

Working with Rescue Groups

(adopted 23/11/14)

1 Introduction

1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA Policies and RSPCA position papers:

- [Policy A02 Acquiring a companion animal](#)
- [Policy A04 Adoption of RSPCA animals](#)
- [Policy A05 Euthanasia of companion animals](#)
- [Policy A06 Breeding of companion animals](#)
- [Position Paper A2 Animal Adoption Guidelines](#)
- [Position Paper A6 Operation of RSPCA Shelters](#)

1.2 Due to the scope of the unwanted companion animal problem there is pressure on RSPCA shelters to find sufficient suitable homes for all eligible animals in their care. RSPCA member societies are already working with rescue groups in various ways, whether formally or informally, in order to maximise positive welfare outcomes for our shelter animals.

1.3 This position paper provides information to assist those RSPCA member societies wishing to explore the opportunity to enter into a formal relationship with a rescue group. It is acknowledged that each member society, whilst operating under national guidelines, may have differing day to day operational procedures and structures based on their size, location, and resources. This position paper outlines national guidelines for when and how the services of a rescue group might be engaged to assist a shelter with rehoming.

1.4 A rescue group is defined as a not-for-profit group or organisation that rehomes companion animals. A rescue group may operate as a shelter and/or foster care network.

2 General principles

2.1 The welfare of each individual animal is prioritised when making decisions about the placement of an animal.

2.2 The RSPCA may work with a rescue group in two ways: to help rehome animals and/or to provide foster care:

- *Rehoming* involves permanent transfer of ownership from the RSPCA to the rescue group where the rescue group will rehome the animal.
- *Fostering* involves the RSPCA retaining ownership of the animal and utilising the rescue group's foster care network which may act as an extension of the RSPCA's own foster care network.

- 2.3 Prior to utilising the services of a rescue group to rehome an RSPCA shelter animal, all possible internal RSPCA options should be explored first, such as, adoption programs and promotions, foster care programs (including rescue group foster care) and transfers between RSPCA facilities.
- 2.4 Needs and arrangements for working with rescue groups will generally be identified and initiated by the RSPCA. Expressions of interest from rescue groups to work with the RSPCA will be assessed in accordance with RSPCA criteria.
- 2.5 In some situations the involvement of a rescue group might occur to assist a particular RSPCA shelter with capacity issues or because the specific animal will benefit from the specialised care and resources available through the rescue group.
- 2.6 Choice of rescue group should be based on their ability to meet the criteria outlined in 5.1.
- 2.7 Any existing RSPCA criteria for establishing business and marketing partnerships should be considered in the development of criteria for working with rescue groups.
- 2.8 The rescue group should have values consistent with those of the RSPCA and meet RSPCA standards and guidelines for care, treatment, and adoption of animals such as those in
- [Position Paper A2 Animal Adoption guidelines](#)
 - [Position Paper A6 Operation of RSPCA Shelters](#)
 - Any contract or MOU containing a Code of Conduct

3 Arrangements

- 3.1 A contract, MOU or similar written document must be in place and signed by both parties prior to commencement of any arrangement with a rescue group.
- 3.2 Any arrangement between or practices involving an RSPCA shelter and a rescue group must be in accordance with relevant federal, state and local government legislation.
- 3.3 Those animals that are suitable for rehoming and/or foster care can be placed with rescue groups.
- 3.4 Prior to transfer from an RSPCA shelter to the responsibility of a rescue group, all animals must be, desexed, vaccinated and permanently identified where appropriate for the individual animal and/or species (see Policy [A04](#) and [Position Paper A2](#)).
- 3.5 Details of transfer of the animal must be recorded with copies of relevant documentation being retained by both parties. Formal follow-up between the RSPCA and rescue group should occur for traceability to determine the rehoming outcome for the animal and to ensure animals are not retained for prolonged periods and to ensure their welfare.

- 3.6 All dealings between the RSPCA and rescue group must reflect mutual respect and acknowledge the positive relationship that exists between the parties.
- 3.7 The RSPCA can withdraw from a relationship with a rescue group if the RSPCA considers this is necessary.
- 3.8 Animals transferred from the RSPCA to rescue groups for rehoming will always be accepted back by the RSPCA (see Policy [A4.5](#)).

4 Circumstances for utilising rescue group services

- 4.1 Depending on the function and needs of individual RSPCA member societies, circumstances which may benefit from the services of a rescue group may include:
- Long-term rehabilitation or management of complex medical and/or behavioural conditions requiring specialised placement.
 - Animals ill-suited to staying in or being rehomed from a shelter environment, for example, where behaviour significantly deteriorates in a shelter and the animal is happier/healthier in a foster home environment.
 - Where an individual animal is difficult for the RSPCA to rehome, as indicated by the length of stay in the shelter.
 - Where large numbers of specific types/breeds or species of animal are presented to the RSPCA at one time which exceed RSPCA adoption demand or capacity.
 - Inspectorate seizures or surrenders involving large numbers of animals with complex health/behaviour issues, e.g. a hoarding or puppy farm/factory case.
 - RSPCA shelter capacity constraints.

5 Criteria for choosing a rescue group

- 5.1 When a rehoming or foster care need has been identified by the RSPCA, the rescue group identified by the RSPCA to fulfil that need and with whom an arrangement is entered into must:
- Operate in line with RSPCA values following due diligence as to their operational capacity, credibility and accountability.
 - Operate on a not-for-profit basis.
 - Have no previous animal welfare issues or relevant legal issues as determined by checks with local government, Inspectorate (and other relevant agencies where required) and other legitimate and reasonable RSPCA enquiries.
 - Operate in accordance with all local, state and federal legislative requirements, such as local laws, codes of practice, acts and regulations.
 - Provide appropriate rescue group identification to enable traceability.

- Demonstrate the ability to meet the physiological, behavioural and social needs of the animal/s and to provide a high standard of care and animal welfare.
- Have suitable premises, facilities, equipment and resources for general housing and care, or access to these through a foster care network, and where required, resources for medical and/or behavioural treatment and rehabilitation.
- Observe confidentiality of any private information concerning an animal's origin or history, e.g. not disclose case details or name of previous owner, etc.
- Allow inspection by RSPCA representatives of premises and facilities prior to signing an agreement and periodically during review of the agreement.
- Articulate accurately in relevant adoption materials, e.g. their website, the nature of the partnership with RSPCA and the circumstances of the acquisition of an RSPCA animal.
- Gain RSPCA permission before utilising RSPCA name in communications.
- Where the rescue group includes or is associated with animal breeders, they must be responsible breeders and operate in line with RSPCA policies, standards and values (see clause 3.4 and RSPCA Policy A06) and abide by all local, state and federal legislative requirements.

6 RSPCA support for rescue group partners

6.1 RSPCA shelters should consider how they might support a rescue group partner with their potential resource and communication requirements. Examples of the areas in which we could offer support where available to rescue groups are:

- *Resources*
 - pet supplies such as food, bedding, toys
 - veterinary services
 - capacity support (accommodation, care and adoption) when rescue groups are at capacity
 - animal behaviour and care training
 - operating guidelines and procedures for shelter and foster care management
- *Communications*
 - advertising on our website
 - customer referrals
 - use of RSPCA name in their materials with written pre-approval
 - cross-promotional opportunities
- *Advice on:*
 - humane training and socialisation
 - environmental enrichment
 - humane behaviour modification
 - veterinary care and treatment