

Pets in the Workplace Policy

1. Purpose

Inala Community House (ICH) recognises the important role of pets in workers' lives. ICH also recognises the positive impacts that pets can have in the workplace as they can create a fun environment, encourage interactions with others and helps people in remembering to get up for a break.

Having pets in the workplace is a privilege and owners have responsibilities which they have to respect. All owners who wish to take part in this program must agree to comply with this policy.

This policy only applies to dogs or cats. Other pets are not included at this time. Owners with alternative pets can contact HR to explore whether other pets can be permitted.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, Board members, volunteers, students, trainees and contractors. For the purposes of this policy, these persons shall be referred to as workers.

This policy does not apply to service animals which have been certified and have undertaken the Public Access Test.

This policy also does not apply to pets not owned by workers. Pets of service users, visitors or any other person (not including service animals) are not permitted to be on ICH premises.

3. Definitions

Service Animal is a generic term for a guide, hearing, or service dog specifically trained to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist a person with a disability. Service animals are permitted in public areas and to deny access can be a breach of discrimination laws. Assistance animals are not to be confused with therapy, emotional support or companion animals which are not required to undertake a Public Access Test (PAT).

Dangerous or Menacing Animals can be declared by the Council. They are subject to additional requirements as a result of an attack on another animal or a human.

4. Policy

This policy seeks to provide a safe, happy and healthy environment for all team members while also balancing this with work responsibilities and safety considerations.

4.1 Safety

This policy seeks to provide a balanced approach with appropriate consideration of the following risks:

- From humans to animals such as:
 - Inappropriate interaction (e.g. interacting while eating or sleeping)
 - Poor treatment (e.g. pulling their tail, hitting the animal)
 - Not recognising dog warning behaviour (e.g. ears back, tail down or wagging slowly, snarling/growling, teeth bared, etc)
- Animals to other animals such as:
 - Infections or illnesses
 - Fighting or aggression
 - Infectious conditions
- From animals to humans such as:
 - Aggression and attacks
 - Injuries (e.g. if a dog was to trip someone up)
 - Infections and illnesses
 - Hygiene related issues such as coming into contact with animal waste
 - Workers, community members, service users or others not feeling safe, comfortable or healthy in the workplace

4.2 Pet Eligibility

To be eligible for the program pets must be:

- Clean
- House trained (or trained to use pee pads, litterboxes or similar)
- Obedient (depending upon the age of the pet)
- Sociable with no history of food aggression, guarding, biting or other aggressive behaviours
- Free of any communicable infections or illnesses
- Free of parasites such as fleas, ticks, hookworm or ringworm and is on appropriate and current parasite prevention medication

While a pet may be eligible, it is important that owners recognise that pets must also be suitable for the workplace, meaning that they should not become a distraction (e.g. excessive energy, barking, scratching, etc.).

ICH strongly recommends that:

- All pets are vaccinated – owners must understand that exposing unvaccinated animals to areas where other pets have been can put them at risk of illness. Some diseases can live in an environment for up to 9 months
- All pets are microchipped in the event of a pet becoming lost
- All pets should be covered under relevant insurance policies to protect the owner from injuries to other people caused by their pet (this may include pet insurance or home/rental insurance)
- Pet owners consult with vets about their pet's health prior to bringing their pet into the workplace (this includes discussing the suitability of current vaccinations)

Pets that are not permitted in the workplace include:

- Any that have been declared dangerous or menacing
- Any that are restricted breeds such as Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro, Japanese Tosa, American pit bull terrier or pit bull terrier, Perro de Presa Canario or Presa Canario

These pets must not be brought into the workplace for any reason even if control strategies have been implemented (e.g. wearing a muzzle).

4.3 Owner Responsibilities

Pet owners who wish to participate in this program must agree to comply with the following responsibilities to:

- Be fully responsible for their pet's behaviour, care and hygiene while they are in the workplace
- Be respectful of other people
- Ensure that the space is suitable and safe for their pet
- Keep their pet leashed or in a crate when outside the office
- Keep their pet with them and controlled throughout the day. Pets must be supervised at all times by the owner or make arrangements with a co-worker if necessary. Pets are the owner's responsibility and it should not be expected that other team members will care for or supervise the animal
- Refrain from taking their pet into other offices except where it has been confirmed that no other pet is there. The pet must remain leashed unless everyone is comfortable with the pet being off-leash and if the owner has confirmed that the environment is safe for the pet
- Ensure that pets do not interfere with other workers comfort or ability to do their work
- Provide their own pet items such as leashes, crates, gates, food, toys, waste bags and bowls
- Provide adequate bathroom breaks, access to water, food and exercise throughout the day
- Immediately clean up after their pet (including shedding, waste or other messes) and properly disposing of waste in an outdoor bin. Pee pads or litterboxes must be changed as soon as they become dirty to ensure the comfort of everyone in the workplace
- Be legally and financially responsible for any injury or damage caused by their pet
- Take their pet home if the pet's behaviour or health makes it a distraction, nuisance or danger to anyone else, or if asked to do so by their Manager or the CEO
 - In some cases, it may be possible to have another person pick up the pet

Owners must ensure that public interaction with pets is limited as much as possible (e.g. keeping a dog in a secure and separate area) if community members are present in the workplace.

Pet owners must also seriously consider if being in the office is in the pet's best interest. Some pets may not prefer to be in the company of new people or in a new environment. Some pets may be nervous or become stressed in these cases which may make it more likely for them to exhibit inappropriate behaviour. Other pets may have a high energy level and may be unhappy being confined to the office. Pet owners must also be mindful of their pet's tendency to wander or escape, particularly with offices where people are coming and going frequently. If a pet was to become lost, it is the owner's responsibility to find the pet.

Pet owners should also consider that bringing pets into the office is not an everyday occurrence, it is not appropriate to consider this program as a way to circumvent issues such as separation anxiety.

4.4 Restrictions

To ensure that this program is suitable for the workplace, limits any risks and to ensure that everyone is comfortable some restrictions are necessary, including:

- Bringing pets to work is not suitable if owners are:
 - Leaving the premises for visits or meetings or intending to move between multiple sites;
 - Attending professional meetings with external parties (regardless of where this occurs) or supporting service users at the workplace;
- Pets are not suitable for areas which are open to the public or which require access to public areas of buildings. An exception to this is if the building is closed to the public for the duration of the pet's stay (e.g. a team training day) or where public access is extremely limited in frequency and duration (e.g. reception) and where the pet is not kept in a public area (see Public Access Exception section below). This is to ensure that all community members feel safe and comfortable in accessing services;
- Pets in heat are not permitted to be in the workplace;
- Only one pet is allowed per building at a time. Multiple pets can result in inappropriate behaviour such as mating, aggression and causing a distraction; and
- Cats will not be permitted in the workplace where a pregnant person is working. This is a precautionary measure as this can pose risks due to toxoplasmosis and current medical advice is for pregnant women to avoid cat waste (i.e. when changing the litterbox).

Public Access Exception

In determining whether an exception may apply in regard to publicly accessible venue, the Manager must consider:

- The frequency of people visiting the site
- The average duration of people attending the site
- The number of people attending the site
- If the pet can be kept in a separate area that is not generally publicly accessible (e.g. a separate office with access limited to workers only where the owner is working)
- Whether workers are required to provide support, engage or meet with community members, participants or service users (this impacts their ability to care for and supervise their pet whilst also keeping the pet in an area separate from public and people receiving services)
- Any other relevant factor

This public access requirement is vital in ensuring that community members feel safe and comfortable when accessing and engaging with services. For this reason, exceptions should to this rule should be limited.

4.5 Approval

All pets must be approved to be in the workplace, this is on a case by case basis and one approval does not necessarily mean it will be approved for future occasions.

Managers are responsible for approving pets to be in the workplace. Managers must take into consideration:

- Confirming the date and time that the team member wishes to bring their pet to work
- Ensuring that only one pet will be in the building at a time
- Ensuring that this will not occur in a publicly accessible area except where the building is closed to the public or where an exception applies
- Confirming that the owner will be in the office for most of the day and understands that supervision of the pet is their responsibility during the day
- Checking that bringing a pet to work does not interfere with their work responsibilities or the general running of services
- Checking that the owner is aware that if there is an issue with their pet, they will be required to take the pet home or have the pet picked up
- Checking if other team members are comfortable with a pet being in the office
- Confirming what space will be necessary to accommodate a pet, generally this should be confined to the owner's workspace (e.g. litterboxes, crate, food bowl, etc.)
- Ensuring that the pet owner has read and understood this policy and a completed copy of the Pets in the Workplace Agreement has been signed with a copy being sent to HR

4.6 General

While having pets in the office can be a positive experience, it is important generally for people to remember to:

- Practice good hygiene after interacting with pets – always wash hands after interacting with pets
- Never feed a pet or attempt to approach a pet while eating without the owner's permission
- Never interact with a sleeping pet
- Never pick up a pet unless agreed by the owner
- Never approach a pet that appears fearful or aggressive

4.7 Issues

While ICH recognises the positive benefits that having a pet in the workplace can have, it is also important that all people feel safe and comfortable. It is important to recognise that some people may feel uncomfortable with pets in the workplace or may even have allergies which would cause them discomfort.

Having pets in the office needs to be agreed by the team, all team members have the right to feel safe and not have their health compromised while at work. In the event that someone is uncomfortable with pets, it should be recognised and validated. Alternative arrangements can be considered such as bringing pets on days where they are not working, bringing them for short periods on a leash for a meet and greet or making areas which will be inaccessible to the pet. Similarly, for a person with allergies, it may be possible to consider alternative strategies which do not adversely impact their health. On the occasion that a person feels uncomfortable or if there are allergies which make it untenable to have a pet in the office and alternative strategies cannot be put in place, this will be considered a pet-free space.

In the event of an issue arising with a pet, a worker is encouraged to:

- Talk to the pet owner directly
- Report it to the Manager or to HR

Managers can prohibit some or all pets from the office if it is determined that there is a risk to others, if the pet is unsuitable for the workplace or is causing issues within the team.

Owners are reminded that bringing pets to work is a privilege which can only be offered where owners take their responsibilities seriously, where pets are eligible and suitable for the workplace and where the entire team is comfortable with having pets in the workplace.

4.8 Responsibilities

Owners are responsible for:

- On each occasion, seeking approval for their pet to enter the workplace
- Ensuring that their pet is eligible and suitable for this program
- Ensuring that they understand their responsibilities
- Acknowledging that participation in this program is a privilege and that approval may or may not be granted on each occasion
- If a request is declined due to others being uncomfortable or having allergies, taking no adverse action against them or placing blame

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that the entire team is comfortable with having the pet in the office
- Ensuring that having pets in the workplace will not interfere with work responsibilities
- Taking into consideration all factors prior to giving approval for a pet to be in the workplace
- Ensuring that only one pet is in the building at all times
- Ensuring that pet owners have read and understood this policy and a completed copy of the Pets in the Workplace Agreement has been signed and sent to HR
- Ensuring that in the event that a request is declined due to others being uncomfortable or having allergies, that no adverse action is taken against them or blame placed
- Taking team member's concerns seriously and investigating as soon a complaint is received

CEO is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the workplace is a healthy, fun and comfortable place for all people
- Taking appropriate action if this program is not effective, causes distractions or otherwise negatively impacts the workplace or workers
- Reviewing and make reasonable adjustments to the *Pets in the Workplace Policy* as and when required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of team members and the effectiveness of this program

4.9 Breaches

Breaches of this policy can result in pets being banned from the workplace or disciplinary actions up to and including termination.

5. Review

This policy shall be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required after any incident involving pets or after a complaint/grievance is lodged.

This policy remains in effect unless otherwise determined by resolution of the Board of Directors.

6. Related Documents

Legislation

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

Policies

ICH Work Health and Safety Policy
ICH Risk Management Policy
ICH Health and Wellbeing Policy
ICH Grievance and Dispute Resolution Policy

Forms

Pets in the Workplace Agreement
Critical Incident Report
Non-Critical Incident Reports
Grievance Form