

Media Release

Opposition leader sees program that gives hope to elderly & their pets

The plight of ill and frail elderly people who rely on a pet for companionship and love was the focus of a visit by NSW Liberal leader John Brogden, to the RSPCA's Yagoona shelter on Wednesday August 11 2004.

Mr Brogden met 'Whiskey' whose elderly owner could no longer take care of the 13 year old dog. Through a special pilot program operated by the RSPCA and the Aged Care Assessment (ACAT) team at St Joseph's hospital Auburn, Whiskey is now enjoying quality care and the company of her new foster parent Ken.

RSPCA Chief Veterinarian Dr Mark Lawrie said Mr Brogden's visit highlights the *Pets Of Older People* program and reinforces the significance of the RSPCA's work on behalf of animals and people in the community.

"Not only is the RSPCA caring for around 33,000 homeless animals a year, we are working to improve the lives of people in the community through this program with St Joseph's hospital and with Safe Beds for Pets, which the RSPCA operates with St George Hospital Domestic Violence unit.

"The RSPCA is alleviating suffering and anguish in animals and in humans and we need the community and the government to recognise the significance of our work and the need for additional support."

Dr Lawrie applauded the efforts of St Joseph's hospital ACAT team, who identified the need for RSPCA involvement when they found many aged people were no longer able to care for their pets or were fearful of leaving animal companions when they go to hospital.

"The St Joseph's hospital ACAT team and the RSPCA are enhancing the quality of life for all older people and pets involved."

Any elderly, frail, ill or disabled person in the Auburn Local Government area who does not have relatives or friends willing to take responsibility for their pet is eligible for assistance under this program.

The Pets of Older People program, believed to be the first of its type in Australia, is now expanding to other local government areas.

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Pets of Older People Program

St Joseph's Hospital/RSPCA NSW

Fact Sheet

Background:

- Pets can be therapeutic for older people, however age and disability often restrict owners from seeking veterinary assistance for their pets.
- Pets of Older People program established to care for the pets of older persons in the community. Set up by Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) at St Joseph's Hospital, Auburn, NSW. ACAT assist the aged, allowing them to stay in their own homes.
- ACAT noticed a need for a special program when elderly patients without family support were undergoing treatment and/or were hospitalized. RSPCA involved 2003.
- Age and disability prevent some owners from caring for their pets as they would like. Others have no concept of their pets' needs.
- Some people refused to enter hospital or residential care as they were worried about their pets' future.

Services provided through Pets of Older People Program:

- Monitoring of pets by RSPCA staff
- Support in caring for pets
- Treatment by RSPCA vets when required
- Monthly grooming with Aussie Pooch Mobile
- Foster accommodation should owner require hospitalization
- Assistance with pet food if required

Eligibility:

- Any elderly person owning a pet who does not have relatives or friends willing to take responsibility for the pet
- Eligibility determined after assessment by ACAT at St Joseph's Hospital. Palliative care patients/inpatients do not require ACAT assessment
- Presently limited to those living in Auburn Local Govt area, however program is expanding to some other local govt areas.

Other important points of Pets of Older People program:

- Program enhances quality of life of pet involved and otherwise healthy pets have potential to go to new home.
- Opportunity for RSPCA to care for animals and alleviate stress on older people who are unable to care for pets, despite good intentions.
- RSPCA Inspectors can communicate with St Joseph's ACAT when they identify elderly who are not adequately able to care for themselves.
- Prior to being fostered to an approved carer, animals are vet checked, vaccinated and provided with any necessary treatment.
- If Joseph's foster carers are unavailable, RSPCA provides emergency boarding.

To access the service

– contact POOPS co-ordinator on (02) 9649 8941 (Mon-Thurs 9am – 4pm)