

ANIMAL THERAPY POLICY

PURPOSE

The aim of this initiative is to improve teaching and learning practices related to Social and Emotional Learning. This will be achieved through improving socialisation and self-awareness skills that are a part of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies and linked to Victorian Curriculum standards.

Research shows that Therapy Dog Programs provide significant benefits for students as the dogs are trained to use their social instincts and learned social skills to provide health, social-emotional and cognitive benefits. Being in contact with a therapy dog calms children, reducing feelings of anxiety and stress and promoting a sense of belonging in school. Our BNPS Therapy Dogs will also provide social-emotional support to staff and the wider school community, when and where appropriate.

The aim of this program is to improve wellbeing and engagement across the school and assist identified students to build on positive relationships at Beaumaris North Primary School.

IMPLEMENTATION

Animal-assisted interventions (AAIs) are goal-oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education, and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. A therapy dog falls under the umbrella of Animal-assisted interventions. Any working Animal-assisted intervention dog is therefore trained and assessed for a specific role.

Trained Therapy Dogs form part of our wellbeing and engagement approach at BNPS. In Term 2 of 2022, we welcomed **two** newly qualified therapy dogs to our school, Wally and Frankie. In previous years, our school welcomed Archie and Sid as Therapy Dogs, whom together with their handlers formed a valued part of our school community. Archie, Sid and their handlers no longer work at BNPS. Beaumaris North Primary School was fortunate to have been funded through School Focused Youth Service (SFYS), the cost of formal training of Wally in 2022 and Frankie in 2021.

This program relates directly to Staff and Student Wellbeing. This policy governs the program, ensuring that the program maximises its full potential.

ABOUT THE DOGS

Wally and Frankie (along with their handlers Jessi Maddison and Georgie Tilley) have been trained by either K9 Support or Lead the Way Institute, and have been certified as therapy dogs through K9 Support.

Wally is a Groodle (Golden Retriever x Poodle) born January 2020 and Frankie is a Toy Cavoodle F1B (Toy Cavoodle x Toy Poodle) born February 2020.

Therapy dogs are different to service dogs. Therapy dogs have a natural ability to refocus students who may be feeling upset for a range of reasons.

Wally will be working predominantly in the 4C and 4D classroom. Wally will also have his bed set up in the 4C/4D office, which is his 'safe spot' for when he is not working with students, or requires rest.

Frankie will be working predominantly in the 1C and 1D classroom. Frankie will also have her bed set up, inside her crate, in the 1C classroom. Frankie's crate is her 'safe spot', for when she is not working with students, or requires rest.

The students' interactions with Wally and Frankie will initially be teaching students how to engage appropriately with them.

Wally and Frankie's training is ongoing, requiring annual retraining with K9 Support, in Benalla. Both dogs have been thoroughly temperament tested and have been exposed to a range of experiences such as chickens, wheelchairs, ramps, traffic, schools (both familiar and unfamiliar) and other dogs. Throughout testing they both displayed very low arousal, suggesting a highly appropriate temperament for ongoing training and work as Therapy Dogs.

Health

Wally and Frankie are completely up to date with all medical and vaccination requirements. This will be maintained for their lifetime. Wally and Frankie will be regularly groomed and washed as part of their program at school.

Risks in having a dog in a school environment

This policy covers all aspects of having a dog in a school environment; careful management abiding by this policy ensures there is a very low risk of harm.

Context

- Wally is owned by Georgia Tilley and will be based in the 4C and 4D classroom
- Frankie is owned by Jessica Maddison and will be based in the 1C and 1D classroom
- Students will be educated in appropriate conduct around the dogs and develop increased responsibility with handling and managing the dogs
- Visitors to school will be informed of the dogs when signing in at the School Office. Visitors will receive a small leaflet explaining Wally and Frankie's roles and requirements

Daily management of Wally and Frankie

- Not allowed in school if unwell
- Will be kept on lead at all times
- Be up to date with all vaccinations, worming and grooming
- Be under the supervision of Georgia, Jessi, or a delegate at all times
- Continue to be trained as a Therapy Dog on an ongoing basis
- Will not be taken off the site without Georgia, Jessi or a delegate in emergencies
- Will have a safe area in their classrooms
- Wally and Frankie will wear training vests to ensure each dog is recognised as a therapy support dog

Student expectations

- Will never have sole responsibility for the dog or be left unsupervised around the dog
- Will be reminded of appropriate behaviours around the dog with each contact
- With each contact, will be reminded to respect the dog and remain calm around the dog at all times
- Be gentle and not make sudden movements or attempts to physically contact the dog
- Not to stare into the dog's eyes
- Request permission before touching the dog
- Not to put their face near the dog
- Always approach the dog in a calm, slow manner and not touch the dog until it is sitting and calm
- To not disturb the dog while it is eating, drinking or sleeping
- To never feed the dog

Staff and student expectations

- Demonstrate collaboration of the dog's role with the whole school community, including; staff, parents, students, family members

Health and Safety

- All persons should always wash their hands after handling the dog
- Any dog excrement to be cleaned and disposed of appropriately by Georgia, Jessi or their delegate
- Only Assistance Dogs (Seeing Eye, Hearing, etc) to be allowed on school premises, unless other prior arrangements are made with the School Principal – Mrs Sherril Duffy

If a dog is hurt or injured (accident or by student)

- Dog will be removed by Georgia, Jessi or a delegate calmly from the situation if required
- Dog to be moved to its safe spot
- Georgia or Jessi to take Wally/Frankie to the Vet if required: Black Rock Animal Hospital, Balcombe Road, Black Rock
- Parents informed if harm caused by student and Progression of Consequences followed
- Incident protocols
- Dog handlers to be notified immediately, documentation required
- Parents to be notified immediately
- Seek medical attention if required
- Inform all staff of the incident via email
- A full investigation from Principal and Leadership Team
- Safe comfort buffer zone perimeter provided between the dog and the other party of 3 metres

SUPPORT FOR POLICY

- K9 Support. Therapy Dog Training. Tessa Stow. Benalla, Vic. Ph: 0488 585 771
<http://www.k9support.com.au/>
- Vet – Warrandyte Veterinary Hospital, 91 Melbourne Hill Rd. Ph: 9844 3071
- School Therapy Dogs <http://www.schooltherapydogs.org/>
- School Focused Youth Service – Family Life. Ph. [8599 5433](tel:85995433)
- Dogs in the classroom <http://www.creativeteachingsite.com/dogs/dogs.html>

EVALUATION

Guidelines are updated every 3-4 years as per DET recommendations.

This policy was updated on 17 June 2022.