

## **Pets and Animals in the Environment**

### **Policy Statement**

At Meerilinga we believe involving pets and animals in our early learning programs provides many valuable experiences for the children. Encouraging animal interactions with children will enrich their learning about nature, ecology and relationships. Developing bonds with animals can help children build empathy, patience and skills such as nurturing, responsibility and improve their communication.

While there are many benefits of keeping pets in the service, there are also a range of issues and concerns to consider for the safety and wellbeing of both the children and the animals.

### **Policy Purpose**

Providing children with access to animals at our service can be a valuable part of a child's education and care experience by observing, interacting with and learning how to care for animals. Our service aims to provide a safe, hygienic and humane environment for all animals and pets that visit or reside at the service.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to children, families, educators, staff, management and visitors of the service.

### **Exclusions**

### **Policy Review**

At least annually or from time to time the organisation may make changes to this policy to improve the effectiveness of its operation.

### **Implementation**

Educators play a crucial role in guiding children's learning, encouraging them to understand and appreciate the natural environment and the independence between people, plants, animals and the land.

Educators and staff will determine the purpose and benefit of introducing a pet or animal into the service and how it links to the children's development and curriculum. Consideration must also be given for the safety and wellbeing of the children and the animal, as well as the long term implications of caring for a pet.

## **Resident Animal**

Resident pets are housed and cared for at the service. Through the risk management process, the Quality Advisor will assess the risks and benefit to children when considering approval of a resident pet in the service. Housing a resident pet is a long-term commitment and care plans must be developed which include the upkeep and housing of the animal when the service is closed.

Animals that are relatively low maintenance and can be left safely over a weekend with enough food and water may be a more suitable resident pet.

## **Visiting Animal**

Visiting animals may attend the service through planned incursions, educational programs, families or Meerilinga staff own pets or animals. Approval and risk management processes apply to visiting animals before they are allowed on the premises.

## **Approval**

The CEO must agree to permit pets at any Meerilinga premise or service. Approval will be subject to specific operational requirements that must be complied with. No pet will be allowed on the premises unless approved in writing by the CEO. This includes staff members own pets or animals.

When considering the approval of a Pet Application and Agreement for a pet to visit or reside at the service, the Quality Advisor and CEO will consider:

- National and State legislative requirements, including public health, animal welfare and health and safety.
- Risk management processes.
- Developing practices to support a safe environment and minimise risk.
- Any known potential allergies or illnesses that children may suffer as a result of coming into contact with animals.
- Consulting families, children and community users to provide them with the opportunity to express their view.
- The ages of the children, their skills and abilities.
- The value of children's learning and development.
- Maintaining hygiene where children and pets share the same space.
- The welfare of the pets, caring for them safely and humanely.
- Consultation with a veterinarian to determine whether a pet is suitable.

The service may consider other ways of introducing children to animals. Educators and staff may facilitate and extend children's learning by planning community excursions and invite visitors or programs into the centre such as mobile farms, reptile keepers or egg hatching programs. Risk assessment will be conducted during the planning stage of the excursion or centre visits.

## **Assessing and Managing Risks**

Our service has legal and ethical responsibility to provide a safe environment. Children will be adequately supervised and every reasonable precaution is taken to protect them from harm and any hazards that may cause injury.

Through the risk management process, the following will be considered when deciding the type of animal and the way the children will engage with it.

- **Infection**

Children are more vulnerable than adults to acquiring infections from animals. This is due to their age, having a lack of awareness of the risk of disease transmission and effective hygiene practices, their natural curiosity and attraction to animals. Children under five years of age are at an especially high risk due to their developing immune systems, frequent hand-to-mouth activities

### **Disease**

Access to animals at the service requires special consideration to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Health authorities identify that germs can be present on the skin, hair, feathers, scales, and in the faeces, urine and saliva of animals. While these germs may not cause disease in the animal, they may cause disease in humans. Simple measures will minimise the health risk from contact with animals.

### **Infection Control**

- **Hand Hygiene**

Hand hygiene is an important prevention measure to stop the spread of infectious diseases as hands can carry and spread germs. Children, Educators and staff will practice effective hand washing after interacting with animals. Guiding children to develop appropriate personal hygiene habits will become embedded as they grow and develop.

*Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes*

- **Cleaning**

After activities with animals, all environmental surfaces in areas where animals have been present will be cleaned.

Bloodily fluids such as blood, urine, faeces and vomit from animals must be contained and the area cleaned immediately.

*Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes*

- **Food Safety**

Specific areas will be designated for activities involving animals. Food and drinks will not be allowed in these designated areas. Animals will not be allowed into areas where food is being stored, prepared, served or consumed. Animal enclosures, as well as food and water bowls, will not be cleaned in food preparation, consumption or storage areas.

*Refer to the Health, Hygiene and Infection Control Policy and Processes*

- **Allergies and Asthma**

Hosting animals in the service has the potential to introduce high numbers of allergens into the environment. Animal hair, feathers skin flakes, saliva and urine can cause an allergic reaction or aggravate asthma symptoms in some people.

When children are introduced to animals, it is important to monitor them for the development of allergic symptoms such as wheezing, sneezing, and runny or blocked nose.

*Refer to the Medical Conditions Policy and Processes*

- **Supervision**

Children will be appropriately supervised at all times when they have direct contact with animals. Environments may need to be re-arranged to house animals and maximise supervision.

*Refer to the Supervision Policy and Processes*

- **Animal Health**

It is important that all animals visiting or housed at the service are healthy and clean. A health management plan must be in place for all approved resident and regular visiting animals. The health management plan will include examination by a licensed veterinarian to ensure appropriate nutrition, dental care, vaccinations and parasite management/prevention for each animal and must be updated every six(6) months.

### **An Approved Pet**

All terms and conditions of the Pet Application and Agreement together with the risk management and pet profile and care plan for the pet must adhered to at all times. A pet register and individual pet file will be stored at the service.

All service users will be notified of an approved pet on the premises, prior to or at the time of visiting the early learning programs.

### ***The person(s) responsible for the approved pet and educators will:***

- Designate areas/housing for the pet.
- Guide quality practice for all service users with the care and handling of the pet.
- Practice appropriate supervision at all times.
- Encourage children's to engagement with pets and animals, provide many valuable experiences to enrich their learning and development.
- Ensure food and water is made available for all pets and animals, but kept out of reach of children at all times.
- Ensure all enclosures are to be kept clean and hygienic with appropriate bedding.
- Ensure pets and animals visiting the service are never taken into the food preparation area nor will they be allowed near the eating or sleeping area.
- Demonstrate and promote effective handwashing immediately after touching or feeding pets or animals, or cleaning their bedding, tanks, cages or enclosures.
- Follow the services health and hygiene procedures.
- Keep the pets health management plan up date to ensure the six(6) monthly veterinarian checks are completed and the documentation filed in the pet's individual file.
- Inform the Nominated supervisor or Quality Advisor of any change in the pet's health or wellbeing.
- Review and update the risk assessment or pet care plan as required.
- Inform all service users if the pet is no longer residing or visiting the venue.

## **Education – Children, Educators, Staff, Student and Volunteers**

Educators and staff will prepare families and children for an animal visit, gathering perception into how the children may react to the animal.

Prior to animal participation in the program, Educators and staff will read and acknowledge the risk management and pet profile and care plans for the pet or animals.

To ensure appropriate supervision at all times, Educators will discuss supervision strategies amongst their teams before any activities associated with animals. This includes monitoring handwashing after contact with animals.

Educators will teach children about the animals and how to interact gently and appropriately. The children will be encouraged to help care for the animals as they learn responsibility through 'hands on' experiences.

All persons having contact with an animal at the service will be educated on the services infection control measures such as and procedures when cleaning the environment where animals have been present and hand hygiene.

## **Unexpected Animal Visit**

There may be situations where spontaneous events occur that involve animals (eg: a situation where an animal has made its way into the service). Educators may use this as a spontaneous learning experience for the children however they will ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children at all times.

If an animal is potentially dangerous; such as a snake or spider, educators will isolate the area and may initiate emergency procedures such as a lockdown. The appropriate authority will be contacted for assistance.

*Refer to the Emergency Management Policy and Processes*

## Pets and Animals in the Environment Process

Process Owner

CEO

Effective Date

4 February 2019

Date of Last Revision

31 January 2019

### Process Details

	Description
1.	<p><b>Evaluation</b> Educators and staff together with the Quality Advisor will determine the purpose and benefit of introducing a pet or animal into the service. The necessary actions and approvals required before the pet or animal has access to the service.</p> <p><b>Pet</b> - A domestic or tamed animal kept for companionship or pleasure. A Meerilinga approved pet that may reside or regularly visit the service. Applications can only be made by a staff member of the service. CEO approval in writing is required.</p> <p><b>Animals</b> visiting the service through planned incursions, educational programs or with families will be approved (or not) following the services risk management process. If approved, Educators and Quality Advisor will ensure all risk control measures are in place before the animal visit.</p>
2.	<p><b>Application for Pet</b> (to reside or visit the premises or service venue) The Quality Advisor will meet with the Educators and staff to discuss the risks versus the benefits of including a pet in the educational program.</p> <p>The following actions must be carried out:</p> <p><b>Risk Assessment</b> to determine the risks associated with a pet visiting or residing at the service, this includes but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Infections and Control</li><li>- Allergies and Asthma</li><li>- Supervision</li><li>- Animal Health Management</li></ul> <p><b>Pet Profile and Care Plan</b> the ongoing commitment to the care and wellbeing of the pet.</p> <p>The following points must be considered and documented in the plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Who will be the appointed responsible person(s) for the pet?</li><li>- This pet will ONLY be allowed in designated areas, do you have enough physical space available at the service for this pet?</li><li>- Are there any children or educators at your service who are allergic to, or have phobias of, animals?</li><li>- Who will pay for the care and upkeep of the pet, including feeding, health management and cleaning?</li><li>- How will the pet be cared for on weekends and during service closure periods?</li><li>- What time will be available throughout the day to care for the pet?</li><li>- Following the risk assessment process, are the health and safety risks of having this pet greater the benefits?</li><li>- If Approved, how will children and families be consulted about the pet?</li></ul>

## Process Details

	Description
	<p><b>Pet Application and Agreement</b> form to be completed by the staff member applying for the pet to visit or reside at the service. This application must be signed by an Advisor.</p> <p>When completed, the Pet Application and Agreement form, together with a Risk Assessment and Pet Profile and Care Plan is submitted to the CEO for consideration.</p>
3.	<p><b>CEO Application Review</b></p> <p>The CEO will must agree to permit access of all pets at any Meerilinga premise or service, this includes staff members own pets or animals. Approval is subject to specific operational requirements that must be complied with. Approval is NOT guaranteed.</p> <p>No pet will be allowed on the premises unless approved in writing by the CEO.</p> <p>Approval will be granted or denied through the Pet Application and Agreement form.</p>
4.	<p><b>Approved Pet and Ongoing Compliance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The completed Pet Application and Agreement form together with the risk management and pet profile and care plan must be filed in the pet's individual file and stored at premises or service venue where the pet is located.</li><li>- The pets health management check by the pets veterinarian must be completed at least every six(6) months and documentation filed.</li><li>- Inform the Nominated Supervisor [Responsible Person] or Advisor of any change in the pet's health or wellbeing.</li><li>- Report any incidents that occur at premises or service involving pets or animals to the Nominated Supervisor [Responsible Person], Quality Advisor or CEO.</li><li>- Review and update the risk assessment or pet care plan as required.</li><li>- Notify the Quality Advisor or CEO if the pet is no longer residing or visiting the service. The Pet Agreement will be cancelled and documented in the pet's individual file.</li></ul>

## Associated Documents

### Meerilinga Policy Manual

- Section 2 - Human Resources Policies
- Section 6 - Children's Program Policies and Processes
  - *Health, Hygiene and Infection Control*
  - *Supervision*
  - *Medical Conditions*
  - *Emergency Management*
  - *Illness and Infectious Disease*
- Section 7 - Workplace Health and Safety Policies

- Risk Management Plan
- Pet Application and Agreement
- Animal Care Plan

## Guidelines for Quality Advisor

Ensure no pet or animal is present on the premises or service venue until the necessary actions and approvals have been completed.

When requests are made for a pet to visit or reside at any Meerilinga premises or service venue. Oversee and guide Educators and staff through the Pets and Animals in the Environment Process:

- Risk Management Plan
- Pet Profile and Care Plan
- Pet Application and Agreement

Consult with the CEO and staff member on the outcome of the application review.

Upon approval of a pet application, conduct ongoing monitoring at the service to ensure compliance with the pet agreement, risk management and pet profile and care plan.

File all documentation and manage legal or ethical breaches accordingly.

Inform the CEO of any serious incidents involving a pet or animal where a child was harmed or injured and required medical treatment by a registered medical practitioner. Notify the Regulatory Authority in writing within 24 hours of the incident.

Review risk management and pet profile and care plans every six(6) months.

Inform the CEO if the pet no longer resides or visits the venue. Cancel the pet application agreement and forward a copy to the CEO. Ensure all documentation is kept onsite at the venue for the required period of time.

## Records Management

Title	Location	Responsible Officer	Minimum Retention Period
Pet Application and Agreement	CFC W/Leed	CEO	3 years
Risk Assessment Plan	CFC W/Leed	CEO	3 years
Pet Profile and Care Plan	CFC W/Leed	Quality Advisor	3 years
Child Incident Record	CFC	Nominated Supervisor	Until the Child is 25 years old
Medical Management Plan	CFC	Nominated Supervisor	Until the Child is 25 years old
Notification to Regulatory Authority	CFC W/Leed	Quality Advisor	3 years



## Reference

- Education and Care Services National Law Act (WA) 2012 - *October 2018*
- Education and Care Services National Regulations (WA) 2012 - *October 2018*
- ACECQA - National Quality Standards - *February 2018*
- ACECQA - Belonging, Being & Becoming - Early Years Learning Framework
- Code of Ethics - *Meerilinga*
- Code of Conduct - *Meerilinga*
- ACECQA - Keeping Pets and Animals in Education and Care Services - *Information Sheet 2016*
- Staying Healthy - Preventing Infectious Diseases in Early Childhood Education and Care Services, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council - *June 2013*
- Privacy Act 1988
- Children and Community Services Act 2004
- Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996.
- ASCIA - Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy - Pet Allergy - *Information Sheet 2015*

## Definitions

Term	Definition
Animal	Any member of the animal kingdom of living organisms, characterised by voluntary movement and being able to move eg: birds, crabs, rabbits, fish etc.
Pet	A domestic or tamed animal kept for companionship or pleasure. A Meerilinga approved pet that may reside or regularly visit the service.

## Mapping Policy and Processes

Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012	
<b>Section</b>	165, 174(2)(a).

Education and Care Services National Regulations (WA) 2012	
<b>Regulations</b>	85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 100, 101, 102, 103, 106, 109, 115, 155, 156, 162, 58, 160, 161, 170, 171, 172, 176(2)(a)(ii), 177, 181, 183.

Standards for RTOs 2015
Vocational Education and Training is a significant contributor to Australia's economy domestically, being the primary mechanism to meet the skilling needs of the Australian community. The standards give the community confidence that RTOs are delivering quality training and assessment that is highly regarded both locally and overseas.

Policy Area	National Quality Standards Early Childhood	National Standards for Volunteering Involvement 2015	Standards to Community Services	Standards to Family Support
Children's Programs	QA 1 - 1.1, 1.2 QA 2 - 2.1, 2.1.2, 2.2, 2.2.1, 2.2.2. QA 3 - 3.1.2, 3.2.3. QA 4 - 4.1. QA 5 - 5.1, 5.2. QA 6 - 6.2.2, 6.2.3. QA 7 - 7.1, 7.2.1.	N/A	N/A	N/A