

## 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 our newly qualified therapy dog to our school, Wally. 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.

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

### ABOUT THE DOG

Wally (along with his handler Georgie Tilley) has 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.

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.

The students' interactions with Wally will initially be teaching students how to engage appropriately with him.

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

## **Health**

Wally is completely up to date with all medical and vaccination requirements. This will be maintained for his lifetime. Wally will be regularly groomed and washed as part of his 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
- Students will be educated in appropriate conduct around Wally and develop increased responsibility with handling and managing him
- Visitors to school will be informed of the dog when signing in at the School Office.

## **Daily management of Wally**

- 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, 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, or a delegate in emergencies
- Will have a safe area in their classrooms
- Wally will wear a training vests to ensure he 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, 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, or a delegate calmly from the situation if required
- Dog to be moved to its safe spot
- Georgia to take Wally 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 handler 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 13 December 2023.