
Wellbeing Dog policy

Date Reviewed:

February 4, 2025

Regulation:

100,113,114

Standards:

3.2

Rationale

Woden Valley ELC is committed to promoting the wellbeing of all students and educators, and a Wellbeing Dog may be used to assist with this. The initiative to introduce a Wellbeing Dog Program is to enhance the nature based program currently offered within the centre. The key aim of the Wellbeing Dog Program is to promote empathy and wellbeing amongst young children and adults who may be experiencing issues with their mental health and wellbeing, trauma, separation, grief and loss and family and domestic violence.

In particular the Wellbeing Dog aims to:

- Provide comfort and support to young children and educators who are experiencing high levels of distress
- Facilitate communication between the student and dog handler
- Facilitate the development of the therapeutic relationship

Purpose

The aim is to use the Wellbeing Dog as a companion across a range of settings, including one-on-one and group settings.

1. Within the one-on-one setting the Wellbeing Dog accompanies students when they may be discussing emotionally provoking information with the Wellbeing Dog Handler or needing emotional support after experiencing crisis.
2. Within the group setting, the Wellbeing Dog may be trailed in the classroom context with the goal of comforting students with mental health difficulties, support neurodiverse students and offer ongoing access to an animal.
3. The Wellbeing Dog could also attend larger group events with the goal of identifying and supporting students with mental health difficulties, especially during nature walks and excursions.

Guiding Principles for Practice

1. Research Based Practice

Research suggests animals can assist the therapeutic setting in the following ways:

- Animals can teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
 - Help individuals develop social skills
 - The relationship between therapy animals and the therapist can be a model for a healthy relationship
 - The presence of animals is soothing and can more quickly build the therapeutic relationship for children, adolescents and adults
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- Patting an animal has been demonstrated to lower blood pressure, lower anxiety and lessen stress
- It has been shown that animals have the potential to lower human anxiety by simply being present
- Using animals in discussions and skill development is potentially less threatening, than working only with human interactions, while also providing practice for how participants may behave in their human-to-human relationships (see Lambin, 2014).

2. The work with animals also has the potential for children to promote:

- Healing and wellbeing through the calming, accepting and responsive nature of small animals
- Self-esteem through the skills and responsibility gained in regard to caring and handling animals.

3. Health and Safety

The centre is committed to the implementation of a Wellbeing Dog Program in a safe and supervised manner. Infection and injury risk management strategies include:

- Careful dog selection
- Regular grooming of the animal to reduce the risk of allergic reaction
- Selecting a well-trained and well-behaved dog to minimize the risk of animal bites and/or injuries
- Obtaining information from staff and students in regard to allergies through in place Medical information collection upon enrolment. If required a list of any children/staff who are anaphylactic will kept by the Handler
- Proof of vaccinations are provided to the centre.
- Twice yearly general health checks of the dog with documentation provided to the centre, to maintain infection control.
- If the Wellbeing Dog is unfit to attend the centre due to illness etc., contact should be postponed until the animal has fully recovered.

4. Hygiene is essential for all participants:

- Alcohol-based hand rub available to all students and staff upon their request.
- The Handler should wash their hands with soap after toileting the Wellbeing Dog and disposing of soiled or dirty towels, using alcohol-based hand rub if necessary.

5. Animal Welfare

The centre has a responsibility for maintaining the dog's health and wellbeing by the following:

- The Wellbeing Dog Handler is the guardian whilst the dog is at the centre and sessions are conducted in an area that is suitable for both the student and the Wellbeing Dog.
 - Provide the Wellbeing Dog with fresh food, drink and appropriate shelter and nurturing
 - Keep and maintain separate animal records
 - Where possible, the Handler will toilet the animal in designate areas at the centre in a safe and clean manner whilst cleaning up after the animal. Should the animal toilet in an undesignated area, the area will be disinfected as required
 - The Wellbeing Dog must not be left alone with a student
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- The Wellbeing Dog must be removed from group settings if it becomes distressed
- The Wellbeing Dog must wear a vest, special lead or bandana while working

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Related documents:

Wellbeing Dog Procedure

References:

Animal Welfare Act 1992 | *Acts*. (n.d.). ACT Legislation Register. <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/1992-45/>

Transport Canberra and City Services. (n.d.). *Animal welfare*. City Services. <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/pets-and-wildlife/domestic-animals/animal-welfare>

Transport Canberra and City Services. (n.d.-b). *Education and awareness school program*. City Services. <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/pets-and-wildlife/domestic-animals/dogs/education-and-awareness-school-program>
