



## D3.1

### E-BOOK: METHODS AND TOOLS

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## E-book: Methods and tools.

### Abstract

THEO's eBook represents a comprehensive, evidence-informed educational resource developed to foster empathy, responsibility, and active lifestyles in children through structured interactions with dogs. Designed as a narrative storybook complemented by practical, developmentally appropriate activities, the eBook enables children to explore key concepts of animal welfare, communication, trust, and responsible ownership. By integrating physical exercise, cooperative play, and reflective learning, it supports holistic child development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth, while simultaneously promoting positive, welfare-oriented interactions with dogs.

The initiative draws upon interdisciplinary research in child development, psychology, pedagogy, animal behavior, ethics, and health promotion, reflecting the understanding that early, supervised engagement with animals can enhance socio-emotional competencies, moral reasoning, social skills, and compassionate attitudes toward living beings. The eBook's design balances narrative appeal with practical guidance, allowing children to internalize ethical principles and responsible practices through enjoyable, active experiences. Activities are tailored to age-appropriate abilities and learning needs, providing concrete examples of safe and engaging interactions with dogs that reinforce empathy, cooperation, and active play.

THEO's eBook supports children's holistic development and promotes compassionate, socially responsible behavior, thus advancing the THEO project's goal of strengthening human-animal relationships across diverse learning environments.

**Keywords:** physical activity, children, adolescents, empathy development, dog-assisted learning, child development, animal welfare education, responsible pet ownership, active lifestyles, educational eBook



## 1. Introduction

The development of THEO's eBook represents a strategic initiative aimed at fostering empathy, responsible behavior, and active lifestyles among children through structured, educationally grounded interactions with dogs. Recognizing the substantial evidence supporting dog-assisted educational approaches, the consortium sought to create a resource that is pedagogically coherent, evidence-informed, and culturally adaptable, capable of supporting learning in both formal and non-formal educational settings. The eBook was conceived not merely as a storytelling tool, but as an integrated educational instrument combining narrative elements with practice-oriented activities that enable children to understand and internalize key aspects of animal welfare, communication, and responsible dog ownership.

This initiative is built upon interdisciplinary research spanning developmental psychology, education sciences, animal behavior and welfare, and health promotion. Central to the project is the understanding that early, carefully supervised encounters with animals can strengthen children's empathy, social reasoning, and moral development. Structured interactions with dogs also serve to promote responsible attitudes toward animals, modelling appropriate handling, communication, and caregiving practices. The eBook thus addresses the dual objective of supporting children's development while simultaneously promoting animal welfare through educationally meaningful experiences.

THEO's eBook has been designed to provide a developmentally appropriate learning framework. Its narrative component introduces children to foundational concepts related to trust, communication, and mutual understanding between humans and dogs, providing an engaging entry point into the subject matter. Complementing the story, the activity section offers concrete examples of exercises and interactions that encourage physical activity, cooperative play, and reflective learning. By embedding welfare-oriented principles and responsible ownership practices within these exercises, the eBook helps children develop a balanced understanding of both the joys and responsibilities of living with dogs. The combination of narrative and activities ensures that the resource is both accessible and pedagogically aligned, fostering meaningful engagement with the material. The design process of the eBook was guided by rigorous educational and scientific criteria. Activities were crafted to be age-appropriate, evidence-based, and aligned

with developmental milestones, ensuring that children can safely and effectively engage with the material. Emphasis was placed on promoting not only physical activity but also socio-emotional skills such as empathy, cooperation, and reflection. The approach draws upon research demonstrating that structured interactions with animals enhance cognitive flexibility, moral reasoning, and social competence, highlighting the potential of dog-assisted programs as multifaceted educational tools.

In addition to educational rigor, the eBook was developed to be culturally adaptable and linguistically accurate. Translation and harmonization across multiple languages were carefully implemented to preserve conceptual consistency and educational integrity. This ensures that the pedagogical objectives of the eBook are effectively communicated across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, making it a versatile resource for educators and families alike. Moreover, by combining storytelling with interactive exercises, THEO's eBook represents a practical, evidence-informed tool that supports holistic child development. It encourages children to engage physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively, while fostering responsible attitudes toward animals and promoting an understanding of welfare principles. Beyond its immediate learning outcomes, the eBook exemplifies an innovative approach to integrating human–animal interaction into educational practice, demonstrating the value of carefully designed interventions in promoting empathy, responsibility, and active engagement among young learners.

Overall, the eBook embodies a pedagogical vision in which interactions with dogs are leveraged to support the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth of children. Through narrative storytelling enriched with developmentally appropriate activities, it provides a structured and accessible framework for fostering compassion, awareness, and practical knowledge. In doing so, it stands as a durable, evidence-based educational resource capable of nurturing meaningful and responsible human–animal relationships across diverse learning contexts.

## **2. The Role of Dog–Human Interactions in Supporting Children's Growth and Education**

### **2.1. The Evolving Human–Animal Relationship**

The connection between humans and animals is deeply intertwined with the

history of civilization. Early human groups depended on animals for survival, protection, transport, and companionship, gradually forming interspecies relationships that influenced social and cultural development. As civilizations progressed, these relationships evolved from practical cooperation into complex bonds characterized by emotional closeness, psychological support, and shared wellbeing. Research across anthropology, ethology, and developmental psychology consistently shows that animals—particularly dogs—play a significant role in children’s lives, shaping their emotional growth, cognitive development, and social behavior (Serpell, 1991).

Research on human–animal interaction (HAI) has grown substantially during the last decades, demonstrating that companion animals make meaningful contributions to human health. Dogs possess a remarkable capacity to understand human signals, emotions, and intentions, a result of their long co-evolution with people. This innate sensitivity enables them to serve not only as companions but also as active partners in therapeutic, educational, and developmental contexts. Evidence shows that interacting with a friendly, well-trained dog can lower physiological stress, elevate oxytocin levels, and enhance social bonding in humans (Beetz et al., 2012). These benefits are particularly relevant to children, who are at a formative stage where empathy, social competence, self-regulation, and physical habits are being shaped. Recent findings show that children often view animals as confidants and emotional anchors, assigning them social roles that support attachment and feelings of safety (McNicholas & Collis, 2001). The presence of a dog can reduce performance anxiety in school, facilitate peer interactions, and even support literacy, as seen in programs where children read aloud to animals to improve fluency and confidence (Lane & Zavada, 2013).

Understanding this powerful dynamic, modern educational frameworks increasingly incorporate structured interactions between children and animals. Yet one dimension that remains underutilized, despite strong evidence, is the use of shared physical activity between children and dogs. Exercise is fundamental for healthy child development, promoting motor coordination, cardiovascular health, and emotional regulation (de Almeida & Nolls, 2024). When combined with the presence of a dog, exercise transforms into a socially and emotionally enriched experience that deepens motivation and leads to more consistent engagement (Pajaujiene & Petrigna, 2024).

## **2.2. The Impact of Dogs on Children’s Learning and Development**

The integration of dog-assisted activities into educational programs offers a compelling opportunity to enhance children’s socio-emotional and moral development. Engaging with dogs allows children to recognize and respect the emotions, needs, and boundaries of another living being, fostering empathy and emotional competence. Developmental psychologists suggest that empathy develops through repeated experiences that require perspective-taking and compassionate action (Hoffman, 2001). When a child ensures that a dog feels safe, comfortable, and understood during an activity, they are actively practicing these skills. Empirical research supports this connection: studies by Ascione (2005) and Melson (2001) indicate that children who regularly interact with animals demonstrate greater emotional intelligence and moral reasoning. These children become more attuned to non-verbal forms of communication, more sensitive to suffering, and more capable of showing care. Dogs, who primarily communicate through subtle body language and gestures, effectively serve as teachers of emotional literacy. Through interaction, children learn that a wagging tail does not always signal friendliness, that a lowered body may indicate fear, and that respecting personal space is an important act of kindness. This heightened awareness of non-verbal cues naturally extends to greater empathy and understanding toward peers.

Beyond emotional growth, dog-assisted activities promote physical development and the cultivation of healthy habits. In contemporary societies, sedentary lifestyles are common, and children often fail to engage in sufficient physical activity. Dogs provide a unique motivational force to counteract this trend. Research indicates that families with dogs tend to walk more regularly, and children in these households are typically more physically active (Christian et al., 2016). In structured educational programs, this effect can be amplified by framing activity as a cooperative and enjoyable experience—such as caring for the dog’s wellbeing—encouraging children to participate enthusiastically. Activities such as walking, gentle running, and cooperative games with dogs enhance gross motor skills, balance, coordination, and endurance. The rhythmic nature of walking with a dog can also help regulate emotional states, reduce anxiety, and improve focus. Some researchers propose that the calming presence of a dog during exercise reduces the child’s perception of effort, making physical activity feel less strenuous and more enjoyable (Gee, Fine & Schuck, 2015). In this sense, dogs act as both motivators and

regulators, enhancing both the physical and psychological dimensions of development.

Cognitive growth is another area enriched by dog-assisted activities. Dogs naturally provoke curiosity, prompting children to explore questions about canine behavior, cognition, and emotions. This curiosity fosters analytical thinking and cognitive engagement. Observing a dog navigate obstacles, respond to commands, or solve simple tasks allows children to develop an understanding of cause and effect, pattern recognition, and problem-solving strategies. Additionally, educational psychology research shows that the presence of a friendly animal can increase motivation and persistence in learning, particularly for children who struggle with attention or academic confidence (Kotrschal & Ortbauer, 2003). When exercise sessions incorporate small training components—such as asking a dog to sit before initiating an activity—children acquire lessons in sequencing, consistency, and non-verbal communication, translating these skills to broader learning contexts.

Dogs also serve as social catalysts, facilitating cooperation and peer interaction. Their presence can reduce tension in group settings, encourage collaboration, and strengthen social bonds. During group activities with dogs, children negotiate roles, decide who will hold the leash, give commands, or guide the dog through an obstacle. These interactions support the development of communication skills, turn-taking, and cooperative problem-solving. Empirical evidence demonstrates that programs involving dogs in schools can decrease social withdrawal and enhance prosocial behavior (Friesen, 2010), providing children with a safe context to practice interpersonal skills. Accordingly, interaction with dogs contributes to environmental and ethical education. Many children today experience animals primarily through digital media, which can distort their understanding of animal behavior (Beaumont et al., 2019). Hands-on engagement teaches children that animals possess needs, emotions, and limits, promoting respect for living beings. Narrative discussions that explore questions such as why dogs need exercise or why it is important to protect their habitats and rights help children develop an early appreciation for environmental stewardship. In this way, responsible interaction with dogs not only nurtures empathy and social competence but also lays the foundation for ethical awareness and respect for the natural world.

### **2.3. Supporting Development Across Ages: The Role of Dog-Assisted Programs**

Children and adolescents can benefit from dog-assisted programs across a wide developmental range, but research consistently highlights middle childhood (ages 6–12) as a particularly receptive period. Children in the early primary years (6–9) tend to display heightened emotional attunement, spontaneous empathy, and imaginative engagement with animals, making them especially responsive to activities that encourage nurturing and cooperative play (Melson, 2001). Studies show that children in this age group often interpret animals as social partners, which can enhance emotional expression and empathetic development within structured dog-assisted interventions (Beetz et al., 2012). As children approach the later primary years (10–12), their cognitive abilities mature, enabling more sophisticated reasoning about animal behavior, ethics, and welfare. This developmental shift allows them to engage more analytically with tasks such as interpreting canine body language, understanding training principles, and considering responsible care practices (Purewal et al., 2017; Serpell, 1996).

For early adolescents (13–14), interactions with dogs serve somewhat different psychosocial functions. This age is marked by growing autonomy, identity exploration, and increased sensitivity to social evaluation. Supervised opportunities to act as mentors for younger children in dog-related activities—such as assisting with handling exercises or modeling humane behavior—can strengthen adolescents’ leadership, self-efficacy, and prosocial motivation (Jalongo, 2015; Hediger et al., 2021). Research also suggests that animals can reduce social anxiety and self-consciousness in adolescents, promoting more authentic communication and cooperation (Beetz et al., 2012). As youth move into later adolescence (15–18), dog-assisted programs can provide support linked to stress reduction, emotional regulation, and physical activity. Physical engagement with dogs—such as structured walking, agility-like activities, or recreational training—encourages habitual exercise at an age when activity levels often decline (Christian et al., 2013). Adolescents are also developmentally capable of participating in more complex animal-care tasks, ethical decision-making, and community service projects involving dogs, fostering a deeper sense of responsibility and civic engagement (Hediger et al., 2021).

Importantly, evidence shows that dog-assisted activities can benefit families as holistic systems, not just individual children or adolescents. Families with dogs often

report increased shared time outdoors, improved communication during cooperative care routines, and enhanced overall cohesion (Walsh, 2009). Parents play a critical role in modeling: when adults demonstrate compassionate, responsible, and knowledgeable animal care, children are more likely to internalize those practices and attitudes (Melson, 2001). Thus, although ages 6–12 may form the most developmentally fertile period for introducing structured dog-assisted activities, adolescents and their families also gain significant emotional, relational, and behavioral advantages from dog-supported engagement.

#### **2.4. Ensuring Animal Wellbeing in Educational Programs**

A responsible educational program must recognize that animals are not merely passive instruments but active participants whose wellbeing is essential for ethical and effective engagement. The health, comfort, and emotional state of dogs directly influence their ability to interact safely and positively with children. Neglecting animal welfare not only raises ethical concerns but also compromises the quality of educational interactions, as stressed or fatigued dogs cannot participate effectively. Therefore, programs must incorporate thoughtful design, proper training, and consistent respect for the animal's needs.

Physical Wellbeing is a fundamental aspect of dog welfare. Just as children require regular physical activity, dogs need structured exercise to maintain cardiovascular health, muscle tone, and joint mobility. Activities such as walking and gentle running provide essential movement, particularly for dogs living in urban environments where opportunities for exploration are limited. Participation in child-focused exercise programs allows dogs to stretch, explore new environments, and experience novel sensory stimuli. Exercise, however, must be carefully tailored to the age, breed, size, and physical condition of each dog. Smaller or older dogs may require shorter, less intense sessions, while high-energy breeds may benefit from longer, more dynamic activities. Continuous wellbeing assessments ensure that each dog's physical needs are met and prevent overexertion.

Equally important is mental enrichment and cognitive engagement. Dogs thrive on stimulation and novel experiences that challenge their problem-solving abilities and prevent boredom. Incorporating cognitive challenges into educational programs aligns with the Five Domains Model of animal welfare, which emphasizes the promotion of positive mental states (Mellor et al., 2020). Simple obstacle courses,

scent-based games, and command-based exercises provide dogs with opportunities for cognitive engagement, fostering satisfaction and enhancing their overall mental wellbeing. In addition, emotional fulfillment and social bonding are critical for the holistic welfare of dogs. As social animals, dogs form attachments with humans and respond positively to calm, gentle, and respectful attention. When children are taught to interpret canine signals accurately, dogs experience security, comfort, and affection. Research demonstrates that dogs release oxytocin—a hormone associated with bonding and pleasure—during positive interactions with familiar humans (Nagasawa et al., 2015). For therapy or educational dogs, structured engagement with children can be deeply rewarding, provided that the pace and format of activities respect their comfort levels and natural rhythms.

Protection from stress and misinterpretation is another essential consideration. Children may inadvertently misread canine signals, mistaking fear, discomfort, or avoidance behaviors for friendliness. Effective educational programs address this by offering pre-activity instruction, visual aids, and supervised practice, teaching children to recognize stress indicators such as yawning, lip licking, or averted gaze. The presence of trained professionals ensures that dogs can rest or withdraw as needed, safeguarding their emotional balance and preventing negative experiences.

Finally, prioritizing animal wellbeing strengthens positive human–animal dynamics. When dogs are treated as partners rather than tools, the relationship becomes reciprocal. Dogs gain confidence, social familiarity, and a sense of purpose through regular, respectful interaction with children. These experiences not only enhance their adaptability in public and educational settings but also enrich their daily lives, fostering stronger bonds and mutual respect between humans and animals. By ensuring physical, cognitive, and emotional care, educational programs create environments where both children and dogs can thrive together.

### **3. Concept Creation and e-Book Development**

#### **3.1. Scope of the e-book**

THEO project seeks to address two pressing and interconnected challenges facing modern society: the widespread sedentary lifestyles among children and the need for greater awareness and understanding of pet welfare, particularly for dogs.



While the benefits of physical activity for children are widely recognized, many young people fail to engage in regular exercise, with long-term consequences for their physical, cognitive, and social development. At the same time, pets often receive insufficient attention to their physical and emotional needs, despite their integral role in family life.

Although the benefits of regular physical activity are widely recognized, many children and adolescents fail to incorporate consistent exercise into their routines. This lack of movement not only affects their health but also limits opportunities for social interaction, creativity, and emotional resilience. At the same time, pets—especially dogs—require stimulation, companionship, and understanding to thrive. When these needs are neglected, the wellbeing of both humans and animals suffers, weakening the bonds that make families and communities stronger.

To respond to these challenges, the consortium has articulated clear objectives:

- To encourage active lifestyles throughout childhood and adolescence.
- To nurture empathy, compassion, and responsible behavior toward animals.
- To equip families with practical tools that enable safe, enjoyable, and meaningful interactions with their pets.

At the heart of this strategy lies the development of an innovative educational resource, the THEO eBook. This tool will blend engaging storytelling with interactive, hands-on activities, designed to inspire children and teenagers to move more, care better, and connect deeply with their pets. The eBook is intended for a broad audience, spanning children, adolescents, and their families. By engaging multiple age groups simultaneously, it aims to create shared routines that strengthen family bonds while promoting holistic well-being. Through narrative-driven content and practical exercises, young readers will learn the value of regular physical activity, discover safe and ethical ways to interact with dogs, and cultivate empathy and social awareness that extend beyond human–animal relationships.

The primary objective of this initiative is to encourage children to integrate physical activity into their daily routines through playful, cooperative interactions with dogs. Walking, gentle running, and simple games included in the eBook help children develop motor skills, coordination, endurance, and cardiovascular health, while also supporting emotional regulation and social skills. Equally important is the



promotion of empathy and ethical behavior: as children learn to recognize dogs' signals, respect boundaries, and respond appropriately, they develop compassion, emotional literacy, and a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the human–animal relationship.

THEO's eBook also seeks to raise awareness about pet welfare by educating children and families about the physical, cognitive, and emotional needs of dogs. Activities are carefully designed to ensure that animals are engaged in a safe, stimulating, and enjoyable manner, reinforcing the idea that wellbeing is reciprocal. In doing so, children gain a deeper understanding of animal behavior, ethical treatment, and the role of pets in family and society.

Beyond individual learning, this eBook contributes to the broader goals of the THEO project by fostering the creation of a network of experts, educators, and stakeholders who can share best practices, collect evidence on the benefits of dog-assisted activities, and promote sustainable, health-focused initiatives at a wider scale. By offering simple, inexpensive, and replicable strategies, THEO empowers families and schools to embed physical activity and responsible pet interaction into everyday life, helping to establish long-lasting, positive habits.

### **3.2. Selection of a central storyline aligned with the project's themes.**

The storyline of THEO's eBook was carefully developed to embody the values and objectives of the initiative in an engaging, narrative-driven format. Central to this approach was the idea that dogs are more than pets, they are friends, helpers, and even heroes. To communicate this concept effectively to children, adolescents, and families, the consortium created the character of THEO, a therapy dog with a big heart, whose story illustrates the positive impacts of human–animal interaction.

The storyline begins with THEO, a joyful and empathetic therapy dog, encountering Lena, a young girl who is initially fearful of dogs. Through their interactions, Lena gradually learns to understand THEO's signals, respect him, and experience the joy of companionship. This narrative was deliberately chosen to reflect real-world scenarios in which children and adolescents may encounter animals. It highlights the development of empathy, emotional regulation, and confidence while reinforcing the principles of responsible and ethical interaction with dogs. The development of the storyline followed a clear pedagogical rationale: by using a



story-driven approach, the eBook engages readers both emotionally and cognitively, making abstract concepts such as empathy, responsibility, and cooperation, accessible and relatable. The experiences of Theo and Lena provide a safe, illustrative framework for demonstrating how positive interactions with animals can support emotional, social, and physical development. The narrative also demonstrates the benefits and responsibilities of dog ownership, highlighting safe play, routine care, and physical exercise, showing that interacting with dogs can be both joyful and accountable.

In addition, by addressing Lena's initial fear, the story further promotes inclusion and social development, illustrating how dogs can support emotional confidence, facilitate social interaction, and encourage inclusive play. Moreover, through Theo's role as a therapy dog, the narrative introduces the value of assistance and therapy animals, demonstrating how they can provide educational, emotional, and supportive benefits. By embedding these objectives within a compelling and emotionally rich story, the eBook goes beyond simple instruction. It is designed to inspire lasting positive attitudes and behaviors toward animals, physical activity, and social engagement. In this way, the storyline serves not only as the heart of the eBook but also as a strategic tool for achieving THEO's broader project goals: fostering empathy, wellbeing, inclusion, and responsible human–animal relationships across diverse age groups and family settings.

### **3.3. Developed activities to ensure engagement and learning value.**

The development of the activities presented in this eBook was informed by a structured review and discussion of the proposals submitted by partners under two priorities: (1) fostering empathy towards dogs, and (2) strengthening children's understanding of the benefits and responsibilities involved in dog ownership. Partners engaged in a systematic exchange of perspectives, examining a range of suggested approaches intended to promote children's understanding of canine emotions and behavior, as well as proposals aimed at illustrating the advantages and obligations associated with dog ownership. While not all proposals were incorporated into the final selection, the collective reflections on these contributions played a significant role in shaping the conceptual framework of the activities. This consultative process provided a foundational basis for ensuring that the final activities are pedagogically sound, aligned with the project objectives, and capable of

supporting meaningful learning outcomes.

The first priority focused on supporting children in developing empathy by enhancing their awareness of how dogs perceive and respond to their environment. The activities designed under this priority encourage children to explore canine perspectives, emotions, and sensory experiences. Role-playing exercises were developed to enable children to imagine themselves in typical scenarios experienced by dogs, prompting reflection on emotions such as excitement, uncertainty, or stress. Complementary visual tools, including illustrations and video material, further support children in identifying and interpreting canine body language and behavioral cues. These components were included to promote the understanding that respectful human-animal interactions rely on the ability to recognize signs of comfort, discomfort, or distress. Narrative and creative tasks reinforce these learning objectives. Story-based activities introduce children to real or representative accounts of dogs in various circumstances, raising awareness of the importance of care, protection, and responsible treatment. Creative writing exercises, such as composing diary entries from a dog's perspective, and arts-based activities, such as emotion-themed collages, were incorporated as reflective tools that enable children to express their understanding in a constructive and imaginative manner.

In addition, the activity framework acknowledges the value of experiential learning. Opportunities for supervised interaction with dogs—such as encounters with therapy dogs or observations in controlled environments—were integrated to allow children to apply empathetic behaviors in practical settings. Sensory exercises, designed to mirror certain aspects of dogs' perceptual experiences, further contribute to strengthening children's awareness of the physical and emotional realities of canine life.

The second priority guiding the activity development concerns the promotion of informed and responsible attitudes toward dog ownership. To ensure that children gain a balanced understanding, the activities address both the benefits of human-canine relationships and the practical responsibilities required to support a dog's well-being. The benefits of dog ownership are introduced through discussions and examples that highlight the emotional, physical, and social advantages associated with daily interaction with dogs. These include companionship, improved emotional regulation, increased physical activity through walking and playing, and the development of social and interpersonal skills. Presenting these benefits

encourages children to recognize the positive role that animals can play in promoting human well-being. Responsibility-focused content was included to ensure that children understand the obligations inherent in caring for a dog. The activities address essential components of responsible ownership, such as appropriate nutrition, healthcare, regular exercise, grooming, training, and the maintenance of a safe and secure home environment. Ethical considerations, including positive reinforcement, socialization, and adherence to community regulations, are incorporated to reinforce the message that dog ownership requires long-term commitment and consistent, responsible behavior. Responsibility simulations and guided decision-making tasks were integrated to allow children to explore practical care scenarios and reflect on the consequences of their choices. This approach supports the development of critical thinking skills while grounding learning in realistic contexts.

The final set of activities presented in the eBook reflects an integrated approach, in which empathy-building and responsibility-based learning are interwoven across tasks and thematic units. Activities that encourage emotional understanding are connected to those addressing practical care requirements, ensuring coherence and reinforcing key messages across the learning experience. This integration promotes a holistic understanding of human-animal relationships, enabling children to connect emotional awareness with responsible action.

### **3.4. Collaborative Development and Delivery of THEO's eBook**

The delivery of THEO's eBook was a collaborative, multi-step process, grounded in research and practical insights from across the consortium. KEAN, as the Work Package leader for this deliverable, coordinated the overall process, ensuring that the content met the project's goals. All partners contributed to content creation, review, and editing, focusing on clarity, coherence, and educational consistency.

The content and structure of the eBook were developed through intensive collaboration among consortium partners. Brainstorming sessions facilitated the exchange of ideas and practical examples aligned with THEO's objectives, including promoting empathy, responsibility, and active lifestyles in children. The development of the eBook was informed by the findings of Work Package 2 (WP2), which included questionnaires and interviews conducted with children and their families. These activities provided valuable feedback on children's preferences, learning styles, and

experiences with dog-assisted activities, ensuring that the eBook would be both engaging and pedagogically sound. Particularly, the partners from Inonu University contributed significant insights on proposals for empathy-building activities and suggested content regarding the benefits and responsibilities of dog ownership. This evidence-based approach was complemented by a comprehensive literature review, which reinforced best practices and helped shape the educational framework of the eBook.

The text was crafted to support both narrative storytelling and activity-based learning, allowing children to engage with the material in a meaningful and enjoyable way. The visual design and accessibility of the eBook were given careful consideration to enhance engagement and learning. ACAL led the design of the layout, including illustrations, iconography, and a carefully chosen color palette, all aimed at capturing children's attention and supporting their understanding of the content. Accessibility was prioritized, with all partners translating the eBook and its activities into their respective languages. This multilingual approach ensured that children across participating countries could benefit from the resource, reinforcing inclusivity at every stage.

This comprehensive approach, combining research-based content, collaborative development, careful editing, and engaging visual design, allowed the eBook to be delivered as a high-quality, accessible educational tool aligned with the scope and objectives of the THEO project. It stands as a testament to the consortium's shared vision and dedication, offering children a resource that is both enjoyable and transformative, while equipping educators and families with a practical tool to foster empathy, responsibility, and active living.

#### **4. Communication and Dissemination Activities**

The communication and dissemination activities associated with the storybook and its accompanying activity guide were conceived and implemented as integral components of the project's broader strategy to promote empathy towards animals, with a particular emphasis on dogs. The material seeks to enhance children's understanding of responsible dog ownership, while illustrating the emotional, social, and physical benefits that arise from positive, structured human–dog interactions. The activities included at the end of the storybook provide educators, families, and community facilitators with practical examples of engagement, particularly those

centered on physical exercise, cooperative play, and the cultivation of empathy and responsible behavior.

To ensure accessibility, equity, and relevance across all participating countries, a rigorous translation and linguistic validation process was undertaken. The eBook was translated into all project languages, followed by detailed proofreading by native speakers. This step ensured not only linguistic precision but also cultural alignment, sensitivity to local educational contexts, and age-appropriate communication. Attention was paid to the harmonization of terminology, with the aim of preserving consistency in core concepts—such as dog welfare, empathy-building, and responsible care—across all linguistic versions. The outcome is a coherent, high-quality educational resource that retains its pedagogical integrity regardless of the language in which it is delivered.

The eBook is currently published on the project website, forming the first stage of its public dissemination. Building on this initial release, further dissemination actions are planned to extend the material's reach and facilitate broad uptake. These actions include publication on partner institutional websites, integration into digital libraries, and distribution during project-related events, such as training workshops, conferences, and awareness-raising activities. Educators and stakeholders will be provided with downloadable, print-ready versions to encourage use in formal educational settings, non-formal learning environments, and within families. Such multimodal availability supports flexible deployment of the resource, enabling adaptation to local teaching needs and community contexts.

The project's promotional activities are designed to reinforce visibility, encourage stakeholder engagement, and stimulate long-term use of the material. A coordinated online communication campaign—implemented via newsletters, structured social media messaging, and partner communication networks—will highlight the educational contribution of the storybook and the relevance of empathy-building in contemporary child development. These actions will also underscore the significance of responsible dog ownership, the welfare needs of animals, and the mutual benefits derived from active, healthy interactions between children and dogs. The storybook will additionally be presented at upcoming multiplier events, serving both as a dissemination tool and as a catalyst for dialogue among educators, policymakers, animal welfare professionals, and community representatives. This outreach will be complemented by the inclusion of the eBook in

post-event informational kits and follow-up communication packages, designed to ensure continued visibility and encourage sustained engagement beyond the duration of the events.

All dissemination and communication actions are aligned with the strategic objectives of WP5. These objectives include increasing awareness of the project and its outputs, strengthening stakeholder engagement across sectors, and enhancing the long-term impact and sustainability of the project's results. WP5 also aims to facilitate knowledge transfer, support the mainstreaming of innovative educational approaches, and promote synergies that will continue to advance animal welfare education after the project's conclusion. Through consistent messaging, coordinated dissemination, and structured stakeholder engagement, the project seeks to ensure that the storybook and its activity guide become effective tools in fostering empathy, responsibility, and active living.

The communication strategy identifies three primary target groups, each addressed through tailored channels and approaches. Families and dog owners constitute a key audience, as the storybook provides concrete guidance on responsible dog care, encourages safe and meaningful interaction, and raises awareness of the welfare needs of dogs within the household. Animal associations, veterinarians, shelters, sport clubs, and educators represent a second crucial group; they are provided with practical materials that can complement their work with children, enhance community engagement, and support structured daily activities involving dogs. A third target group includes local authorities, associations, and the broader public. Communication efforts directed at this group are designed to inform, advise, and encourage the integration of project principles into community policies and local programming.

Across all target groups, communication channels include digital platforms, professional networks, community events, and institutional dissemination mechanisms. The combined use of these channels ensures broad outreach and enables the project to address both general audiences and specialized professional communities. By implementing a coordinated, comprehensive, and multilingual communication strategy, the project ensures that the storybook and its activity guide achieve widespread distribution and contribute meaningfully to the development of positive human–animal relationships in educational, familial, and community settings.

Through these efforts, the project advances its overarching mission of promoting empathy, responsibility, and health-conscious behavior among children, while fostering constructive and sustainable interactions between young people and animals.

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## The ebook



# THEO AND THE MAGIC PAWPRINTS





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# **INTRODUCTION**

Dogs are not just pets; they are friends, helpers, and even heroes! This is the story of Theo, a special dog with a big heart.

THEO's E-BOOK aims to:

- Encourage empathy towards animals, especially dogs.
- Show the benefits and responsibilities of having a dog, emphasizing good practices related to play and physical exercise.
- Offer examples of activities that can be done with dogs and highlight the benefits of these activities.
- Promote inclusion through dog-assisted activities, supporting emotional well-being and social interaction.
- Highlight the importance of therapy and assistance dogs in improving lives.

# MEET THEO

**THEO** is very special dog. Not just of his **GOLDEN** fur, his bright eyes, or because he loves helping people feel safe and happy.

What makes Theo really, really **SPECIAL** is that he is a **THERAPY DOG**.

I AM THEO  
A THERAPY DOG

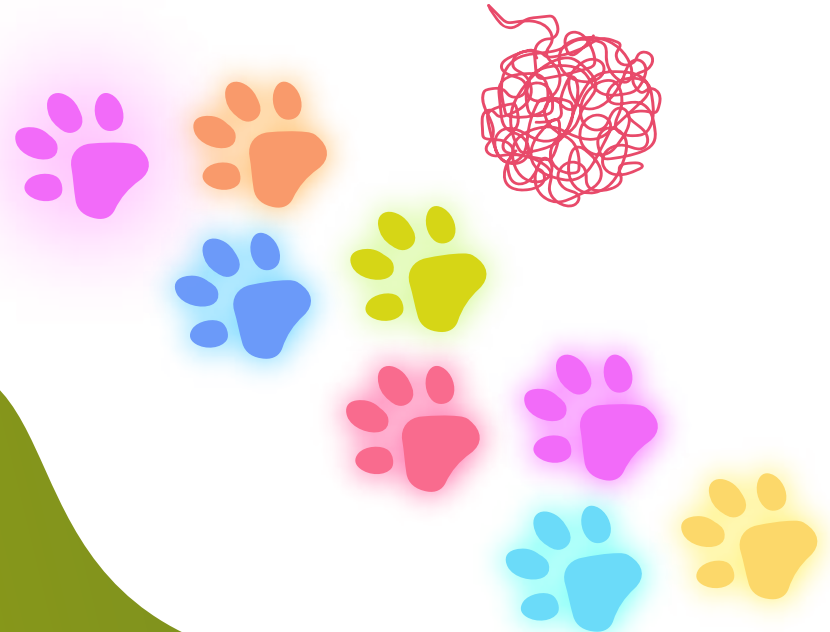


And what exactly is a therapy dog?

??????

A furry friend to those in need! Therapy dogs are trained pets that travel to schools, nursing homes and hospitals to **HELP** people relax and feel at ease.

And today, he is about to meet a new friend **LENA**, a girl who feels **NERVOUS** around dogs!




# LENA'S FEAR

**LENA**, is a quiet girl who doesn't like dogs, and for some reason, that always SURPRISES everyone.



I AM LENA



When she says she doesn't like them, people look at her as if she was a stranger. 

**LENA** feels misunderstood, "They're always making a mess," she says. "They bark too loudly! They **JUMP** too much!"



WOOF!  
WOOF!



But one day, Lena's mom takes her to the park and introduces her to a very special dog...



I have a **surprise** for you, **LENA**, so I need you to close your eyes," her mother says.



"What is it? Can I see?" **LENA** asks, excited.

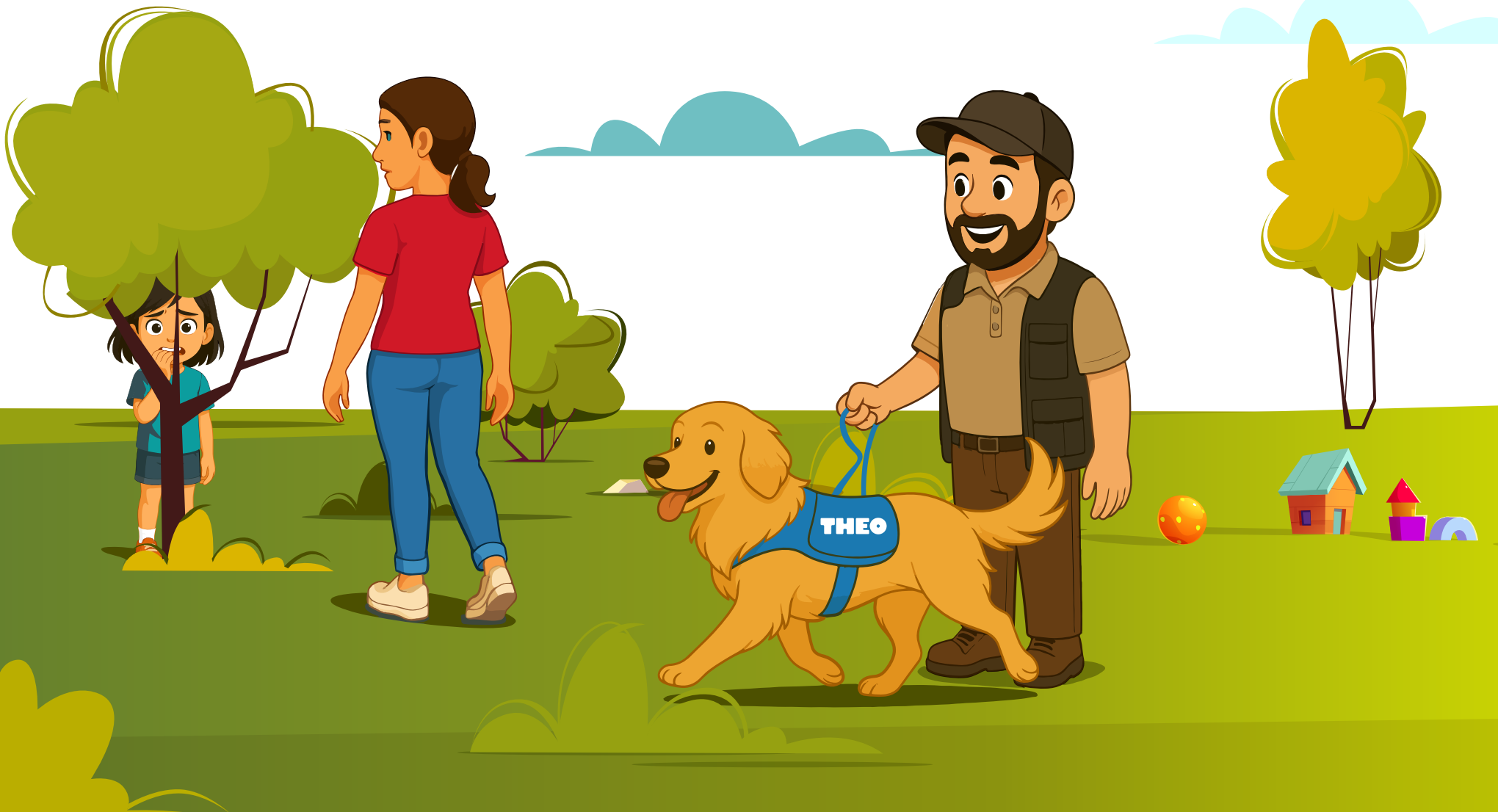
-There is someone I want you to meet. **THEO**, come!



# A GENTLE STEP

It is a very strange first meeting. **LENA** hides behind a tree and watches from a distance. Every time she looks at **THEO**, he wags his tail as if greeting her back.

Eventually, Lena calms down and approaches **THEO**. “You can trust him,” Theo’s trainer says. “He’s a professional friend.”



"Would you like to give him a treat?" The trainer adds with a smile.

Theo's eyes shine brighter when he hears the word treat.

**LENA** hesitates at first, but she carefully holds out her hand and gasps as **THEO** gently takes the treat.

"Wow! He's so... soft"

WOW



# LEARNING TO TRUST

Over the next few days, **LENA** goes on walks with **THEO** in order to overcome her fear of dogs.

Her mother tells her that befriending a dog is a very special process: it may need patience and trust, but if done correctly, it can result in an unbreakable bond.

**LENA** is especially interested in how **THEO** always knows how to help those who feel sad or **NERVOUS**.



"Dogs understand our feelings"



**LENA** remembers the trainer said. "So they always try to make us smile." And bit by bit, Lena starts feeling safe around **THEO**, enjoying their walks together.



# THE RAINY DAY

One day, Lena notices a little boy crying over his toys. He said he had to return home because it was going to rain, but he still couldn't find his things.

And when **THEO** sees this, he immediately rushes towards the kid!

“**THEO**, **NO!**” Lena says, worried. But to Lena's surprise, the boy smiles and hugs **THEO**.



Then, using his sharp sense of smell, **THEO** walks around the park and tracks one by one all of the kid's toys. And as Theo hands the last one to the boy's lap and wags his tail, **LENA** realizes that...

**“THEO MAKES  
PEOPLE HAPPY!”**



# FACING HER FEAR

Both at home and at school, **LENA** has started to smile and talk more with her friends and her family. Many even say her good mood is contagious!

One day, Lena sketches a very cute drawing of **THEO** and, excitedly, tells her mom her newest goal: "I want to learn how to take care of dogs!"

The next day, **LENA** learns how to brush Theo's fur, and how to train him with commands like, "Sit!" "Stay!", and after the training, "Good boy!"

When she shares her goal with the dog trainer, he smiles and tells her, "Then, you're doing great, Theo already considers you his best friend!"



# THE BIG HUG

One afternoon, after playing in the park, Theo gets too excited and suddenly jumps on Lena! He wags his tail and nudges her hand with his head. She begins to get nervous, but... She finally giggles and gives him a big hug!

"I love Theo!" she says. "I'm not scared anymore, dogs really are our friends!"



The rest of that day, Lena and Theo run around the park and play fetch with a frisbee. All that running makes both of them feel very tired and happy.

“It was a very good day!” Lena thinks, as they laugh and lay on the grass.



# LENA'S PROMISE

**LENA** would have never imagined how much her life would change after meeting that therapy dog. Since then, whenever she walks in the park with Theo, Lena looks after those who feel like her, sad, anxious, or scared of dogs, so they can recover their happiness pawprints.

“Trust him,” Lena says whenever he approaches a new friend.

**HE'S A VERY,  
VERY  
SPECIAL  
DOG.**

Dogs are not only friends or helpers, but real heroes! From them we learn kindness, gentleness and care. While giving her best friend a yummy treat and a hug, Lena feels that step by step, she is improving the world.



## **ACTIVITIES & BENEFITS SECTION**

### 1. Daily Walk Challenge

**Activity:** Plan and keep a weekly walking calendar. Go on walks with your dog for 15–30 minutes a day. Include different environments (park, beach, street).

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Promotes physical activity, responsibility, and routine-building.
- **For the dog:** Maintains physical health and reduces behavioral problems from boredom.

### 2. Playtime & Toy Rotation

**Activity:** Rotate different toys weekly to keep playtime exciting. Create DIY toys (e.g., a rope puller or a sock-ball).



**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Sparks creativity and hands-on engagement.
- **For the dog:** Provides mental stimulation and prevents destructive behaviors.



### 3. Calm & Connect Time



**Activity:** Practice sitting quietly next to your dog while petting it gently or brushing its fur. Teach basic commands using positive reinforcement.

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Teaches patience, emotional regulation, and communication skills.
- **For the dog:** Strengthens the bond with the person and reinforces training.

### 4. Hide and Sniff

**Activity:** Hide treats around the house or yard and encourage the dog to find them using its nose.

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Encourages planning and observation.
- **For the dog:** Stimulates natural sniffing instincts and brain activity.



## 5. Creative Expression with Dogs

**Activity:** Draw your dog, write a short story about your adventures together, or take photos of your dog doing funny things.

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Develops imagination and creative expression.
- **For the dog:** Gets quality time and attention from their human.

## 6. Outdoor Adventure Days

**Activity:** Plan a nature day (e.g., hiking or beach day) where your dog can safely run, swim, or explore.

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Boosts connection to nature, improves physical health, and builds empathy.
- **For the dog:** Provides excitement, exercise, and mental enrichment.

## 7. Teach a New Trick Together

**Activity:** Pick a new trick every month (e.g., sit, roll over, paw) and work on it daily using rewards.

**Benefits:**

- **For the child/person:** Teaches consistency, motivation, and joy of achievement.
- **For the dog:** Builds confidence and reinforces positive behavior.

## 8. Dog Care Checklist!

**Activity:** Write 3 things every happy dog needs.

**Benefits:**

- **For kids:** Builds awareness of animal welfare and responsibility.
- **For dogs:** Encourages better care and attention from young caregivers.



## 9 . My Dog Friend

**Activity:** If you had a dog, what would you name them? What games would you play?

**Benefits:**

- **For kids:** Encourages imagination and emotional connection.
- **For dogs:** Promotes thoughtful planning before pet adoption.

## 10. Obstacle Course Challenge!

**Activity:** Set up a small obstacle course (using pillows, cones, or chairs) and guide your dog through it with treats and encouragement.

**Benefits:**

- **For kids:** Develops creativity and leadership skills.
- **For dogs:** Provides physical exercise and mental stimulation.



## 11. Storytime with Theo!

**Activity:** Read your favorite book to your dog and see how they react.

**Benefits:**

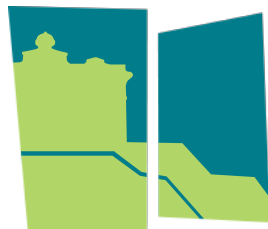
- **For kids:** Builds reading confidence and emotional tone awareness.
- **For dogs:** Enjoys the calm sound of their human's voice.



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# MEET THEO

- a joyful, loyal dog who loves to play, explore, and make new friends!

This storybook invites children on an exciting journey filled with kindness, curiosity, and wagging tails.

Through Theo's adventures, young readers will:

- Learn how to care for dogs with love and responsibility
- Get creative with fun activities
- Discover the power of empathy and companionship

**Whether you have a dog or dream of one, Theo will be your guide to a world of pawsitive learning!**



*A heartwarming story and activity book that brings children and dogs closer together.*