



The Children, Adolescents and Animals Research Group
Clinical Psychology
School of Health in Social Science
University of Edinburgh
Doorway 6, Medical Quad, Teviot Place, EH8 9AG
Project website: <https://bit.ly/Petsandchange>



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM FOR CARERS/GUARDIANS/PARENTS

April 2022

Dear carer/guardian/parent,

Pet animals and changing homes study

We are contacting you to provide information on a research project that is running from January to July this year and seek your consent for the child aged 12 to 15 years in your care to take part. We are required to ask permission from carers/guardians/parents when the child is under the age of 16. They will also need to provide their formal consent. Before deciding whether you are happy for the child in your care to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please feel free to talk with others about the project and contact us if you have any questions at all. If you are happy to continue after reading this information, please show the child the enclosed information sheet for participants.

Who are we & what is the study for?

Our names are Dr Janine Muldoon and Professor Jo Williams. We are researchers and run the '[Children, Adolescents & Animals Research group](#)' (caar) at the University of Edinburgh. We know how important pet animals can be in our lives, but there is hardly any research examining the role that pets have played in the lives of children and young people who have been in care. We want to examine:

- (a) how important pets have been for these children, in the knowledge that they can be extremely important sources of support and a 'bridge' to forming other relationships, and
- (b) the impact on children when these relationships are disrupted or lost when moving homes is necessary.

We hope to be able to identify support that could be put in place to maintain relationships with pets, help children deal with loss, or assist those who want a pet of their own when they leave care.



The study is funded by the [Society for Companion Animal Studies \(SCAS\)](#), and we will be working with animal welfare charities and those that support children and young people who have been in care or are care leavers, including Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf), Fostering Compassion, and the Scottish SPCA.

We would like to include all children and young people aged 12 to 15 years who are, or have been, in care, and feel at least one pet has been important to them.

Please note that the study will also include young people aged 16 to 20 years who are either still in care or are care leavers, and we have separate information for them, as they do not require permission from carers/guardians/parents.

What will the study involve?

The study involves an online survey that children can complete on any device. A link to the survey will be provided once you have provided your consent and contact details in the online form (see below). This will be a short survey taking approximately 15 minutes. Some of the questions will ask children to select the responses that are right for them. Others will have a space for them to write their own thoughts. All questions are optional with the exception of age confirmation. If you feel the child in your care would benefit from some support reading the questions and selecting the right responses, you can ask them if they would like you to help. It is important to respect their privacy when they respond. The support you provide should be primarily with reading the questions and not their responses. We will begin the survey by asking the child to confirm that they understand the research and are happy to begin the survey. Our questions will then include the following:

- Background information – age, gender, area of current residence
- How many years they have been in care
- The number of homes they have had
- The number and type of pets they have known
- What the pet/s mean or meant to them
- Experience and confidence in looking after pets, observations of pet treatment
- Reasons why relationships with pets ended or were disrupted
- Measures of attachment, wellbeing and self-esteem

The focus will be on children's views about how changes to their housing and relationships with pets have affected them. We will not ask especially sensitive or personal questions, but remembering times in the past may be upsetting. If you or the child need support, we can point you/them in the right direction. We will provide contact details of the charities who are partners in the project and other organisations that can provide support.

Does the child in your care have to take part?

No. It is up to you and the child to decide whether or not to take part. At any point in our studies, people can change their mind about taking part. Even if the child decides to start, they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to and can stop at any point. No one will mind or follow up. The survey is completely anonymous. Children will not be asked to provide their names or any information that would identify them to others. We will not be able to remove a child's data from the study once the survey has been started, as it will not be possible to identify them.

Will the child taking part and your contribution to the child taking part be treated confidentially?

Yes. If you are both happy to proceed, you will need to complete our online consent form which will ask for your name, date of birth and contact email address. This will only be used to send you a link to the survey that the child will then complete, and we will then delete the information you have provided. The information children share with us will be stored on the University of Edinburgh secure server and labelled only with a number. We will not ask for the child's name in the survey (which will be designed and stored securely in Qualtrics). Everything shared with us will be private and only accessible to the research team during the course of this project (named at the end of this document). However, fully anonymised datafiles (which will be kept for 10 years) may be used in the future by other researchers, but only in partnership with us and under strict controls. All findings will be presented anonymously and in a way that would not identify individuals.

Who has reviewed the study?

The Clinical Psychology Research Ethics Committee in the School of Health in Social Science at the University of Edinburgh, has independently reviewed the research and granted ethical approval. The project also has an advisory group including the SCAS Research Working Group and key members of the Scottish SPCA, Scottish

Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf), Fostering Compassion, as well as two young people who represent care leavers.

How will the data be used?

General patterns in the findings will be reported to the funder, with some recommendations on the type of support that would be useful for children and young people. We will not be describing experiences in a way that would identify individuals, and will post a summary on our website and social media channels (see below) in August 2022. At least two journal articles and a webinar are planned. The students in the research team will base their dissertations on some of the findings. These will only be seen by staff who mark them.

How do you take part or find out more?

If you have any questions at all, please contact janine.muldoon@ed.ac.uk. If you have sufficient information, please pass on the information sheet to the child in your care and discuss with them. If they would like to help us with this research, please complete the online consent form and provide your email address. We will then send a link to the survey.

Online consent form: <https://bit.ly/Carerconsent>

All information can be found on our project webpage: <https://bit.ly/Petsandchange>
We also have a Facebook page: [@ChildAnimalResearch](https://www.facebook.com/ChildAnimalResearch) and Twitter page: [@ChildAnimals](https://twitter.com/ChildAnimals).

Research Team

Dr Janine Muldoon – Research Fellow & Project Coordinator janine.muldoon@ed.ac.uk

Professor Jo Williams – Principal Investigator jo.williams@ed.ac.uk

Research support will also be provided by four MSc students within the Clinical Psychology Department: Alexandra Polastro, Katie Slater, Trishya Bopanna, and Theresa Leonard.

What if there is a problem?

If you wish to speak to someone outside the research team, the independent contact for the research is Dr Monja Knoll: monja.knoll@ed.ac.uk.

In the event that you wish to complain about any aspect of the way in which you or your child has been approached or treated during the course of this study, you should contact Professor Matthias Schwannauer: headofschool.health@ed.ac.uk.

We thank you for reading about our research and hope you/the child in your care will be able to participate.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Janine Muldoon, Research Fellow & Project Coordinator janine.muldoon@ed.ac.uk

Professor Jo Williams, Principal Investigator jo.williams@ed.ac.uk

Enclosed:

Information sheet for children/young people