.
- These are associations from participating shelter programs; they should not be presented as a guarantee for any individual dog.

Evidence standard: Language above is intentionally conservative. It distinguishes evidence about the program's components from evidence about the specific One Leash. Two Lives. model.

SELECTED RESEARCH

- Gunter LM et al. (2021). Investigating the Impact of Brief Outings on the Welfare of Dogs Living in US Shelters. *Animals*, 11(2), 548. PMID: PMC7923296.
- Gunter LM et al. (2019). Evaluating the effects of a temporary fostering program on shelter dog welfare. *PeerJ*, 7:e6620. PMID: PMC6441318.
- Gunter LM et al. (2023). The Influence of Brief Outing and Temporary Fostering Programs on Shelter Dog Welfare. *Animals*, 13(23), 3528. PMID: PMC10668817.
- Kamioka H et al. (2014). Effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 22(2), 371-390. PMID: 24731910.
- Hajek A, König HH. (2022). Pet ownership, loneliness, and social isolation: a systematic review. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. PMID: PMC9272860.

WHAT DO WE DO TOGETHER? WE WALK TOGETHER. WE RECOVER TOGETHER. WE CREATE SECOND CHANCES TOGETHER.