

Pet Aware Policy



Ruah Community Services

Guidelines for responsible pet care

Worker Edition

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Innovation of the Pet Policy

Ruah Community Services Launches Pet Policy with RSPCA WA

The idea of a pet policy began with concerns for the welfare of pets belonging to potentially vulnerable members of our community. With this concern in mind workers contacted the RSPCA to discuss ways in which these concerns could be addressed. The RSPCA responded enthusiastically to the idea of implementing a duty of care for animals. Thanks to support from the RSPCA Education Officer, Lynn Smith, a Memorandum of Understanding was written along with the policy presented here.

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What Is Responsible Pet Care?

Ruah Community Services recognises that the benefits of pet ownership to people can be significantly high. Therefore, the Ruah worker will support the client to become, or continue to be, responsible pet owners where possible; however this is subject to the welfare of the pet being maintained.

Having a pet means that the owner is responsible for the whole of their life. This requires time, money, energy and commitment. If there are doubts that the owner is able to provide these basic items, then action must be taken.

The decision to have or keep a pet cannot be taken lightly. All pets require:

- * Adequate shelter from the elements
- * Protection from potentially harmful situations
- * Balanced diet

- * Opportunity to take exercise
- * Vaccinations, worming and flea treatments as necessary for the species.
- * Veterinary care in cases of illness or injury
- * Interaction with its owner.

These are the basic requirements that all pet owners must provide. Ruah Community Services will aim to provide the client with advice they need regarding the care of their pet or pet ownership. (Pet care brochures are provided by the RSPCA).

Ruah workers are encouraged to inform clients of duty of care for pets, and boundaries regarding confidentiality, at the initial stage of engagement.



“Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.”
~ Roger Caras

Animal Welfare Act

Where there are concerns for the safety or well being of a pet, Ruah Community Services will endeavour to support the client to resolve difficulties in caring for a pet, where practical. However, when difficulties are unlikely to be short term, the Ruah worker will seek to have the pet surrendered to the RSPCA. If a client requires hospitalisation, the Ruah worker will support the client with finding alternative arrangements for the care of their pet. If the client is faced with loss of housing, caring for a pet may be very difficult. Therefore, situations such as this have other considerations that need to be taken into account.

In the Animal Welfare Act 2002, cruelty to animals is defined in Section 19 (2) and (3):

Cruelty to animals is/includes a situation where a person:

- * Tortures, maliciously beats or wounds or otherwise ill-treats, the animal
- * Intentionally or recklessly poisons the animal
- * Does not provide the animal with proper and sufficient food or water
- * Does not provide the animal with shelter, shade or other protection from the elements as is reasonably necessary to ensure its welfare, safety and health
- * Abandons the animal, whether at the place where it is normally kept or elsewhere
- * Causes an animal unnecessary harm.

Any Ruah worker who has concerns that any of the above may have occurred must discuss this matter immediately with their supervisor, and advise and/or report it to the RSPCA in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding.

Duty Of Care

A pet may become unwell, sometimes unexpectedly, and may require veterinary assistance immediately. Veterinary care may be expensive and, in some instances, the pet will need to be transported to the veterinary clinic. Workers can support clients to contact Animal Aid Inc. on 0405 039 067 to provide rebates for veterinary fees of people on the Healthcare Card or Pensioner Concession Card. Workers are encouraged to take the time to discuss (with clients) the possible implications of veterinary care costs, as they could become quite significant. This is so that the client can make a fully informed decision as to whether they can afford the potential costs. Workers may also support the client in enquiring about veterinary fees before any treatment begins.

It is up to the discretion of the Ruah worker and their supervisor whether or not transport of the pet to the veterinary clinic is provided. The Ruah worker must consider if the pet can be adequately secured and supervised in the car when travelling, so that safety is not compromised. The Ruah worker will also need to consider if the pet has any parasitic diseases that may be transferable to other users of the vehicle, thus posing a health risk. A list of considerations for pet transport is outlined on the next page. All service programs/offices are encouraged to have a set of pet transport equipment, in case of an emergency.

Ruah workers should not feel obligated to take a sick animal to the veterinary clinic if they deem it is unsafe to do so. If the worker is unable to assist with transport, they can support the client to source the most affordable mobile vet/home consultation, and to contact Animal Aid Inc. for financial assistance.

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated” Mahatma Gandhi

Workers Welfare

Ruah Community Services is aware that workers can often come into contact with unhygienic surfaces, bacteria and viruses from faeces and urine left by pets. If workers were to assist clients with handling their sick pet, the risks are significantly higher. To protect workers from possible infection, Ruah Community Services will cover the costs of vaccinations for Tetanus and Hepatitis with their General Practitioner. The vaccinations are not compulsory for workers; however, workers are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated if exposed to insanitary conditions.

When Ruah workers receive their vaccination, Ruah Community Services will pay for the difference in vaccination costs after the Medicare cover.

Considerations for Pet Transport

Although this list is expansive, it is written with the purpose of assisting Ruah Community Services workers when considering whether or not to transport a client's sick pet to the veterinary clinic.

The following are some considerations for the Ruah worker:

- * Does the client have access to a pet blanket?
- * If transporting a dog, does the client have access to a dog harness of an appropriate size?
- * If transporting a cat, rabbit, guinea pig or any other small animal, does the client have access to a carrier/cage appropriate for transportation of the animal?
- * Is the animal vomiting or bleeding?
- * Does the animal have bladder and bowel control?
- * Is the animal behaving in an erratic manner, e.g. having seizures or exhibiting irritable or aggressive behaviour?
- * Does the animal have fleas or ticks?
- * Can the client sit with the animal and provide supervision whilst travelling in the vehicle?

Each office/ service programme is entitled to purchase a small set of pet transport equipment. If the office does not already have this equipment, the worker can ask the coordinator/team leader about purchasing the equipment. These items can be purchased from the RSPCA for a minimal fee.

Grief and Loss



Ruah Community Services recognises that the loss of a loved pet can result in strong feelings of loss and grief, and understands the need for acknowledgement of this loss. For some people the relationship they have with their pet is the most significant one they have. As such, the loss needs to be acknowledged.

The client can be encouraged to consider some of the following ways of doing this:

- * Write a poem, journal, song or story about the pet.
- * Take lots of photos or make a video tape.
- * Write a letter to the pet.
- * Create art work that reminds them of the pet.
- * Keep mementos of the pet, like a collar.
- * Talk about how the pet has enriched their life.

“A dog is the only thing on earth that will love you more than you love yourself.” ~ Josh Billings

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