Evacuation Centre: ASSISTANCE ANIMALS[1]

Assistance animals are not pets, but rather are highly trained disability support services that enable a person with disability to safely participate in personal and public life activities[2]. Assistance animals perform some of the functions and tasks that an individual with a disability cannot perform for themselves. Guide dogs are one type of assistance animal with which most people are familiar; however assistance animals may support people with a range of other daily activities including:

- Alerting persons with hearing impairments to sounds.
- Pulling wheelchairs or carrying and picking up things for persons with mobility impairments.
- Assisting persons with mobility impairments with balance.
- Alerting people with a medical condition such as epilepsy or diabetes to an impending episode

The _Disability Discrimination Act 1992_ (Cth)[3] (DDA) in Section 9, sets out the legal definition of an assistance animal. Under the Act, an assistance animal is a dog or other animal that is:

- accredited under a law of a State or Territory that provides for the accreditation of animals trained to assist a persons with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability; or
- accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph; or
- trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability, and to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

In Australia there is no uniform regulation or accreditation of assistance animals across States and Territories. Some States and Territories do provide permits and certification of assistance animals while others have no such provision in place. It is expected therefore that an evacuee with an assistance animal may not be able to present any evidentiary documentation that their animal is in fact a trained assistance animal. However if a person tells you it is an assistance animal it should be treated as such.

Evacuees & Assistance animals

During times of emergency it is probable that an evacuee accompanied by an assistance animal will present for support at an evacuation centre. An evacuee with an assistance animal should not be denied access to any form of emergency shelter including evacuation centres. Therefore all plans should consider how evacuees with assistance animals are supported and serviced during an evacuation. If an evacuee presents with an assistance animal there are some basic guidelines that should be observed:

- An assistance animal is not a pet and should not be treated as such
- An assistance animal should not be touched, fed, distracted or given treats without the direct

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[1] Australian Red Cross: Evacuation Centre Management Training guide 2017

[2] Australian Human rights Commission

[3] Commonwealth of Australia: Disability Discrimination Act 1992

permission of the handler

- An assistance animal should be in a harness or on a leash but does not need to be muzzled. They should not be allowed to roam freely throughout the centre.
- An evacuee with an assistance animal should not be separated from their animal
- An evacuee with an assistance animal should not be segregated from other evacuees (allowances will need to be made for ease of movement through centre facilities, proximity to toilets and special needs of other evacuees including allergies or fear of animals)
- An evacuee with an assistance animal should be allowed access to all areas of the evacuation centre that other evacuees have access to.
- The care and supervision of an assistance animal remains the responsibility of their handler while in the evacuation centre; however some support from the evacuation centre management team will be required (e.g. access to food, water, designated toileting area and animal waste disposal)
- The behaviour of an assistance animal should not pose a threat to the health or safety of other centre users. If an animal displays vicious or threatening behaviour the handler can be asked to remove them from the centre which may in some circumstances mean relocating both the evacuee and their assistance animal to more suitable accommodation.

Evacuation centre layout orientation for an evacuee with a vision impairment

An evacuee who is vision impaired and is accompanied by an assistance animal will need to be supported in orientating themselves to the evacuation centre layout. Orientation will take time as both the evacuee and their animal familiarise with their new environment. Familiarisation should be informed by the evacuee as opposed to directed by the management team. Care should be given to maintaining the same centre layout each day as changes to the layout will cause distress and disorientation to the evacuee and their animal. If a change needs to be made the evacuee should be informed and supported in re-orientating themselves.

Tips on supporting someone with Blindness or Visual Impairment[4]

- Understand that legally blind people may have some vision.
- Provide very explicit and specific directions if asked. Avoid using such terms as "over there" or "turn this way".
- Feel free to use words like "see" and "look".
- Offer your arm/elbow when leading someone who is blind.
- Place the person's hand on the side or back of the chair when seating them.

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[4] University of Washington: http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/faculty/faculty-resources/tips-for-working-with-different-disabilities/