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ANIMALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

National Quality Standard (NQS)

Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety		
2.1	Health	Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard

Quality Area 3: Physical Environment		
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible

Education and Care Services National Regulations

Children (Education and Care Services) National Law	
168	Policies and procedures are required in relation to health and safety
170	Policies and procedures to be followed

Introduction

Educators at Woden Early Childhood Centre (WECC) are "encouraged to foster children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land" (NQS Element 3.2).

Pets help children from a young age learn to care for other living things. They can teach a sense of responsibility, care and tolerance. They can offer many opportunities for developing observational skills and basic natural science experiments.

Encouraging direct contact and developing bonds with animals can help children to develop empathy.

Providing children with access to animals within our Centre will help them learn about the life cycle, relationships and improve communication. We feel role modelling of appropriate behaviours with animals and guidance in caring for the needs of animals are beneficial for children.

Responsible ownership of pets, animals or birds that may reside at WECC or visit the premises is vital. This policy also considers the management of unwanted visitors such as pests and vermin.

Purpose

The Nominated Supervisor or Director will:

- provide a safe, clean and humane environment for all animals and birds that visit or reside at WECC
- ensure pest control measures are regularly undertaken
- ensure there are procedures in place for removing unwanted animals, pests and vermin from the premises
- ensure that an animal caretaker is appointed to care for animals in the Centre (Appendix 1)

Scope

This policy applies to children, families, staff, management, volunteers and visitors of the Centre.

Implementation

Questions to consider prior to having a pet at the Centre include:

- who will pay for the care and upkeep of the animal, including feeding, health care and cleaning?
- how will the animal be cared for on weekends and during Centre closure periods?
- what physical space is available in the Centre? Is it adequate for the animal you are thinking of?
- are all educators and families happy with the decision to keep an animal at the Centre?
- will time be available throughout the day to care for the animal or will educators be asked to give up personal time for this?
- are there any children or educators at the Centre who are allergic to, or have phobias of animals?
- what changes to the Centre's policies and procedures need to be considered? For example, the hand washing policy may need to be updated to include washing hands after having contact with the animal(s)
- what are the health and safety risks?

Other things to consider include:

- some animals, such as lizards, turtles, snakes, spiders and tropical fish may not be an appropriate choice. Check with a veterinarian if you are unsure whether a particular animal is suitable for children, and check with the local health department for regulations and advice regarding animals in education and care Centres. Some states and territories require a license for keeping certain animals.
- animals that may be more likely suitable for education and care Centres may include goldfish, hermit crabs, stick insects, mice or rats. All these animals are relatively low maintenance and can be left safely over a weekend if they are provided with sufficient food and water.

Assessing and managing risks

Whilst there are many benefits to providing children with access to animals and keeping pets at the Centre, there are issues that approved providers and educators need to consider for the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals concerned prior to choosing a pet or having an animal visit the Centre. A risk/benefit analysis should be conducted when deciding the type of animal and the way the children engage with it.

Disease

Access to animals in the Centre requires special consideration to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Health authorities identify that germs can be present on the skin, hair, feathers, scales, in the faeces, urine and saliva of animals. While these germs may not cause disease in the animal, they may cause disease in humans.

Effective hand washing and cleaning

Children and adults should employ effective hand washing after touching or feeding animals, or cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures. Cleaning of bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures can be part of the learning experience.

Appropriate supervision

Children should also be appropriately supervised when they have contact with animals to avoid potential injury or harm to the child or the animal.

WECC pets and invited visitors

- Children must be supervised at all times when interacting with pets or animals. Educators will manage any health or safety risks for the children that may be caused by animals, such as asthma and allergies.
- Educators will be responsible for assessing any situation in WECC where animals are involved to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children, families and animals.
- Management, educators, children and families should consider the rationale for having a pet and the long-term implications of such a decision prior to getting the pet.
- Any animal or pet kept at the Centre will be regularly fed, cleaned, vaccinated and regularly checked for fleas and worms.
- Animals, including pets, will not be allowed in the sand pit or any other play area. Educators will check the sand pit daily.
- Animals, including pets, will never be taken into the food preparation area nor will they be allowed near any eating or sleeping area.
- Anyone who has handled the animal or pet will immediately wash their hands after they have finished holding the animal or pet.
- Children's animals or pets will only be allowed in the Centre when the Nominated Supervisor has granted permission.
- WECC will include in its program how to properly care for animals and how to treat them appropriately.
- Pets will not have access to children's bedding, toys, food preparation areas, eating surfaces or utensils.
- Educators will ensure that all pets and their enclosures are kept clean and hygienic. Educators must ensure the pet(s) have clean bedding and water. Food will be available for the pet however kept out of reach of children at all times.
- Animals and birds visiting WECC as part of the educational program are the responsibility of the owner(s). Educators will ensure that the environment remains safe and hygienic during the visit. Educators will complete risk assessment paperwork in relation to the visit prior to the pet's arrival.

Animals and birds other than pets or invited visitors

- There are situations that may spontaneously occur, involving animals (e.g. an animal or bird makes its way into WECC). Educators may use this as a spontaneous learning experience for the children. At all times they will ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children.
- If an animal or bird is potentially dangerous (such as a snake or spider), educators will contact an appropriate authority for assistance. In the ACT this authority is Canberra Connect (phone 132 281) and

go into lockdown if necessary. If the dangerous animal is a dog, the 'Managing an Unidentified Dog Policy' should be referred to.

- The animal's movements should be monitored to ensure a speedy and efficient capture by a professional, but priority will be given to educator, child and family safety. At no time is the potentially dangerous animal, insect or bird to be approached or touched by educators, children or families.

Pests and vermin

- Pest control will occur at WECC on an annual basis. Educators will monitor any occurrences in WECC to determine the success of control measures.
- If pests and vermin are seen, educators will advise the Nominated Supervisor or Director, who is responsible for arranging additional pest control visits.
- Where appropriate, educators discuss with children safety issues relating to dangerous products, plants, vermin and objects.
- Educators will thoroughly clean all areas that animals or pests have accessed in WECC with hot, soapy water. If the remains of animal or animal faeces have been found, this will be disposed of in accordance with advice obtained from Territory and Municipal Centres and the area where the remains were found will be thoroughly disinfected with hot, soapy water.

Related policies / documents

- *Child protection*
- *Cleaning and maintaining the environment*
- *Emergency and evacuation*
- *First aid*
- *Incident, injury trauma and illness*
- *Interactions with children*
- *Supervision*
- *Managing an Unidentified Dog Policy*

Statutory legislation and considerations

- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011

Sources and references

- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. (2014)
- Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations
- ECA Code of Ethics
- Guide to the National Quality Standard
- Kidsafe ACT - <http://www.kidsafeact.com.au/>
- NSW Department of Health – [www.health.nsw.gov.au/infectious/factsheets/pages/petting -zoos- and- personal -hygiene.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/infectious/factsheets/pages/petting_zoos_and_personal_hygiene.aspx)
- Guide to the National Quality Standard (3) ACECQA (2011)
- Health and Safety in Children's Services Model Policies and Practices –2nd Ed. revised (2003) <http://cccensw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CCModelPoliciesFinal.pdf>
- Staying Healthy in Education and Care – 5th Edition.
- Bone, J. (2013) The animals as the fourth educator: A literature review of animals and young children in pedagogical relationships Australasian Journal of Early Childhood 38(2) Deakin West ACT: Early Childhood Australia.

- Elliott, S. (2012) Sustainable outdoor play spaces in early childhood centres Investigating perceptions, facilitating change and generating theory. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University.

Policy Reviewed	November 2021	Ratified Date	Next Review Date
Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor punctuation and wording edit • Added review table with modifications and updates • Sources and references checked and updated • New format 	Nov 2021	Nov 2023
Policy Reviewed	October 2019	Ratified Date	Next Review Date
Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing policy 	Oct 2019	Oct 2022
Policy Reviewed	June 2013	Ratified Date	Next Review Date
Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing policy 	June 2013	June 2016

Authorisation

Paul Halloran
 President
 2021-22 WECC Management Committee

Animal Caretaker / Officer

Appendix 1

EMPLOYEE NAME:	
POSITION:	
DATE:	
SUPERVISOR:	

THE ANIMAL CARETAKER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- Caring for the Centre animals
- Exercising the animals
- Ensuring the animals are clean
- Nurturing the animals
- Keeping up to date with pet licenses (if required)

REQUIREMENTS

The Animal Caretaker / Officer must:

- Enjoy and appreciate animals
- Be kind and patient

MAIN DUTIES / RESPONSIBILITIES

The Animal Caretaker / Officer must:

- Clean and maintain the animal's habitat
- Ensure the animals are fed and provided fresh and clean water daily
- Complete all required documentation (cleaning checklist, Pet Register forms etc.)
- Collect any eggs from chickens
- Ensure vaccinations are up to date and recorded

I have received, reviewed and understand the job responsibilities for the Animal Caretaker / Officer. I comprehend that I am responsible for the satisfactory execution of the job role and will adhere to all requirements.

EMPLOYEE NAME:		DATE:	
EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE:			