



WELLNESS DOGS IN SCHOOLS

Background

The Division recognizes that a certified AAI Wellness Dog, when trained and supported, not only demonstrates its trained tasks but can also comfort people. The presence of a wellness dog can decrease anxiety and provide a level of comfort that enables students to work through a variety of challenging issues. Their responsibilities are to provide psychological and physiological therapy to individuals.

Wellness dogs are NOT service dogs. The Division supports the use of a certified wellness dog in schools as long as the appropriate planning and preparation has taken place prior to the implementation of the program.

Definitions:

Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)

An Animal Assisted Intervention is a goal-oriented intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human service (e.g. social work) for the purpose of therapeutic gains in humans. Animal assisted interventions incorporate human-animal teams in formal humans' service such as Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) or Animal Assisted Education (AAE).

Main Handler

The main handler will provide the primary home for the dog, providing for the dog's basic care and needs. The main handler is responsible for getting the dog to and from school each day. As the main handler is usually most familiar with the dog and his/her needs, primary decisions relating to the dog's care, well-being, deployment, etc. should rest with the main handler.

Alternate Handler(s)

The dog may have up to 3 alternate handlers who may care for the dog when the main handler cannot. The alternate handlers also work in a role where they can deploy the dog under the oversight of the main handler.

Support Handler(s)

Support handler may assist with transporting the dog within the school to an alternate or main handler, to the dog's resting area, or to the dog's "bathroom" area. Support handlers do not deploy the dog on their own.

Certifying Organization

The organization chosen by the school to oversee the training, education and certification of staff, the main handler and the dog.



Guidelines for Human and Animal Wellbeing

1. Human Wellbeing

1.1 **Parent Information and Consent** – Parents who register their children in a division school will be given an information and consent form to fill out, explaining that there is a school wellness dog on site. Any concerns will be dealt with on an individual basis, involving the Principal, and the main handler. Concerns and exclusions will be documented, whether for allergies, fears, or cultural sensitivities, and made available to all staff.

1.2 **School Liability Insurance Coverage** – The Principal is responsible for ensuring the school has, and maintains the correct insurance, under the guidance of the School Division Office.

1.3 **Signage** – A sign will be posted at the front entry of the school indicating that there is a AAI Wellness Dog on site, for visitors and for emergency service providers.

1.4 Student Education

1.4.1 At the beginning of the school year students will learn/ review the correct way to approach the dog in a group and individual setting at school.

1.4.2 At the beginning of the school year students will learn/review hand washing after petting the dog.

1.4.3 At the beginning of the school year students will learn/review their option to opt out of any encounters with the dog, at any time. Students whose families have not signed a consent form will not be able to be in the classroom when the AAI Wellness Dog is in the room.

1.5 Handler Training

1.5.1 **Main** – The main handler should have received training and certification in Animal Behavior and Animal Ethics. The main handler should have knowledge of the dog's well-being needs, including being able to detect signs of discomfort and stress in their dog. The main handler is the overseer of the deployment of the dog at school.

1.5.2 **Alternate** – The alternate handler(s) should have received training under the supervision of the main handler and should have knowledge of the dog's well-being needs. The alternate handler(s) may deploy the dog at school under the supervision of the main handler. There should be no more than 2-3 alternate handlers.

1.5.3 **Support** – The support handler(s) should have received training under the supervision of the main handler and should have knowledge of the dog's well-being needs. The



support handler(s) may assist in transporting the dog to the main or alternate handler, to the dog's resting area, or to the dog's designated bathroom area. The support handler(s) does not deploy the dog at school.

1.6 Staff Awareness

1.6.1 Teachers/EAs

1.6.1.1 All staff should have had training on basic dog behaviour, the role of AAI in the school, and basic procedures and protocols that are in place, preferably done by the certifying organization. Staff that do not wish to have the dog come into their classroom for any reason, are able to opt out of the AAI program.

1.6.1.2 When the AAI Dog is scheduled to come into a classroom, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to prepare the students and classroom for the visit. That includes picking up any objects on the floor that could harm the dog. It also includes allowing students time to opt out of the encounter with the dog and having an alternative place for them to go in the school. It may also include informing the main/alternate handler of any specific situations with a student that the handler should be aware of. After the visit has occurred, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to reinforce hand washing after being with the dog.

1.6.2 **Custodial Staff** – Custodial staff need to be aware of the designated bathroom area for the dog. It is the handler's responsibility to clean up and dispose of any dog waste. Custodial staff need to know where the designated disposal area is for dog waste. Custodial staff need to be informed if the dog has eliminated/vomited in any place in the school, so that they can do a final disinfect if necessary. It is not the custodial staff's job to clean up after the dog.

2. Animal Wellbeing

2.1 **Screening** – Not all dogs, including many that would be considered "good pets" by their owners, are good candidates for AAI. Dogs considered for participation in AAI should be carefully evaluated by an expert in animal behavior such as an animal behaviorist. Only those dogs with the proper disposition and training should be selected for AAI. A veterinarian or animal behaviorist should also examine the dog before his/her involvement with AAI- assessing for health, temperament and behavior and ensuring that all appropriate preventive medicine protocols are in place.

2.2 **Socialization visits** – Before a dog begins working fulltime as an AAI Wellness dog, they should have adequate time to become socialized with the layout of the school, begin building



relationships with staff and students, practice appropriate dog behaviours, as well as allowing the students to meet and get to know the dog, and practice appropriate behaviours with the dog.

2.2.1 Socialization visits should be brief and positive for both the dog and the students and staff.

2.2.2 There should also be an appropriate period of transition time from socialization visits to becoming a full-time AAI wellness dog so that the dog can be monitored for signs of stress and /or tiredness, and the dog's schedule can be developed accordingly. Industry standards prescribe that for every 1 hour of on-duty time, the dog should be given 1 hour of rest time.

2.3 **Training/Certification/Pet insurance** – As an AAI Wellness dog, the dog will be trained and certified by a recognized animal organization. The school will carry pet insurance to ensure the costs of any serious and/or expensive medical procedures will be able to be provided for the dog.

2.4 **Spay/Neuter** – As an AAI Wellness dog, the dog will be spayed/ neutered before working in the school.

2.5 **Health records/ veterinary care/annual checks** – Proper veterinary care must be provided. All dogs participating in AAI must be checked by a veterinarian during the selection process and on a regular basis.

2.6 **Daily ethical work schedule**

2.6.1 Working with the certifying animal organization, a daily schedule and log book will be set up and maintained by any handlers that interact with the dog. The log will include times and activities that the dog is deployed during the day, as well as signatures of who was the handler at the time. This close monitoring will ensure that the dog is getting the needed rest, breaks, potty breaks, etc. for optimal wellness. Any signs of stress or unusual behavior will also be recorded in the logbook. The logbook will be signed off at the end of the day by the main handler.

2.6.2 When the dog is taken to an area in the school with a handler, the handler will note details in the logbook, take the dog's backpack and treat bag with them. Upon returning to the quiet area, the logbook is to be updated and signed, and the backpack and treat bag returned for the next person.



- 2.7 **Rest area for dog** – A designated rest area with a crate and access to water will be set up in a quiet area of the school away from students. The dog is not to be disturbed at all during these times.
- 2.8 **Fresh Water** – Fresh water for the dog will be available throughout the day in several locations in the school.
- 2.9 **Bathroom area** – A designated bathroom area will be set up outside the school that is easily accessible for the dog, and clearly marked for people to be aware of. Dog waste bags will be available on site. Any dog waste that occurs will be removed by the handler who is with the dog at the time. Dog waste will be placed in a designated garbage receptacle that the custodial staff is aware of.
- 2.10 **Vomit** – If the dog is sick inside the school, the handler with the dog will stay with the dog at the site, and request assistance from another handler. One handler will take the dog outside to the designated bathroom area, and the other handler will clean up and disinfect the area immediately. This incident will be noted in the logbook, and custodial staff notified.
- 2.11 **Recess** – The dog will go outside for morning and lunch recess with a handler as part of the school walking club. The handler will have dog waste bags with them.
- 2.12 **Cold or Extreme Weather**
- 2.12.1 If the school deems that the weather is too cold/ stormy for students to go outside, then the dog will be taken out for the regular bathroom breaks and then come back inside.
- 2.12.2 The dog will have walking boots available for cold/ice/salt if the handler deems necessary.
- 2.13 **Fire, Fire Drills and Other Building Evacuations**
- 2.13.1 In the event of a fire or fire drill, whoever is the designated handler at the time of the event must assume responsibility for making sure the dog exits the building safely.
- 2.13.2 If the dog is in the quiet area of the office, it is the school secretary who will take the dog out of the crate and ensure the dog exits the building safely.
- 2.13.3 As soon as is safely possible, the main handler will be notified and/or the dog will be brought to the handler.
- 2.14 **School Lockdown** – In the event of a school lockdown or drill, whoever is the designated handler at the time of the event will ensure that the dog is removed from visibility and kept in safe



proximity to the others in the room. If safely possible, have the treat bag with the dog in order to keep the dog as calm and quiet as possible.

2.15 **Grooming** – The dog will be groomed at least every 6 weeks to ensure the coat is kept appropriately short to reduce shedding and avoid matting.

2.16 **Diet** – As an AAI Wellness dog, the dog’s diet will not contain any raw animal source protein foods. This choice is based on the 2010 Delta Society’s decision to ban raw animal source protein foods from its therapy dogs. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) make the following statement on their website:

Raw diets, especially raw meat diets, are not recommended because of the risk for salmonellosis and other infections that can affect pets and their owners.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) accepts the evidence for potential health risks to pets fed raw meat-based diets (RMBDs), and to humans who are in contact with RMBDs, or with pets fed RMBDs. The CVMA holds that the documented scientific evidence of potential animal and public health risks in feeding RMBDs outweighs any perceived benefits of this feeding practice.

2.17 **Vest** – The AAI Wellness dog will wear a vest or other visible article to indicate to the school community when the dog is on duty.

2.18 **Off-Leash** – The AAI Wellness dog may be off leash only inside the school and only with the main handler, and at her discretion, e.g., in her classroom, if she has deemed the students, situation and environment are safe for all. The dog is not permitted to be off leash at any time outside the school.

2.19 **Appropriate Boundaries** – The safety and comfort of a dog that is participating in AAI should never be jeopardized. Students should be supervised at all times and in all settings to make sure that they are not harming or treating the dog inappropriately, thereby putting themselves and the dog at risk.

2.20 **Freedoms of Animal Welfare** – The five freedoms of animal welfare will be adhered to at all times:

2.20.1 Freedom from Hunger and Thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

2.20.2 Freedom from Discomfort by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

2.20.3 Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.



2.20.4 Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

2.20.5 Freedom from Fear and Distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

3. School Building and Site

3.1 **Classrooms** – The AAI Wellness dog is permitted to access any classroom in the school with the classroom teacher's permission. If the teacher does not wish to have the dog come into their room, the handler will respect that decision. Students are able to opt out of any encounter with the dog and have an alternative place for them to go in the school, as designated by the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher will also inform the main/ alternate handler of any specific situations with a student that the handler should be aware of, before the dog enters the classroom.

3.2 **Kitchen/Washrooms/Sickroom** – The school kitchen, sickroom and washrooms will not be accessible to the dog.

3.3 **Bathroom Area** – A designated bathroom area will be set up outside the school that is easily accessible for the dog, and clearly marked for people to be aware of.

3.4 **Playground** – The AAI Wellness dog will not go on any designated playground equipment and immediate areas around the equipment. The dog will be on a leash with its handler as part of the school recess walking club.

3.5 **Bus stop** – The AAI wellness dog may be on the main sidewalk, but not directly next or near any school busses, provided the dog is with a handler.

4. Safety and Risks

4.1 Safety

4.1.1 The dog is never to be unsupervised around children under any circumstances.

4.1.2 Children must be educated in the proper way to approach and pet a dog.

4.1.3 Children will wash their hands after petting the dog.

4.1.4 The handlers must ensure that the dog is healthy, well rested, comfortable and cared for during and after interacting with students.



4.1.5 The handler must have had appropriate training and certification to understand the dog's behaviour including being able to detect signs of discomfort and stress in their dog and remove the dog from any situation which could put a child or the dog at risk.

4.2 Risks

4.2.1 **Allergies** – No dog is hypoallergenic. There is no such thing as a hypoallergenic dog breed, although some individual dogs may cause fewer allergy symptoms than others. Many people think that pet allergies are caused by a dog's or cat's fur, but the real source of pet allergies is often a protein that's in the saliva and urine of dogs and cats.

4.2.2 **Zoonoses** (diseases which can be transmitted to humans from animals) – Adequate measures must be taken to prevent zoonoses. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that the dog receives a routine health evaluation by a licensed veterinarian at least once a year regarding appropriate (flea), parasite, (tick or mange) prevention (control) and screening for specific, potentially zoonotic microorganisms including group A streptococci, if indicated.

4.2.3 **Fears/phobias/cultural sensitivities** – Any child who experiences any of the above has the opportunity at any time to opt out of having contact with the dog.

4.2.4 **Inappropriate dog behaviour** – In the event that a dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the school community, the dog will be limited, removed or excluded from the school facility until the situation has been investigated and resolved.

5. Financial Responsibilities

5.1 **Grooming** – Grooming is an important part of the dog's hygiene and well-being. By keeping the dog's coat at a shorter length, it is more suitable for AAI in a school, and helps minimize any shedding. Presently, the dog is being groomed every 6 weeks to lessen matting, and the main handler and the school are alternating paying for the grooming bills. Grooming over the summer is paid by the main handler.

5.2 **Dog Food** – The dog is eating an optimum brand of dog food selected by the breeder for this particular dog. The school pays for the dog food during the 10 months of the school year, and the primary handler pays for the dog food over the summer months.

5.3 **Boarding** – Presently the school works together to provide 'in-house' boarding with various handlers. Should that not be possible, boarding that is needed due to school responsibilities will be paid for by the school; boarding that is needed for personal reasons will be paid for by the main handler.



- 5.4 **Toys** – Presently the main handler pays for all dog toys. In the event that a particular toy or object is needed for educational purposes at school, the school will pay.
- 5.5 **Crates** – Crates, blankets, water dishes, food bowls that are used for school are paid for by the school. Those used at home are paid for by the main handler.
- 5.6 **Home fencing** – Enclosures, fencing etc. at the main handler's house are paid for by the main handler.
- 5.7 **Vet bills** – Bills for annual check-ups, vaccines, etc. are paid by the school.
- 5.8 **Pet insurance** – The school is enrolled in a pet insurance program, that the school will pay as long as the dog is part of the school.
- 5.9 **Dog license** – The main handler makes sure the dog has a valid license.
- 5.10 Training Treats and Supplies/Treats, collars, harnesses, leads and miscellaneous supplies
 - 5.10.1 Presently the main handler is paying for all training treats/treats and miscellaneous supplies for the dog.
 - 5.10.2 Specific, more costly items will be worked out on an individual basis with the school.

6. 5 Year Wellness Dog Plan

- 6.1 Recognizing that events can occur that might affect the ability of the dog to continue in the role of school wellness dog, and recognizing the human animal bond that forms, especially with young children, it is in the best interests of the school that consideration be given to the possibility that the dog will become unable to continue in the role for whatever reason.
- 6.2 Accordingly, no later than four or five years after the first AAI dog is certified, a second dog with its own team of handlers will be in the process of training and certification. This cycle will allow the school the school to always have a certified school wellness dog, alleviating any possibility of the school suddenly being without a dog, and the stress that can come with a dog leaving the program, for whatever reason. This plan recognizes the bond that develops over time with a dog, and the loss that can be experienced.
- 6.3 When there are 2 active wellness dogs in place, this timeline can be adjusted as necessary.

7. Retirement of Main Handler and/or Dog

- 7.1 Every dog is different which makes setting a definite age of retirement for the dog difficult. As a general guideline, Service, Therapy and AAI dogs usually are retired between 8-10 years of age, but every dog is different and needs to be monitored regularly for health conditions. It is also



important to consider if the dog is still able to complete tasks and if the dog is doing so completely happily and without stress.

- 7.2 It is recommended that the main handler be prepared to commit to an AAI dog for several years. The main handler has the first option to formally adopt the dog when either the main handler or dog retires, the main handler moves, or the main handler is no longer able to continue in their role as the main handler. It is scientifically proven that a dog bonds to one person for their entire life. It is not ethical for the dog to have this primary bond broken, as the dog becomes a member of the handler's family and builds a lasting relationship with that family.
- 7.3 Financially, if the main handler chooses to adopt the dog, and together they leave the program for any reason before 8 years have passed, the main handler will compensate the school for the original purchase price of the dog as follows:
- If the handler and dog leave after 1-3 years, the handler will pay the school \$2,500.
 - If the handler and dog leave after 4-6 years, the handler will pay the school \$1,500.
 - If the handler and dog leave after 7-8 years, the handler will pay the school \$1,000.

Reference: Section 3, 11, 31, 32, 33, 52, 53, 196, 197, 204, 222, 225 Education Act