



## Participant Information Sheet

Research ethics approval number: **VREC1610**

Project title: The Life with Smalls Study - "Rescue Me" adoption follow up

Name of researcher(s): Macy Rowles, Prof Carri Westgarth, Dr Helen Clough, Prof Liz Perkins

### Introduction

Thank you for your interest in taking part in our study. You have been contacted because you are in the process of adopting a small furry rescue pet from one of our partner rescue shelters and you have indicated that you may be willing to participate in our research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it's important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends or relatives if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

### What is the purpose of this study?

This study is about how adopting a small furry pet may impact the wellbeing of owners. Most of the previous research in this area has focused on the impact of dogs and cats on owner physical health and mental wellbeing. It is time to find out how other small furry pets impact our lives. The study is funded by the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute.

### Can I take part?

In order to take part, you must be an English-speaking, UK adult, aged 18 or over, who is adopting a small furry pet type (rabbit, guinea pig, rat, hamster, mice, gerbil) from a shelter who we are working with.

### Do I have to take part?

No. This study is entirely voluntary and does not affect your ability to adopt your animal. You may withdraw at any point during a survey by exiting the browser screen. If you wish to withdraw from the entire study, please contact our team on [lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk)

### What will happen?

You will be invited to take part in 4 online surveys over a 6-month period. These will be:

1. Before you take your new pet home (baseline)
2. 1 month
3. 3 months
4. 6 months after taking your pet home

Each survey will take you less than 15 minutes to complete. After the eligibility questions, you are free to pass on any of the questions.

In addition, we will be obtaining information about your household and the animal that was collected during the adoption process from the shelter.

### **Do I need to provide any personal information?**

We need your name and email address in order to keep sending you the next survey at the right time. You will be asked to consent to this being passed to us by the shelter in order to contact you about this study, and we will only use it for the purposes of this project. The rest of the data collected will be answering questions about your background, household, health and wellbeing. We need this information in order to understand how different types of people may be impacted in different ways by pet ownership.

### **How will the data be used?**

By completing these questionnaires, you are giving your consent for us to use the information you provide for the purposes of this study, including sharing the results in scientific publications and conferences, and media articles. Although the main researcher will know who you are, the data will be analysed using an ID number instead of your name. The findings from the study will be anonymous when presented – it won't be possible to tell who you are. The data will be stored on the University of Liverpool secure server. After we have completed the main data analysis, the anonymous dataset will be archived indefinitely and may be used again in future related projects. The anonymous dataset will only be released to other researchers on application to the project authors, for genuine research purposes, and subject to ethical approval.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. Prof Carri Westgarth (the Principal Investigator/Supervisor) acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to Prof Carri Westgarth, Department of Livestock and One Health, University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus, Chester High Road, Neston, Cheshire, CH64 7TE, Tel: 0151 795 6029, Email: carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk.

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	Data will be collected using online survey platforms and records about your pet from the participating shelter will be passed on to us.
How will my data be stored?	Data will be stored on secure university servers and will be encrypted.
How long will my data be stored for?	Contact data for sending you the links to surveys to complete will be stored for up to ten years so that the project data collection and follow-up can occur. Your study data collected from the surveys will be stored indefinitely but will be in an anonymous form using an ID number.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	Data files will be stored on a secure password-protected university drive. Wherever possible data will be encrypted.  Confidentiality may be broken in the very unlikely event that any criminal activity such as severe animal cruelty is disclosed, or a person is deemed to be at risk. Such instances may be reported to the RSPCA or the police.

Will my data be anonymised?	Your data will be pseudonymised; this means that your personal data for contacting you will be kept separately from your survey data. In the study dataset you will be given a study ID number to replace your name. Further, any personally identifiable information data (such as names, locations etc.) you may give within the survey responses will be changed so that you are not identifiable.
Will I be quoted?	Anonymised quotes you submit through the survey may be used in publications or presentations. Any quotes used will contain no identifying details so that your identity cannot be recognised from your data/quote.
How will my data be used?	Data from the survey responses and animal rescue centre records will be analysed statistically to examine changes to the responses over time and upon adoption of your pet. Open text data from surveys will be analysed to uncover themes relevant to our research questions. This analysis will then be used to inform written and oral research outputs such as conference presentations and scientific papers.
Who will have access to my data?	Prof Carri Westgarth, Macy Rowles, Dr Helen Clough and Prof Liz Perkins will have access to your study data. Employees of the rescue organisation you are adopting a pet from will also have access to records about you and your new pet, some of which they will pass on to us so that we can contact you and understand the medical and behavioural history of your pet pre-adoption.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	The anonymous dataset will be archived indefinitely and may be used again in future related projects. Data will only be released upon application to the project authors and for genuine research purposes.
How will my data be destroyed?	Any personal contact data will be deleted after 10 years.

### **Are there any risks in taking part?**

There are small anticipated risks to you by participating in this study. Because the study is about the impacts of pet ownership on wellbeing, the survey asks some questions about topics such as anxiety, depression, loneliness and how happy you feel. For example, you are asked to say how much you agree with statements such as:

- “I feel that people barely know me”,
- “My life has meaning”,
- “I felt worthless”,
- “My worries overwhelmed me”.

If you feel you would find this distressing, you might not want to take part.

Another potential downside to you is giving up the time it will take to complete the surveys, which will be approximately 15 minutes each.

**Are there any benefits to taking part?**

If you complete all 4 surveys, we will send you a £20 Amazon voucher. There are unlikely to be any other direct benefits to you of taking part, but your input will help to increase understanding of small pet care and pet and owner wellbeing. This increased understanding may help researchers to create initiatives in future which could assist in finding innovative means of overcoming common problems faced by pet owners.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results from this study will be used to write a research thesis and may be published in peer-reviewed scientific papers, mentioned in press articles and/or presented at conferences. You will not be identifiable from the results. Study updates will be published on the WAG-LAB Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/waglab](http://www.facebook.com/waglab)) and the study website <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/infection-veterinary-and-ecological-sciences/research/life-with-smalls-study/>

**What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You can stop filling in the survey at any point before the end to stop taking part and we will not use any of your data. If you want to withdraw from the entire study, please contact us and we can do this for you, up until the point where your data has contributed to analysis.

**If I want to ask a question about this study or I have a problem, who do I contact?**

This research project has been approved by the University of Liverpool Veterinary Ethics Committee (Number **VREC1610**). The project is being conducted by PhD student Macy Rowles and supervised by Prof Carri Westgarth, Dr Helen Clough, Prof Liz Perkins, at the University of Liverpool. It will also be supported by collaborators Prof Maggie O’Haire (University of Arizona), Prof Erika Friedman (University of Maryland), Dr Fiona Cooke (Woodgreen) and Natalie Powdrill-Wells (Woodgreen).

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher Macy Rowles ([lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk)).

If you are unhappy or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Carri Westgarth ([carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk)) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at [ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigor in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

**I'm happy - how do I take part?**

To take part please complete the survey(s).

**If you feel you need more support during or after the study**

My pet is having medical issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please contact a veterinarian immediately, preferably an exotic vet who can provide the most appropriate care</li> </ul>
I need general pet behaviour or housing advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Woodgreen Pet Advice <a href="#">Woodgreen Pet Advice</a></li> <li>- PDSA Pet Advice <a href="#">PDSA</a></li> </ul>
I need general pet behaviour advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free individual pet advice <a href="#">Woodgreen Pet Behaviour Helpline</a></li> <li>- Find a behaviourist <a href="http://www.apbc.org.uk">www.apbc.org.uk</a></li> </ul>
I need health advice or low-income veterinary care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low-income veterinary help <a href="#">Our services - PDSA</a></li> <li>- First aid and health advice <a href="#">Your pet's symptoms - PDSA</a></li> </ul>
I'm thinking of rehoming my pet	<p>If you feel you are unable to care for your pet anymore and wish to give them up, please contact the rescue shelter that you adopted from who will be able to support and advise you how to do this or access some of the resources below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">‘Thinking of giving up your pet?’</a></li> <li>- <a href="http://rspca.org.uk">Giving up a pet   RSPCA - RSPCA - rspca.org.uk</a></li> </ul>
I am having a mental health crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact <a href="#">Samaritans</a></li> </ul>
I would like to self-assess my wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit <a href="#">NHS Wellbeing Self-Assessment Tool</a></li> </ul>
I would like to speak to a registered counsellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact a counsellor from <a href="#">BCAP</a></li> </ul>
I would like general advice about my mental health or wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit <a href="#">Mind</a></li> <li>- Visit <a href="#">NHS Mental Health</a></li> </ul>
I am struggling after the death of my pet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact <a href="#">BlueCross</a></li> <li>- Or Contact <a href="#">BCAP</a></li> </ul>