

PETS WHO HEAL

Meet the animals whose unconditional love helped their owners make major changes in their health and well-being.



WALKING A PUPPY UPS YOUR SPEED 28%.

« **SAMSON** "I was a total couch potato with high blood pressure and cholesterol," Hillary Zody says. "I found my inner exerciser when I rescued 11-year-old Samson in 2006." Hillary started walking with Samson; he enjoyed the exercise, and Hillary was surprised to find she did, too. In fact, research shows that dog owners are active for 30 minutes more a day than non-dog owners. Even without diet changes, Hillary lost 10 pounds and lowered her blood pressure and cholesterol. Although Samson has passed away, Hillary has kept up her routine, exercising with the three dogs she has now. "Our walks give me time to reflect and gather my thoughts. If I have to skip one, I feel like my day is missing something."



BOGART

Alicia McKay has battled anxiety and depression since she was young. But everything changed when Alicia was matched with Bogart, a now 6-year-old German shepherd trained to recognize Alicia's panic attacks. "When Bogart senses that I'm going into an anxiety spiral, he diverts my attention with little groans or by shoving his head into my hands or arms," Alicia says. Across the country, service dogs help people with anxiety disorders live full lives. While Bogart has given Alicia courage to do daily activities like take public transportation, he also inspired her to achieve bigger goals: In October 2016, Alicia ran her first half-marathon with Bogart by her side. "He gave me the chance to really live." ■

JUST ONE INTERACTION WITH AN ANIMAL RELEASES STRESS-REDUCING HORMONES.

COOPER

Alexandra Janelli knew she had weight to lose, but she had no motivation to exercise until she rescued Cooper, an Australian shepherd. He had a limp and needed exercise. So Alex started walking, then running, with him every morning. "First, we only did a quarter mile," she says. They quickly ran farther and more often. Alexandra started losing weight, and Cooper's limp improved.

Now the pair run three days a week and take a daily morning walk. "I wouldn't miss our time together for the world."



« **JASMINE**

It's been said that pets can sense when something's off with their humans; in one study, professionally trained dogs helped detect cancer. Stephanie May-Sanchez experienced that sixth sense firsthand. When she began having episodes of radiating pain from her chest to her jaw, her 13-year-old cat, Jasmine, would bat at the left side of Stephanie's chest. "Jasmine's behavior spurred my husband to take me to the emergency room last New Year's Eve during one of the episodes," Stephanie says. The diagnosis: supraventricular tachycardia (an abnormally fast heart rate).

Today, Stephanie takes medication to help control her condition, but she gives Jasmine props for playing a huge role in her well-being. "Jazzie's purring is the best medicine."

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PET OWNERS HAVE A REDUCED RISK OF HEART DISEASE AND DEPRESSION.