

# Assistance dogs improve mental health of disabled young people

18 March 2020, by Sophie Armour



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Assistance dogs have a significant positive impact on the mental health of disabled young people, according to a [report](#) by the University of Sheffield and charity Canine Partners.

Using surveys and interviews with disabled people aged between 18 and 35 who are partnered with an assistance dog, the researchers found 86 percent felt more optimistic thanks to their dog.

Over 90 percent of disabled [young people](#) surveyed reported feeling less lonely, 88 percent felt less anxiety and 86 percent felt less isolated. Assistance dogs were said to boost confidence for 90 percent of participants, and help them to navigate [social situations](#).

The dogs were said to put non-disabled people more at ease in social situations, and help 67 percent of the young people to embrace their disability. Nine out of 10 of those surveyed said their dog had boosted their confidence, with some saying they had helped them to achieve major

goals such as getting a degree and living independently.

Over two thirds of disabled young people said that, since getting their assistance dog, they relied less on support from human carers—with 81 percent saying they had reduced the discomfort and guilt they feel when relying on human carers. More than half also felt that their assistance dog had helped them take better care of their physical health.

Dr. Kirsty Liddiard, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield, said: "Our research makes clear the transformative impact an assistance dog can have on a disabled young person's life—increasing their independence, building their confidence and helping them to embrace who they are.

"In the future, we would like to see policymakers, [local authorities](#) and care professionals making all young people with physical impairments aware of the possibilities and benefits of canine care."

Sally Whitney, a disabled young co-researcher on the project, said: "Leading the project has been an honour and a joy as it is a topic that is incredibly important to me. It was because of my own experiences of being a disabled young person and having my assistance dog, Ethan, that meant I was so keen to work on the project. This has given me the impetus to probe further into the experiences of other young people and the results have shown an even deeper level of impact than I had anticipated. It is clear that assistance [dogs](#) do so much more than physical tasks and have a transformational impact on how young people receive care and, in turn, on so many aspects of their lives."

**More information:** The Canine Care Project Report: [livinglifetothefullesttoolkitc ... re-project-final.pdf](#)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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