**EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

**Therapy Dogs in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Interventions in School Settings**

**Project:** The Impact of Incorporating a Therapy Dog into an SEL Intervention in a School Setting

**Ethics Project ID:** 24522

**Chief Investigators:**

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**Student Researcher:**

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Provisional Psychologist

Master of Educational & Developmental Psychology/ PhD candidate

Monash University

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We are a group of researchers from Monash University conducting research on how therapy dogs can be used in social and emotional wellbeing interventions in educational settings. We are inviting you and your child to participate in this research. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the student researcher via the email address listed above.

**What are the aims of this research project?**

The aim of this research project is to evaluate the impact of incorporating a therapy dog into an evidence-based social and emotional learning program in a school setting. Specifically, this research will examine how children experience the program and the impact of the program on social competence and their mental health. The outcomes of this research will help to inform the use of therapy dogs in schools in Australia.

**What does the research involve?**

If you agree to participate in this research, your child will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a pre, post-program and follow-up de-identified survey. Each survey will take around 30 minutes to complete.
2. Take part in an evidence-based 12-week Social and Emotional Learning intervention within school hours (1 hour a week).
3. Have the option to take part in an in-person or online (via Zoom) interview taking around 20-30 minutes.

*NB: All students will receive some form of intervention, however not all groups will have the intervention at the same time or will have the therapy dog present. These latter groups will have the opportunity to spend time with the therapy dog post intervention.*

**Why is your child invited to take part in this program and research?**

All students in Year 5 at your school are invited to take part in this research. Your school has agreed to support the program and include the intervention in their wellbeing program. Your response is invaluable to us in understanding the needs of pre-adolescent children and the best ways to support them with their social and emotional learning.

**Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research**

The consent process for this research project involves the following:

1. Reading the Explanatory Statement to fully understand the project before giving informed consent to participate in the study;
2. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate;
3. If you decide to participate in the study, please read and complete the consent form provided;
4. You have the right to withdraw from further participation in the research, without any adverse implications at any stage up until the end of the data gathering period.

**Possible benefits and risks to participants**

Based on therapy dog research and research surrounding SEL interventions in schools, it is anticipated that there will be a positive impact on children’s wellbeing overall. The results of the research may enable schools to make informed decisions regarding the impact of therapy dogs on social skills and wellbeing and how to incorporate a therapy dog effectively within the school environment. Whilst there is a growing trend to bring dogs into schools, there is limited research around how best to incorporate a therapy dog within a school setting. This project will be the first in Australia to incorporate a therapy dog into an SEL intervention within a school.

There is a slight possibility that some participants may experience distress from answering the survey questions about mental health and social skills. However, we believe that the risk for participants to experience distress is minimal as the survey and interview questions are not aimed to elicit stress or difficulty. If a child is in distress, the parent will be contacted and a list of support services will be made available. The researcher will follow an outlined procedure to ensure the appropriate support is provided.

All data will be de-identifiable and at no time will the participants or responses be identifiable to others.

Children who have an allergy to dogs or a fear of dogs have the choice to participate in the group without the therapy dog if they would still like to be involved in the study.

**Confidentiality**
Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and their data will be maintained as the survey will be de-identified in the reporting of the results of the study.

**Storage of data**

The data generated from this research project will be stored using the university’s password protected Drive owned by Monash University. Only the research investigators will have access to the data. The data will be deleted and destroyed in five years if it is no longer required.

**Results**

Results of the project will be disseminated at conferences, in practitioner and academic journals and a final report to your school. No findings of a personal nature will be included in these reports. If requested, we can provide you with a copy of the final report with our findings.

**Complaints**

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

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| Executive OfficerMonash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Room 111, Chancellery Building E,24 Sports Walk, Clayton CampusResearch OfficeMonash University VIC 3800Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu Fax: +61 3 9905 3831  |  |

Thank you,



Lena Wintermantel

**Student Researcher**