



COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMS



Information for Volunteers & Foster Carers

Introduction and General Information

Thank you for enquiring about the RSPCA Community Outreach Programs and expressing interest in becoming a volunteer and/or foster carer! The RSPCA Community Outreach Programs relies heavily on our dedicated team of foster carers and volunteers to assist disadvantaged individuals or people in crisis situations with their pets. Any contribution you can make to these programs is greatly appreciated!

Please find enclosed:

1. Some general information about the different RSPCA Community Outreach Programs
2. An outline of the types of activities we ask volunteers/foster carers to perform
3. Forms to be completed to become a volunteer/foster carer

We hope that the information provided encourages you to step further into the satisfying world of volunteering and foster care. In advance, the owners and their pets thank you for your time and compassion.

Please contact the Programs team at the RSPCA on the number listed on the last page if you have any further questions.

Why are Pets Important?

The RSPCA strongly believes in the mental, emotional and physical benefits of the relationships between people and pets. Pets give people a sense of purpose, a reason to get up in the morning. At a time when the older person often feels that they are of no further use to the community, pets provide loyal companionship and enable them to be maintained in their own homes for longer periods of time.

The therapeutic benefits of pet ownership for socially isolated people have been well documented. People who keep a pet have been reported to:

- adapt more quickly to stress associated with bereavement and other adverse events
- require fewer visits to the doctor
- have stronger emotional stability and
- maintain a sounder state of health

A study published in the Journal of American Geriatrics Society showed that senior citizens who own pets are:

- less likely to be depressed
- more able to tolerate social isolation
- more active than those who do not own pets



The Pets of Older Persons (POOPs) program assists socially isolated elderly people by offering assistance with their pets in times of crisis. The POOPs Program aims to keep pets and their elderly owners happy, healthy and together in their own homes for as long as possible.

POOPs is a joint program between St Joseph's Hospital Auburn and the RSPCA NSW. The program began in 2003 when ACAT staff at St Josephs found that elderly pet owners would not attend to their own medical needs for fear of abandoning their much loved pets.



Who is eligible for POOPs?

POOPs is specifically designed to help people 65 years of age or older who are socially isolated, with no relatives or friends willing/able to help, and require assistance with care of their pets.

Palliative care patients of any age who are socially isolated may also access POOPs services.

POOPs services:

- Temporary foster accommodation and/or emergency boarding of the pet should the owner require medical treatment, respite or other assistance
- Assistance with veterinary treatment
- Assistance with pet grooming
- Home visits to assist the elderly with basic pet care
- Volunteer network to assist with dog walking, transport to and from local vet, etc



HELPING HOMELESS PETS AND THEIR PEOPLE



Every day, right around Australia, there are people with pets without a place to call “home”. Often, this is through unexpected circumstances and for reasons beyond their control that may be very stressful and traumatic.

The RSPCA strongly believes in the mental, emotional and physical benefits of the relationships between people and pets. In the case of a person who finds themselves

homeless, their pet is often the only positive thing in their lives during a time of uncertainty and disadvantage.

Our research has found that people facing homelessness place great value on the relationships they have with their animals, and that the idea of having to “give up” their pet/s is a cause of major distress to people who are already suffering hardship.

Living Ruff Initiatives

- Providing access to food for pets
- Providing emergency boarding and foster care
- Providing access to veterinary treatment
- Education and outreach services



SAFE BEDS FOR PETS

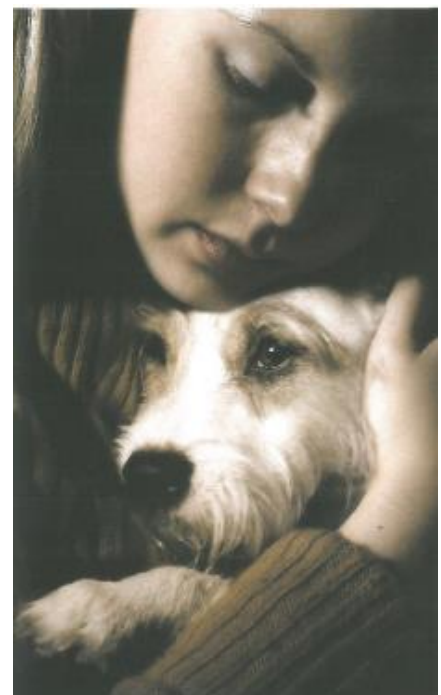
ALL FAMILY MEMBERS DESERVE A LIFE FREE FROM FEAR AND ABUSE

Studies have shown that one in three Australian women experiencing domestic violence delay leaving the abusive relationship because of fear of what will happen to their pets. The RSPCA NSW Safe Beds for Pets program aims to assist in empowering people to escape domestic violence in the home by offering safe temporary accommodation for pets.

Perpetrators of domestic violence usually attack those that are the most vulnerable, so frequently target the family pet. Safe Beds for Pets is specifically designed to help victims of domestic violence. It is common practice for the perpetrator of domestic violence to lure family members back home by threatening to harm the pet. With the Safe Beds for Pets Program families can now leave domestic violence situations and not fear for the safety of their pets. In most cases, these animals are referred through to the RSPCA from a domestic violence counseling service.

Safe Beds for Pets Checklist

- Please let us know if your pet has any health problems or is on medication.
- Provide as much information as you can on your pet's behaviour – this will assist with settling your pet into their emergency accommodation as quickly as possible.
- Keep in regular contact with the Safe Beds for Pets Coordinator who can give you updates on your pet's welfare and assist with getting you and your pet back together again as soon as possible.
- We want to help keep you and your pet safe – please keep information about your pet's emergency accommodation confidential.



Note: To mitigate risk the volunteer / foster care network is not accessed for Safe Beds for Pets clients

Becoming a Community Outreach Programs volunteer/foster carer

Anyone can apply to become a Programs volunteer and/or foster carer.

Volunteers/foster carers must fill out an application form, indicate what activities they would be able to perform (dog walking, feeding, helping with transport to and from vet, etc.) and they must pass a criminal record check as they may be accessing the homes of the elderly and vulnerable.

Volunteers and foster carers are provided with training and a manual which contains further information about the program and emergency contact details. Volunteers and foster carers will be contacted and continually supported by a Programs team member, additional training may also be offered for specific areas of interest.

Approved volunteers/foster carers are fully covered by the RSPCA NSW insurance policy.

Foster Care and Volunteer Activities

The RSPCA Community Outreach Programs is always looking for volunteers and foster carers to help out in any way they can. Many elderly and disabled people are unable to attend to their pets' needs and are unable to drive a car to take their pet to the vet or the groomer. Consequently, they need people to help them feed, groom and walk their animals, as well as take them to the vet.

The activities we find people commonly need help with are:

- 1. Dog walking** - Many elderly people are physically unable to walk their dog and become distressed when their pet is not getting the exercise it needs. We ask volunteers who live in the nearby area to walk the dogs of those elderly people in need. Dogs need to be walked on a regular basis but volunteers are under no obligation to commit to regular walking times. These can be arranged at the volunteer's convenience.
- 2. Animal feeding** - People sometimes go into hospital for short periods of time (days to a week). In these cases we do not organise foster care, but ask volunteers who live in the nearby area to feed animals in the homes (often backyards/verandas) of hospital patients. This provides these people with the peace of mind that their animal is being looked after, and allows them to attend to their own medical needs with as little disruption to the pet's usual routine as possible.
- 3. Transport** - Many of our clients have used a local vet for a number of years but due to age and/or disability, are no longer able to drive a car or walk the distance to get their pet to the vet. We try to keep clients using their local vet as much as possible, but in order to do so we need help to transport animals to and from the local vet. If you are willing to use your own car to transport animals to a local vet, or walk a dog to the vet (if it is within walking distance), we would love to hear from you!

4. **Grooming** – Are you able to bath, brush, trim, clip nails etc? These are also areas that some pet owners have difficulty with. For example, arthritis for elderly clients often makes it difficult to manage scissors and nail clippers.
5. **Medicating** – Sometimes pets need to have their flea treatment or worming and the owner is unable to or uncomfortable about doing this so just needs a hand once a month or quarterly to administer a top spot application or give tablets.
6. **Foster Care** – Owners having to go into hospital or access crisis short term accommodation often require care for their animals whilst they are receiving the assistance they need. Fostering can range from 1 week to months depending upon the owners needs; we also often have owners that have ongoing medical needs so they may need foster care for their pets at regular intervals whilst they receive treatment.

Please note: The amount of time you dedicate to these activities, and the type of activities you want to be involved in is entirely up to you. Only do what you feel comfortable doing, when you have the time to do it. All assistance is very much appreciated!

Becoming a volunteer/foster carer

Before you can start volunteering for Programs, you need to fill out a few forms and send them back to the Programs team at RSPCA NSW. The forms you need to fill out are:

1. **A Volunteer application form** - you need to fill out your personal details and indicate what type of activities you would be interested in performing - i.e. Feed dogs/cats and walk dogs etc.
2. **A Foster Carer application form** – you need to complete your personal details and indicate what sort of animal/s you would be able to foster and the housing and care arrangements you have for those animals – a premises inspection will be carried out initially and on a regular basis to ensure facilities are suitable for ongoing care.
3. **Criminal Record Check forms** - A criminal record check is also required as we undertake these checks on all new potential volunteers for the safety of our elderly clients. Once we receive your application back a company called 'Verify' will be in contact with you to gain consent for the criminal record check to be completed.

Once we have your completed forms and the CRC clearance is obtained; we will contact you to organise an induction and to provide you with guidance, training and the volunteer and foster manuals.

**Thank you for your interest in supporting this very worthwhile service
to our community and those in need.
Your involvement is truly appreciated by the owners, programs team
and most importantly, the much loved pets.**

Contact Details

RSPCA Community Outreach Programs

PO Box 34
YAGOONA NSW 2199

Phone: (02) 9782 4408

Fax: (02) 9770 7593

poops@rspcansw.org.au