

An information
booklet for
homelessness
projects about
accepting
clients with
dogs

Welcoming Dogs



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The information in this booklet has been endorsed by the following organisations:





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- Liz Campbell, Equinox Brook Drive detox centre, London
- Stuart Cummings, Providence Row HA – Hackney Road hostel, London
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- Richard Howlett, Jimmy's Night Shelter, Cambridge
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This booklet draws on the following research into the benefits of dog ownership:

- Prof S Ahmedzai, 'Companion animals in health and social care institutions', The SCAS Journal, 2001
- Blue Cross, 'A dog's life: Homeless people and their pets', 2001
- Dr AB Charnaud, 'Dogs as transitional objects in the treatment of patients with drug dependency', The SCAS Journal, 2000
- W Connelly and BD MacDonald, 'Pet therapy programs for the elderly', 1992
- AH Kidd and RM Kidd, 'Benefits and liabilities of pets for the homeless', Psychological Reports 74, 1994
- People and Animals Together in Health, 'Pets and homeless people in Nottingham – the issues', 1998
- SCAS, 'Older people and pets', 2005
- RS Singer, LA Hart & RL Zasloff, 'Dilemmas associated with rehousing homeless people who have companion animals', 1995



Dogs Trust is the largest dog welfare charity in the UK and is committed to working towards the day when all dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction.

The Hope Project is part of Dogs Trust and helps dogs whose owners are homeless or in housing crisis. Since 1994, the Hope Project has been working hard to help these dogs by giving advice to their owners and enabling the dogs themselves to get regular veterinary healthcare. The Hope Project also works to encourage homelessness projects to accept clients with dogs.

For many homeless people, their dog is their only friend; the only living creature they can really trust. It's incredibly important that we don't take this away from them. But far too many homeless people are denied the help they so desperately need simply because they have a dog. In fact, across Britain, almost three in four homelessness projects regularly turn homeless people with dogs away.

To find out why, the Hope Project carried out an extensive survey of homelessness projects. They discovered a real demand for more information on key issues, such as health and safety, insurance and hygiene – the very reasons that many projects give for refusing to take in dogs.

As a result, the Hope Project has produced this booklet to provide this information and explain why projects should accept dogs. As you would expect, we believe strongly in the benefits of having a loyal, loving dog as a companion. We know how incredibly important dogs are to their homeless owners. Homeless people and their pets deserve the same access to housing and other services as anybody else.

We know from our own experience that opening your doors to dogs does not mean a lot of extra work. To illustrate this, Hope Project staff spoke to managers working in dog-friendly hostels and shelters across Britain to find out what they think and to pass on their experiences. We hope that this booklet, as well as the views and experiences of these project managers, will persuade more projects to accept dogs, giving more homeless people the chances they need and more of their dogs the quality of life that they deserve.



Clarissa Baldwin

Why accept dogs? The benefits to clients

Anybody working with homeless people knows the cost this lifestyle brings. Homeless people can often suffer from drug or alcohol addiction, mental health problems, depression or stress. They all badly need the help offered by front-line services, such as hostels, shelters and detox clinics.

But many homeless people with dogs find it almost impossible to access the services they need. In a Hope Project survey carried out in 2005, 73% of responding homelessness projects said they did not accept dogs. That means a lot of homeless people are not being helped – just because they have a dog.

An intense emotional bond

The emotional bond between dog and owner is a strong one but never more so than with homeless people: “These pets are their family”, said Liz Campbell of Equinox Brook Drive detox centre in London. Martin McNaughton, Manager of Castlecliff in Edinburgh agreed: “Their dog is an important part of their life.” As a result, when forced to choose between their dog and a bed, many will stay with their dog.

American research into the bond between owner and dog confirmed the strength of this attachment: “Pets provide solace and emotional support, help reduce loneliness for emotionally and physically isolated people, and give unconditional love and acceptance... pets provide these same benefits several-fold to their homeless owners, who often lack human relationships.”

“Overall, the dogs are smashing; they’re lovely; sometimes they are their owner’s only friend and companion.”

Julie Jarrett,
St Mungo’s Endsleigh Gardens hostel,
London

Plus more practical benefits

Research carried out over the last decade in both America and the UK has also proved that owning a dog brings a number of real, material benefits. Dogs reduce stress and blood pressure, provide emotional support, reduce loneliness and enhance their owner’s quality of life and self-esteem. What’s more, caring for a pet also encourages owners to look after themselves.

These advantages are backed up by Dogs Trust Canine Charter for Human Health, which provides further evidence of the health benefits that come from owning a dog.



Safety, stability and love

Research by the Blue Cross suggests that homeless people with dogs are less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol. Dogs are also natural conversation points, helping their homeless owners to initiate conversation with others, thereby giving them more social contact and helping them to learn valuable social skills. It stated: “Owning a pet, even when in a situation which brings most people to the depths of despair, can and does alleviate the desperation... it not only helps some people hold themselves together while on the streets... it helps them reintegrate into the mainstream.”

The same research suggests that, for over 50% of homeless dog owners, their pet provides their only real relationship with a living being. Dogs can provide homeless people with a vital companion in life: one that they can talk to and trust; one that offers unconditional love; and one that is often their only source of safety and stability.

Research into homeless dog owners in Nottingham concluded: “A companion animal is then far more than a mere pet – it is a lifeline. It may be one of the most important things in the homeless person’s life.”

“I thought it would be a real headache but I was wrong. It’s opened my eyes to the importance of that relationship, how they depend on each other and the value that residents put on their pet. I wish I’d known how straightforward it would be.”

Martin McNaughton,
Castlecliff, Edinburgh

Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 1: If we let one dog in, everyone will want one

This will not happen. Only a minority of homeless people own dogs and you can set a limit on the number of dogs you accept at any one time. You should also stipulate in your policy that current residents cannot get a dog once they have moved into your project.

Why accept dogs? The benefits to projects

Although accepting dogs is clearly good for the animals and their owners, it can bring additional advantages. Many project managers have told us that welcoming dogs also benefits their project and the other residents.

Extending inclusion

Allowing dogs makes a project accessible to people usually excluded from front-line services. To Mandy Mansfield at St Mungo's, the end result is that "by accepting dogs there are fewer people sleeping rough." Martin McNaughton agreed: "This issue is keeping people on the streets. We have to change – to exclude people just because of their dogs makes no sense at all."

"If we're dealing with street homeless people, then we really have to deal with dogs as well."

Richard Howlett, Manager,
Jimmy's Night Shelter, Cambridge

Wallich Clifford in Cardiff has also decided to let in dogs. Rob Minchin is a project worker at the hostel; he believes that this decision has meant that "we've had at least a dozen residents in the last two years who had access to the hostel where before they would not have been able to get in."

It is very clear that there is a real demand for front-line services from homeless people with dogs. Doug Montgomery, of St Anne's hostel in Birmingham, said; "It's disappointing that there aren't more hostels around. We're based in Birmingham and we offer just short term, emergency accommodation... but we find people coming from all over, like Brighton, to stay just because we take dogs."

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) also recognises the importance of this issue. In its guidance notes for the Hostel Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP), it gives a number of best practice suggestions for dealing with dogs. These suggestions – made in consultation with the Hope Project – offer common-sense solutions to ease the transition to a dog-friendly project.

Social benefits to projects

Some project managers we interviewed spoke of the social benefits of accepting dogs. In particular, they felt that dogs help lighten the atmosphere. Doug Montgomery said: "The pluses of having dogs outweigh the minuses quite considerably – it's more homely having dogs around." At Providence Row in Hackney, Sean Hickey agreed; "I think pets are a wonderful addition to a social project where residents have an opportunity to commune. They help the atmosphere – I mean, dogs are never in a bad mood, are they?"

Several hostel managers told us that pets acted as social ice-breakers: Martin McNaughton said; "Dogs can be a good point of contact between staff and residents: right now we have a beautiful big husky and people pat it and talk to it." Dogs can also give other residents something to focus on: quite often hostels have found that clients who had been withdrawn came out of their shell to talk to dogs and their owners.

"We've got a huge dog in now and it's so calm, the other clients really like it and want to take it for walks."

Liz Campbell,
Equinox Brook Drive detox centre,
London

Therapeutic benefits

Research suggests that including the patient's dog in their treatment for drug dependency has great therapeutic benefits. The research said that it is "impossible to treat the patient without the dog; in fact by talking to the patient about their dog and welcoming their dog we are often able then to make contact with patients who are extremely suspicious of people... Certainly we find that once a patient has made an attachment to a dog, then this is the beginning of their rehabilitation."

Liz Campbell, Assistant Manager of Equinox Brook Drive detox centre, has a great deal of experience in this area. She said: "A lot of people with addiction can be quite isolated and for those with pets, these are their family. If you've got a drug user or a drinker with a pet, you can't use that as a reason not to help them."

She continued: "If clients have to give up their pet, get it put down, put into kennels, or looked after by someone else, it's really distressing and it's not good to go into a therapeutic programme like ours when you have other distractions – we don't want to give them something else to worry about. If their pet is here with them then they're happier and that's good. You've got to be flexible."



Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 2: Homeless people shouldn't have dogs

The simple truth is that some homeless people do have dogs. Most homeless dog owners are widely accepted to be loving and caring and their dogs are usually very healthy and socialise well with both people and other dogs.

Health and safety (H&S) is often mentioned as a reason why projects don't accept dogs and many people say they want more information on this issue.

What you must do

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that all employers have a duty of care to make their workplace safe and healthy for their employees and the public.

Organisations employing five or more people must also conduct a risk assessment to highlight potential H&S hazards. They must record what the assessment finds and what steps they have taken to deal with any risks.

These organisations must also have a formal H&S policy that outlines the arrangements made to protect their employees and any third party (such as contractors, visitors or residents).

Therefore any project – whether or not it accepts dogs – should already be familiar with risk assessments and the record-keeping this requires. All you need to do is update your risk assessment to take account of the presence of dogs.

“Dogs have to be on a lead when they're in the common areas but they are allowed everywhere bar the kitchen.”

Stuart Cummings,
Providence Row HA, London



Risk assessments

To complete a risk assessment, you just need to consider the environment your staff and residents are living and working in, then analyse the hazards and determine the risks (a risk being defined as the combination of the likelihood and consequence of that hazard).

For example, you might consider whether somebody will be bitten over the course of the year. While it is impossible to say this will never happen, in our experience it is extremely unlikely. This could therefore reasonably be determined as a medium risk. You could reduce the risk further by insisting that dogs showing signs of aggression wear muzzles when they are in communal areas.

“Risk assessments are crucial if you're going to accept dogs, but they're very straightforward – they really aren't an issue at all.”

Julie Jarrett, St Mungo's Endsleigh Gardens hostel, London

Dog policies

Once you have completed the risk assessment and have decided how best to avert or mitigate any possible situations, just put these measures into a dogs policy. All projects accepting pets should draw up an agreed policy. Projects without one are likely to find that residents are unaware of their obligations; what's more, different staff members may give out conflicting information. It is a good idea to extend the policy for staff and include a set of simple procedures for staff to follow should a complaint or issue arise.

A dogs policy needs to recognise that it is illegal to let dogs into food preparation areas. It also makes sense to insist that dogs are kept on leads when they are in communal areas, such as corridors or common rooms. In addition, you should limit the number of dogs and not allow residents to get a dog once they have moved in.

“We got a lot of help from the Hope Project – their dogs policy basically did most of the work for us.”

Mandy Mansfield,
St Mungo's Mare Street hostel, London

All dog owners coming into your project should read, understand and sign your dogs policy. By signing it, dog owners agree to abide by the rules and accept responsibility for their dog's welfare and behaviour. Doug Montgomery describes the procedure at St Anne's hostel in Birmingham: “We have a licence agreement and dog owners have an additional agreement that they sign up for. This is quite important because it means that they are aware of their responsibilities of having a dog here.”

To ensure fairness and transparency for both dog owner and hostel, the dogs policy should be mentioned in the licence or tenancy agreement. This means that, if the dog owner breaks or contravenes the policy, they will also be in breach of their licence or tenancy agreement.

Once you have completed a risk assessment and have a dogs policy and contract in place, you are compliant with H&S regulations.

There is a sample dogs policy at the back of this booklet which contains these and other points. You can adapt the policy as necessary to suit the specific needs of your project.

“We treat a dog in the same way as a visitor – if a visitor is threatening, it's up to the resident to keep them in control so we use the same disciplinary process in respect of dogs.”

Rob Minchin, Wallich Clifford, Cardiff

Insurance

Once again, this is very simple. You should already have public liability insurance cover in case of accidents on your premises. Most public liability insurance already covers dogs but to make absolutely sure, just contact your insurer and:

- tell them that you will be allowing dogs on the premises
- tell them how many you plan to accept
- ask them whether you need any extra clauses in your insurance policy.

It's as easy as that!

“I really wouldn't class dogs as a high H&S risk – after all, people have them in their homes...”

Julie Jarrett, St Mungo's Endsleigh Gardens hostel, London



Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 3: Dogs might fight amongst each other

Hostel managers we interviewed had never experienced this. The truth is that dogs don't like fighting any more than we do. Left alone, they generally prefer to walk away.

Dealing with dogs: hygiene and behaviour

Many people have two central concerns about dogs: behaviour and hygiene. Martin McNaughton at Castlecliff in Edinburgh had the same worries: "I'm not a dog lover and I was very reluctant to have dogs in the hostel: I was worried they'd be messing everywhere and biting people – I thought there would be real problems."

The reality is far more mundane. As Martin himself admits; "I've completely changed my mind on this. Most of the dogs we get here are large dogs – we've had a Staffie and a German Shepherd, for example – but they've not been aggressive. We've never had any dogs bite anyone and only once in three years have I seen dog mess in our courtyard: I'm very pleased and genuinely surprised."

"I don't even like animals but it's not a problem for me."

Liz Campbell,
Equinox Brook Drive detox centre,
London



Behaviour

Of course, dogs will sometimes chew, scratch and bark. Dogs often bark because they are excited, bored or frustrated. This can usually be stopped easily by giving the dog more attention or exercise, although sometimes it may need further investigation by a behaviourist. Try to make sure that dogs are not left alone for more than three or four hours and, if possible, don't put dogs in adjacent rooms. This should minimise any noise: the project managers we interviewed described barking as only an occasional problem.

Chewing and scratching are often signs of boredom or anxiety at being left alone. Again, if a dog is chewing or scratching then it's worth checking whether he is being stimulated and exercised enough and that he is not being left alone for long periods of time. The owner should encourage their dog to play with toys, rather than chewing items. In some cases an indoor kennel could be used in the client's room while the owner is out for short periods of time.

There's a very small chance that dogs may fight with one another. This is extremely rare: none of the managers we interviewed had ever seen this happen. Richard Howlett of Jimmy's Night Shelter in Cambridge said: "A couple of dogs have been a bit snappy, but we've just insisted that they wear a muzzle in the shelter – end of problem."

In truth, most dogs have had some training and are reasonably well behaved, as Doug Montgomery describes: "My experience of homeless people with dogs is that their dogs are very good tempered – we've had no experience of any vicious dogs and it's also a plus because of the interest generated from other residents."

You can also accept only those dogs that appear to be sociable and well-natured. As a result, you are highly unlikely to have any serious problems. If a fight does occur, owners should try and resolve it by walking away and using loud noise as a distraction.

Hygiene issues

As most dogs are toilet-trained as puppies, fouling is rarely a major problem. Project managers agreed: Mandy Mansfield said: "The residents know it's their responsibility and they clear it up straightaway." Rob Minchin said that his colleagues "were worried the dogs would be peeing everywhere, but it's just not happened."

You can further reduce the risk of dogs messing by:

- reminding owners that it is their legal responsibility to clean up after their dogs
- ensuring your dogs contract requires dog owners to clean up their dog's mess
- penalising repeat offences, to the extent of asking the owner and dog to leave
- telling dog owners where the nearest toileting areas are
- supplying suitable plastic bags to help owners clean up after their dogs: these are often provided free by local authorities and can just be dropped in a dustbin or a designated dog bin once they have been used.



"We very occasionally get a dog messing in the car park but it's covered by CCTV so we can check which dog messed there and get the owners to clear it up."

Stuart Cummings, Providence Row HA,
London

Health issues

Many dogs will suffer from a flea infestation at some point in their lives. However, dogs that receive regular preventative healthcare rarely get fleas. As fleas live in the environment and not primarily on dogs, it is a good idea to have residential and communal areas treated for fleas periodically.

All dogs will have worms from time to time. Untreated, this can cause problems. Dog owners need to worm their dogs regularly – twice a year for adults and every two to four weeks for puppies. As anybody with a dog or cat will know, worming them is a normal part of owning a pet.

Dogs Trust Hope Project's veterinary entitlement card scheme provides free vaccinations, microchipping, neutering, worming and flea treatment. More details on this scheme are provided later in this booklet. For further information please email the Hope Project team at hopeproject@dogstrust.org.uk

Dogs Trust also provides free fact sheets on most aspects of dog ownership, so if you or any of your clients need further advice you can visit our website at www.dogstrust.org.uk

Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 4: Dogs will create much more work for staff

Not true. A dogs contract should put responsibility for the animal on its owner. All members of staff should be aware of the contract and enforce it where necessary.

Many dog-related issues have common, practical solutions. So, if you decide to start accepting dogs into your project, here are some simple ways to make the transition as easy as possible.

New arrivals

When first accepting dogs into your project, start with small numbers. This will make it easy to identify any dog owners that may be causing difficulties and resolve any issues that you hadn't previously considered. The number of dogs can then be reviewed after a couple of months. Some projects make the mistake of accepting too many dogs from the outset: this can cause problems and can deter staff and other residents from dogs in the future.

When new clients arrive with dogs, check the animals to make sure that they are healthy and sociable, and see whether the owners appear responsible and caring. Dogs are naturally good-natured animals and it is usually easy to identify ones that will not fit in. You can also ask the owner a few simple questions to find out how healthy and sociable their dogs are.

- How long have they had their dog?
- How often do they feed their dog?
- Is the dog house-trained?
- How well does it get on with other animals and people?

St Mungo's also tells new employees and residents that they take dogs. If a resident has a problem, the staff can make sure they are given a room as far away from any dogs as possible.

"We have dormitory style rooms with five to eight people in each room, so the dogs sleep in, on or under their owner's bed."

Richard Howlett,
Jimmy's Night Shelter, Cambridge

Where should you put clients with dogs?

Clients with dogs should ideally live on the ground floor so that they can easily take their dogs outside to toilet and to get sufficient exercise. However, many projects use this floor for staff offices and communal areas so rooms on other floors can also be used. If you do this, bear in mind that puppies or elderly dogs should be kept on the lowest floor possible. It is a good idea to have no more than two dogs on each floor and to put the dog rooms at the ends of the corridor – this will keep the dogs separated and will minimise barking.

When considering where to room clients with dogs, it is also a good idea to ensure that the room has enough space for the dog to lie out fully stretched so it can sleep/rest.

Some projects think that dogs need to go in special rooms with no furniture and basic flooring. As long as a dogs policy is enforced, there should be no reason for making dog rooms any different from other rooms in the project.

Most hostels provide clients with their own rooms, so dogs should not disturb other residents. However, some projects have dormitory style or self-catering shared accommodation. In these cases, other residents need to be informed that dogs are being accepted and any issues can then be dealt with on an individual basis.

Most projects allow residents to leave their dogs in their rooms during mealtimes and while they use the other facilities in the project. If this is not possible – for example in day centres or dormitory style accommodation – then we recommend providing indoor kennels. These can be set up easily and can be placed somewhere that allows the dog to see its owner.

We find from experience that dogs belonging to homeless people cope badly when they are kept in outdoor kennels. They are likely to bark, howl and try to escape because they are used to close human contact on a regular basis. It is much easier to make the few changes outlined in this booklet in order to accept dogs into your hostel than it is to build and maintain outdoor kennels.

"Dog owners generally are a breed apart – they cause us very few problems, they just get on with their lives, they don't hang around, they're in and out, either in parks, or in their flats or rooms."

Sean Hickey, Providence Row HA,
London

Access for dogs

If you have double doors to your front entrance, try to keep the inner doors shut so that dogs cannot easily run out. If you don't have double doors, a self-closer will make sure that the door shuts automatically.

If you have more than one entrance, such as a back or side door, you could use the second entrance for dogs to minimise the amount of time they spend in the lobby and corridors.

If you decide to allow dogs into communal areas, such as TV rooms, it's a good idea to put signs up to let other residents know that there may be dogs inside. You could also do the same with residents' rooms. If you have more than one communal room, for example a TV room and a common room, then you could make one of them a dog-free zone. If you do this, try to make sure that both rooms are similar enough so that dog owners don't feel like second-class citizens.

It will help if you have a garden or outdoor space, such as a courtyard or car park, where the dog owners can take their pets. It also makes sense to establish a working relationship with your local dog warden: they will be able to tell you where the nearest dog-friendly parks are located.

Registration and microchips

The law says that dogs must wear a collar and tag with the owner's name and address on, so this should be included in your policy. It is worth asking the local council's dog warden if they run a voluntary registration scheme.

It is also a good idea to encourage clients to get their dogs microchipped as it is a way of permanently identifying their dog. Dogs Trust Hope Project microchips all dogs registered on our veterinary entitlement card scheme. Other animal welfare charities, the local dog warden and the police may also operate subsidised microchipping schemes.

Allergies

Some people can develop allergies to dogs. In almost all cases these allergies are mild and can be reduced further by:

- ensuring furniture is cleaned regularly
- ensuring rooms are regularly aired
- asking the pet owner to keep their dog clean and brush it regularly (outside)
- ensuring that people with allergies have minimal contact with animals and wash their hands afterwards.



Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 5: Dogs are dirty

As Liz Campbell, Assistant Manager of Equinox Brook Drive detox centre in London, said; "Dogs may need a bath when they arrive but it's nothing you can't get over." Clients should be encouraged to keep their dogs clean and groomed and to access free veterinary services where available.

Dealing with dogs: getting advice, help and support

If you decide to open your doors to homeless people with dogs, it's important you realise that there is expert support and friendly advice available every step of the way.

A good place to start is the Hope Project. We give advice and help to homeless dog owners and homelessness services and offer free and subsidised veterinary treatment through a veterinary entitlement card scheme.

The Hope Project has always been really supportive and helpful."

Liz Campbell,
Equinox Brook Drive detox centre,
London

Visiting homelessness services

Hope Project staff regularly visit projects to answer any questions they may have. We are happy to visit your project and answer your questions. We can walk you through the details of any issues you may have – such as health and safety, insurance, behaviour and hygiene – and tailor our advice to your specific needs. We can also put you in touch with project managers who do take dogs so you can hear what they have to say. And if you are having difficulties with any dogs in your project, you can ask our dog behaviour experts for advice.

If you don't need a visit, but would like help with your dog policy or advice on overcoming an issue you may have, feel free to email us at hopeproject@dogstrust.org.uk

Dogs Trust Hope Project® veterinary entitlement card scheme

Homeless dog owners can apply for a veterinary entitlement card for their dog through homelessness projects, such as hostels and day centres. As part of their dog policy, many projects insist that their clients use this service.

To register to apply for cards for your dog-owning clients, please go to www.dogstrusthopeproject.org.uk or call 020 7837 0006 for a registration pack.

Each card entitles the holder to free preventative veterinary care, such as vaccinations, microchipping, neutering, worming and flea treatment. The card also covers any other essential veterinary treatment up to a maximum of £250. In these cases, the dog owner just needs to pay a one-off charge of £10.

"We've had success with the vet scheme so that the dogs can go down to get treated – it works well."

Rob Minchin, Wallich Clifford, Cardiff



Other organisations

There are many other animal welfare charities that can give helpful advice and support. Please see the contact details at the end of this booklet for further information.

It's a good idea to give responsibility for dogs to a specific person on your staff, so that they can begin to make useful contacts. A good starting point is the environmental services department of your local council.

"We haven't really had problems, just issues, and these have all been fairly easy to resolve, largely because we got help from the Hope Project... Once we had to ask someone to get a muzzle for his pet – we got in touch with the Hope Project and they helped us sort it out."

Mandy Mansfield,
St Mungo's Mare Street hostel, London



Getting started

Some hostels find it useful to provide a starter pack for dog owners arriving at their project. This might include items like dog biscuits, leads, chews, blankets and toys. These will help your clients and will also help keep the dog occupied, making it less likely to bark, pine or chew other things.

You can probably get most, if not all, of these items for free. Try asking your local newspaper to appeal for new or second-hand equipment, or ask to put a poster and a collection bin in your local supermarket.

Telling the truth about dogs

MYTH 6: Dogs will upset the other residents

Very few people actively dislike dogs and those that do can be roomed well away from any dogs. Very often those with initial worries soon change their minds once dogs have been accepted. In fact, many hostel managers say that they and their residents enjoy having dogs around.

Anybody working in homelessness services understands the challenge of moving people on from temporary accommodation to a more permanent home.

Reluctant landlords

For dog owners, the situation is even worse, particularly in London. It often takes much longer to find them a suitable home with a housing provider prepared to accept their dog. In particular, many housing providers will only house tenants with dogs on the ground floor, where most flats are reserved for disabled people. In some cases, dog owners cannot find any permanent accommodation and are forced to stay within the hostel system.

“The only problem with allowing dogs is moving people on. Some housing providers will not accept dogs and this can limit your options, which means the process can take longer.”

Jonathan Boodle, St Mungo's Endsleigh Street hostel, London

Given the particularly close bond that homeless people have with their dogs, this is a serious problem. Dogs Trust is working to educate housing associations about this bond and how the stability, responsibility and companionship that comes from looking after a pet is not just essential to their eventual resettlement but can also help make it happen.

A joint approach

Dogs Trust has joined forces with Broadway Housing, St Mungo's and the Greater London Authority to assess the scale of the problem. The group surveyed dog-friendly hostels in London and received replies from 23 of them: almost all had had to refer clients with dogs to more than one housing association, local authority or clearing house.

Responses from the hostels painted a picture of little housing, long waits and no consideration given to the needs of the dog. They confirmed that it takes longer to resettle a dog-owning client than one with no animal and that there are few supported or semi-independent housing options for people with dogs.



Improving the system

Following the results of the survey and the examples they revealed, Homeless Link (www.homeless.org.uk) included a question regarding clients with dogs in its Move-On Plan Protocol (MOPP) project. This work is enabling hostel managers and local authorities in a number of areas across the country to work together to analyse move-on requirements and make strategic plans to overcome gaps and barriers. It is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Although this work is still being carried out, there are a number of ways in which project managers and staff can help dog owners find permanent accommodation.

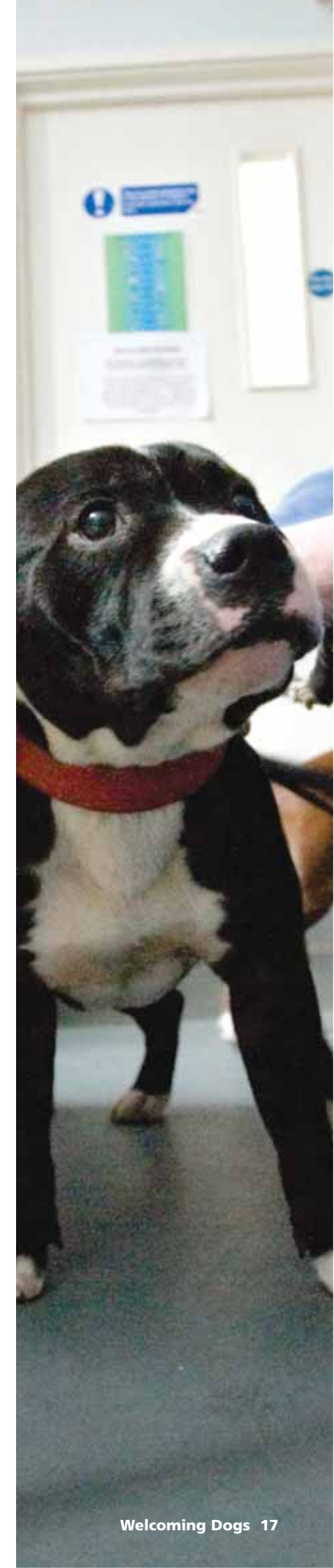
- Try to put yourself in the shoes of a dog owner when referring them for permanent housing: what sort of home do they and their pet need?
- Think of any steps you can take to help refer a dog owner – for example, giving the dog a reference or including copies of its veterinary certificates.
- It's worth gathering evidence to reinforce your client's case for living with their dog: for example, a statement testifying to the role their dog plays in the client's continued stability. In this way, you can demonstrate how important it is that the dog and its owner are not forced to separate just to find housing.
- Are there any other agencies helping the client, for example, substance abuse clinics or skills and training agencies, which could provide a reference?
- Many housing providers are worried that the dog will be left alone during the day, so it's a good idea to think about any ways in which you can reassure the provider that the dog will be looked after while its owner is at work or on training.

It will take some time to give dogs and their owners a truly fair deal when it comes to housing. However, Dogs Trust is working with housing providers to encourage them to be more flexible with animals. We are part of a pets and housing working group called Pathway, which was formed in 1995 to persuade housing providers to develop positive pet policies. In particular, Pathway is working to encourage more housing providers to allow dogs and cats in flats above the ground floor so that single dog owners have more housing choice.

You can download the latest resource for housing providers at: www.pathwaypetsandhousing.org.uk

“I know it's quite a leap, if you've not done it before, but this issue is keeping people on the streets and we have to change because people who are homeless don't want to be parted from their pet.”

Martin McNaughton, Castlecliff, Edinburgh



Model dog policy for homelessness services

The following are recommendations for a model dog policy, which clients should sign to confirm that they have understood it and agree to abide by it. Please feel free to adapt the policy to reflect the needs of your service.

It is also a good idea to put together a procedure document for staff, which they can follow should there be a breach of the policy.

If you receive a request for another species of animal and you need advice, please contact the RSPCA or a relevant animal welfare charity (see contacts at the end of this booklet).

If you require any further advice when putting together your policy and procedures for clients with dogs, then please email hopeproject@dogstrust.org.uk

1. Dog owners are responsible for feeding and exercising their dogs and for any health needs, including veterinary care.
2. Dogs must be kept on a collar and lead whilst in communal areas and not be left unattended to wander within the building. Unattended dogs will be returned to the owner or their room and a verbal warning may be issued. The management has the right to evict persistent offenders and their dogs.
3. Owners must not leave their dogs with other residents/service users for unreasonably long periods of time. What constitutes an unreasonable period of time will be discussed and agreed by both owner and staff when the dog is first admitted. Dogs may only be left for longer than this agreed period of time by prior arrangement with the management and with a named person who shall be held responsible for the animal.
4. Residents are not allowed to obtain a dog after they have moved in. This includes looking after another person's dog except by arrangement with the management.
5. If a dog shows any aggression towards people and/or other animals, it must be kept muzzled whenever it is in any communal area. The aggression may be a symptom of behavioural problems, which will need investigation. If the owner is unwilling to cooperate they may be asked to leave. Owners should be aware that it is a criminal offence to allow their dogs to frighten or injure a person in a public place, such as a hostel or day centre.
6. Dog owners must ensure that their dogs cause no nuisance to other residents/service users, staff or guests. Any dog owners who allow their dogs to disturb or frighten other residents/service users or staff will be asked to leave. Dog owners who fail to prevent their dogs from biting people or other dogs on the premises will be evicted.
7. If a dog is excessively noisy, a veterinary surgeon must be consulted for advice. However, this may also be a symptom of behavioural problems, which will also need investigation. Any owner unwilling to cooperate may be asked to leave.
8. If a dog is being neglected or maltreated, the management will discuss the matter with the owner. After consultation, advice concerning appropriate options will be given. The management will not tolerate refusal by dog owners to care for their dogs properly and will take advice from animal welfare organisations. In clear cases of neglect or maltreatment, the management will contact the RSPCA and the animal may be rehomed.
9. Dog owners should ensure that their dogs are fully vaccinated, regularly wormed, neutered and treated for fleas. (Staff should contact Dogs Trust Hope Project for further details of the veterinary entitlement card scheme, which is a free preventative veterinary service administered through homelessness projects).

10. Owners must clean up after their dogs. Those who persistently fail to do so may be evicted. Separate cleaning materials will be made available for dog owners. If professional cleaning or repair is required for any damage caused by the pet, the owner will be charged accordingly.
11. Owners must not let their animals foul in the vicinity of the building, for example, on the pavement outside. Any accidents must be cleared up immediately.
12. Dog owners must only feed and water their dogs in specified areas using utensils designed for that purpose. Dog owners have sole responsibility for feeding their dogs and will not be entitled to extra 'human' food from the premises to feed their dogs.
13. Dog owners must strictly observe the areas that are out of bounds to dogs.
14. Dogs may not be given away or sold within the building.
15. Responsible dog-owning residents will be allowed to replace a dog that has died with a suitable (e.g. size, age) substitute.
16. Dog breeding is not permitted on the premises. If a bitch is pregnant then the owner must agree to rehome the puppies after six weeks through an animal charity and agree to get their dog neutered.
17. All dogs must have an identity tag on their collar showing the name, address, and room number of the owner (if a resident).
18. If a resident/service user abandons their dog, which means leaving it without prearranging for someone else in the hostel to look after it, then we reserve the right to hand the dog over to the local dog warden or animal welfare charity.

I have read and understood the above policy and I agree to abide by it and fully cooperate with staff in the implementation of it. I understand that failure to do so will result in me being asked to leave/termination of my licence agreement.

Resident/Service User's Signature

Date

Staff Signature

Date



Dogs Trust Hope Project®

If you have any questions about accepting dogs into your project or about our veterinary entitlement card scheme, please do not hesitate to contact the Hope Project team at Dogs Trust.

The Hope Project
Dogs Trust
17 Wakley Street
London
EC1V 7RQ
Tel: 020 7837 0006
Email: hopeproject@dogstrust.org.uk
www.dogstrusthopeproject.org.uk

Other organisations

Animal health, assistance and rehoming

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home
4 Battersea Park Road
London
SW8 4AA
Tel: 020 7622 3626
www.dogshome.org

Blue Cross
Shilton Road
Burford
Oxon
OX18 4PF
Tel: 01993 822651
www.bluecross.org.uk

Cats Protection
National Cat Centre
Chelwood Gate
Haywards Heath
Sussex
RH17 7TT
Tel: 08707 708 649
www.cats.org.uk

Dogs Trust
(see contact details above)

National Animal Welfare Trust
Tylers Way
Watford-By-Pass
Watford
HERTS
WD25 8WT
Tel: 020 8950 1320
www.nawt.org.uk

Purina Pet Care Service
Tel: 0871 230 2325
(Mon-Fri, 8-6pm)

PDSA
Whitechapel Way
Priorslee
Telford
SHROPS
TF2 9PQ
Tel: 01952 290999
www.pdsa.org.uk

RSPCA
Wilberforceway
Southwater
Horsham
West Sussex
RH13 9RS
Enquiries: 0870 3335999
RSPCA cruelty line: 0870 5555999
www.rspca.org.uk

Scottish SPCA
Braehead Mains
603 Queensferry Road
Edinburgh
EH4 6EA
Tel: 0131 339 0222
www.scottishspca.org

Wood Green Animal Shelters
King's Bush Farm
London Road
Godmanchester
Cambs
PE29 2NH
Tel: 08701 90 40 90
www.woodgreen.org.uk

The Animal Warden Service within each local authority should also be able to provide assistance.

Behaviour Problems

Battersea Dogs Home Behaviour Advice Line
Tel: 0905 020 0222

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors
PO Box 46
Worcester
WR8 9YS
Tel: 01386 75115
www.apbc.org.uk

Pet Bereavement

Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Service
Tel: 0800 096 6606
Email: pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk

Environmental/Health & Safety

Contact the Environmental Health Services department of your local authority

Subsidised Veterinary Treatment

See Dogs Trust Hope Project for details of our veterinary entitlement card scheme. Also, check with organisations listed under Animal Health & Assistance to see if they have a branch or practice in the area. Each organisation that provides subsidised veterinary care will have their own eligibility criteria so it's best to check before booking an appointment.

Lost Dogs

Contact your local authority and the Animal Warden Service (Environmental Health Services Department)

Lost Dogs & Cats Line:
0901 477 8477
(Within the M25 area)

Petsearch UK: 01225 705175

PetLog (National Microchip Pet Identification Scheme):
0870 606 6751

