



# Volunteer Handbook and Induction

## Welcome to ACT Pet Crisis Support

Thank you for offering to volunteer for ACT Pet Crisis Support (APCS). This document is designed to give you an overview of the organisation, what we do, what to expect when volunteering and what we will expect of you as a volunteer.

## About APCS

APCS is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit Canberra community organisation registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in March 2019 and dedicated to avoiding economic euthanasia of beloved family pets. APCS's Mission Statement is:

***"To ensure that all pets in need owned by disadvantaged, low-income pet owners in the ACT and local region have access to veterinary care".***

APCS assists pets in the community by providing subsidised veterinary care for disadvantaged, low-income pet owners who have no other options to care for their pets. We are dedicated to avoiding euthanasia purely on economic grounds by providing alternative options for care.

Our values include Transparency, Resilience, Compassion, Respect, Knowledge, and Collaboration, as detailed in our Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

## How Does APCS Help Pet Owners?

Any vet clinic in Canberra and the local region can apply for assistance from the charity via our website page [My Client Needs Help](#). We do not take direct applications from pet owners. The different types of support we offer include:

- *Amounts under \$250* - this is available to vet clinics without prior APCS Committee approval, to assist pet owners who are unable to afford vet care. This was developed to ensure vet clinics were able to see low-income pet owners with the assurance that we will cover a consultation fee and some basic treatment.
- *Amounts over \$250* - veterinary clinics are able to apply for up to \$1,500 to assist a low-income pet owner with an unexpected vet bill. We do not assist with routine care such as vaccination, parasite control and desexing. Pet owners

must first apply for VetPay and have exhausted other options for funding such as borrowing from friends and family.

- *Dentistry* - all dental treatments for which assistance is requested are referred to RSPCA ACT. A pet owner or vet clinic can apply via our webpage '[Dentistry](#)' and the owner is able to utilise Centrepay to pay off the account with RSPCA ACT. Only pet owners receiving a Centrelink payment qualify for this service.
- *Home visit palliative care* - we have partnered with Ashlee from **Sunset Vets** to offer home visit quality of life assessments, euthanasia and palliative care visits. These are only for pet owners experiencing financial difficulty.
- *Tiny Vet Clinic (TVC)* - the mobile vet clinic, launched on 1st March 2023, brings vet services to the local community, assisting those pet owners who have difficulty obtaining transport to the vet or those that are otherwise unable to access vet care due to lack of funds or inability to access a vet appointment.

## **APCS Committee**

APCS is governed by a Committee of locals with a shared passion for assisting people and animals. All members volunteer their time and energy to the important work of APCS, meeting regularly to review progress, and to determine strategies to fundraise and advance the charity's interests.

Although the names may occasionally change the current Committee roles include:

- Vet Lead and Founder: Dr Eloise Bright ([dr.eloisebright@gmail.com](mailto:dr.eloisebright@gmail.com))
- President: Dr Eloise Bright ([dr.eloisebright@gmail.com](mailto:dr.eloisebright@gmail.com))
- Vice President: Karen Gerrard ([karen@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:karen@actpetcrisis.com))
- Secretary: Sue Thomas ([secretary@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:secretary@actpetcrisis.com))
- Treasurer: Alex Bai ([finance@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:finance@actpetcrisis.com))
- Ordinary Committee Members: Michelle Tulley, Carrie Traynor, and Deidre O'Brien.

The Committee can be contacted via email to: [team@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:team@actpetcrisis.com).

## **Your Volunteering Experience**

### **Volunteer Roles**

We are entirely volunteer-run, so would not exist without the valuable support of volunteers. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds and interests. There are many ways that you can provide help as a volunteer, including providing assistance with planning or delivering events, helping to run market stalls, filling one of the roles needed to run the Tiny Vet Clinic, writing procedures or articles, drafting grant applications, assisting with social media messaging, and other administration work. Please complete the [Volunteer Application Form](#) if you have not already and are interested in a specific role.

Being an APCS volunteer means being part of a rewarding two-way relationship. It provides an opportunity to achieve our goals by involving you in our activities, and for you to make a meaningful contribution of your skills and time, contributing to social and community outcomes. As a volunteer you will also have certain responsibilities, including acting responsibly, being accountable to APCS for your actions as a volunteer, and respecting APCS values and practices.

### **Record-Keeping**

Important documents, including Application Procedures, our Governing Document, Code of Conduct and this Handbook and Induction document are available in a password-protected area of the APCS website under "Admin" <https://www.actpetcrisis.com/admin.html#/>. Volunteers are expected to have read these documents prior to volunteering. Please contact a Committee member if you are unable to access them for any reason.

### **WhatsApp**

Our WhatsApp groups are a quick, easy way to communicate with other volunteers. Various groups have been created to discuss different topics, so whenever possible it is important to post a message on the WhatsApp group that is most appropriate to that particular topic of discussion.

Please remember that written comments can easily be misinterpreted. We are all volunteers from diverse backgrounds, so it is very important to be courteous and respectful of other volunteers in your communications. Before commenting, always read your message to ensure you are not likely to upset someone unintentionally.

### **Social Media Policy**

We have a strict policy of not posting on social media sites any photos of volunteers or the individuals or animals we deal, unless the permission of the pet owner and/or volunteer has been obtained. Do not post any images of animals, volunteers or clients, or information about cases that you have encountered while volunteering. Do not include our logo on any personal posts or make comments on any social media platforms or websites on behalf of APCS. If you see a comment on social media that needs attention, please email [team@actpetcrisis.com](mailto:team@actpetcrisis.com) or simply direct the poster to email [actpetcrisis@gmail.com](mailto:actpetcrisis@gmail.com).

Reposting or sharing of things published on APCS social media sites is encouraged. Consistent messaging is important. If in doubt please ask a Committee member.

### **Attendance at Volunteering Shifts**

We are a small team of volunteers, so if you cannot attend a meeting or arranged shift or event, please let someone know as soon as possible. Please use the relevant WhatsApp group or personal mobile telephones to provide as much notice as you can so arrangements can be made to cover your absence.

### **Dress Code**

We have a limited number of t-shirts available for volunteers; please let us know if you would like one to wear to volunteer shifts. Otherwise please wear neat, clean and tidy clothing with closed shoes if you will be working with animals.

### **Boundaries**

Some APCS volunteering roles will require you to hold an ACT Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration and have a valid card, which can be applied for online with Access Canberra. It is free for volunteers unless you work in paid employment in a regulated activity and also volunteer, in which case you are required to pay the application fee.

You will be advised if this is required for any particular role you may be interested in.

When interacting with clients and other volunteers you may find yourself connecting with people you would otherwise not interact with. You may meet people who are in financial or emotional distress. All our volunteers are good people, but it is important to maintain boundaries and ensure you are not offering to help with tasks that are outside of the scope of APCS.

APCS is non-political, non-religious and inclusive. Any beliefs or views that volunteers communicate can be seen as representing the organisation. As such it is important that volunteers do not impose their personal beliefs or opinions about religion, politics or what they believe to be the appropriate level of care provided to animals. Our clients are often not able to provide 'gold standard' or ideal care for their pets. Should you see an animal that you believe is suffering, please bring it to the attention of the Vet Lead and do not make comments to other volunteers or clients.

Volunteers should never be involved in the purchase or consumption of alcohol or drugs with clients. There is no smoking in and around the Tiny Vet Clinic or at APCS events or fundraisers. Volunteers are also not to give clients cash, lifts, food or offer any services besides those offered as part of APCS.

It is also important not to give advice to clients outside of your skills and expertise. Veterinary advice should not be given unless it is confirmed with the Vet Lead first.

### **Complaints and Disputes**

It is important that volunteers follow all policies, procedures and rules advised to them and are able to take direction from Committee members. This will support

the delivery of activities in a safe, efficient and effective way and will ensure an enjoyable volunteering experience.

Should you have any problems with the way APCS operates or your volunteering experience or you have an issue with a fellow volunteer or service provider, please advise a Committee member. If the complaint is confidential in nature, please email or phone our President, Vet Lead or Secretary. Please refrain from venting or commenting on social media or to other volunteers, as this often reflects poorly on APCS and can be harmful to the emotional well-being of our other volunteers.

If an appropriate resolution is unable to be determined, please fill out a [Dispute Resolution Request](#).

## **Health and Safety Matters**

### **Health, Safety and Support**

APCS works to ensure that all volunteers, supporters and clients are as safe as possible at all times when dealing with the charity and will provide information, instructions and assistance as required. As a volunteer, you must take reasonable care for your own health and safety, take care not to affect the health and safety of others, carry out tasks in a safe way and follow all reasonable instructions provided by APCS.

When volunteering, if something doesn't seem safe or you notice any safety hazards please speak up. Speak to a Committee member or the organiser of the event or volunteering opportunity and do not take unnecessary risks. Please also ensure you are following social distancing guidelines to keep yourself and others safe from transmission of COVID-19. Please do not attend a volunteer shift if you are feeling unwell. Follow hygiene measures such as handwashing and the use of sanitiser and gloves when appropriate. If you are unable to maintain the recommended 'social distance' you may choose to wear a face mask and gloves.

### **Safety with Animals**

If you are assisting with animals, please ensure you follow the directions of more experienced volunteers. Do not take any risks or assume that pets are friendly and confident, as many pets will bite when scared and many do not give clear warning before doing so. Do not make direct eye contact with any dogs or cats that may be nervous and do not reach out to pat an animal unless they come to you and actively solicit attention.

Dogs should be kept on a lead at all times; if a client has a flimsy or inappropriate lead, offer a lead to borrow (if available) for the duration of the interaction.

Cats should be kept in a carrier at all times. Cats not in carriers will be unable to attend the Tiny Vet Clinic. If there is an APCS carrier available, this can be loaned for the duration of the clinic but must be returned by the end of the clinic.

Should you be bitten or scratched during your volunteering shift, please notify the Vet Lead as soon as possible and complete an [Incident Report](#).

### **Incidents, Injuries and Near-miss Reporting:**

An incident includes anything that results in physical or psychological injury, vehicle accidents, disease outbreaks, property damage, fire, theft or environmental damage. Incidents should be reported to a Committee member as soon as possible verbally or via email. If the incident has caused injury or property damage, please fill out an [Incident Report](#).

It is important to also report near-misses when something has occurred that might have led to an injury or property damage, but no harm was caused, e.g. you trip on an extension lead but manage to grab the edge of a table to prevent a fall. Reporting incidents, injuries and near-misses allows us to promptly address any health and safety risks and take follow-up action.

### **Other Safety Measures**

When volunteering, do not lift any animal over 15kg and if you suffer from any conditions that make lifting risky, please do not lift anything and look after your body first. It matters to us that you stay healthy and well.

When entering or exiting the Tiny Vet Clinic, please always tread carefully and ensure you use the step provided. If you are too tall to safely stand inside, please restrict your volunteering role to external tasks. If you find working at the Tiny Vet Clinic difficult and you are unable to remain safe, please notify the Vet Lead and avoid the activity. We do not want to aggravate any pre-existing health conditions.

If volunteering for external tasks, and at market stalls, please be aware of sun safety and wear sunscreen and a hat as needed, and bring a water bottle to stay hydrated in hot weather.

### **Managing Violence - Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment**

APCS aims to provide a safe and positive environment free of bullying, harassment or discrimination whether from the general public, clients or other volunteers. Respectful and courteous behaviour is expected from all individuals.

Bullying can be defined as victimising, humiliating, threatening or undermining an individual or group. Harassment includes unwanted propositions, inappropriate language or phone calls, touching, staring and persistent requests for dates. Discrimination is unfair or unfavourable treatment due to a personal attribute such as age, immigrant status, disability, illness, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation or intersex status. None of these behaviours is ever acceptable.

Please advise a Committee member if you do not feel safe, feel uncomfortable, or are experiencing bullying discrimination or harassment.

Physical threats towards volunteers will not be tolerated. Should you feel threatened, please advise the Vet Lead, a Committee member or a service provider. If you experience verbal abuse or threats, do not confront or argue with the aggressor and do not make promises you will not be able to keep.

Never attempt to disarm an armed person, break up an altercation or turn your back on a person showing aggressive behaviours. Should the aggressor continue displaying unsafe behaviour, proceed to a safe place for example, the car, a neutral building such as the St Vincent De Paul office, the Tiny Vet Clinic or an agreed upon location and await further instructions.

## **Our Animal Clients**

### **Fear-Free Vet Care**

All volunteers working with animals will need to first view the video available [here](#) on how to read body language in dogs. Dogs that are stiff and showing fear signs need to be given distance away from people and other dogs in order to reduce their fear. Watching body language increases both pet, owner and volunteer safety in what is often a stressful situation.

The liberal use of treats is an easy way to change a dog's emotional state when it comes to fear, however, it is always best to throw treats rather than reach towards a scared dog. Please always check with the owner whether it is okay to give their dog treats, in case of food allergies or intolerances.

Cats should always be placed away from other animals and off the ground with a towel sprayed with [Feliway](#) covering their carrier.

### **Rescue and Adoption**

APCS is not a rescue organisation and as such we do not have the facilities needed to be involved in rescuing, fostering or rehoming animals. Any client who needs to rehome their pet should be directed to an appropriate organisation for assistance. Further information can be obtained from an APCS Committee member.

### **Revision**

APCS may make changes to this document from time to time to improve the effectiveness of the organisation's operation or to reflect any changes in legislation. Should the review find that there is a need to change any policies,

volunteers who may be impacted by this proposed change will be advised prior to the change taking place.

**Document Control**

Document owner: Volunteer Coordinator

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