

Taking The Lead Welfare Policy



We have used the welfare model of the AIIA as a template for our program, adjusting it to fit the situation of the TTL setting.

Taking The Lead seeks to develop the very best training methodologies, delivered by experienced and qualified staff. We ensure that the dog remains central to our ethos and strive to facilitate the highest standards of care for our dogs and people, creating a model of kindness. We work within a multiagency dynamic to ensure that all staff have the support they need to facilitate the care of our dogs to the highest standards while creating a safe working environment for all of the team involved.

The "Five Freedoms" in conjunction with Operational Details of the Five Domains Model and its key Applications to the Assessment and Management of Animal Welfare (Mellor, 2017), and the One Health Initiative (One Health, 2019), must underpin all of the Taking the Lead activity and form the basic rights that all dogs in our care can expect.

1. Freedom from thirst, hunger, and malnutrition by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Milani, 2016; KINGDOM, U. 2017).

Aims: "Minimize thirst and hunger and enable eating to be a pleasurable experience" (Mellor, 2017). We ensure that we use high-quality diets, including feed puzzles, Kong, snuffle mats, and recreational bones to aid relaxation and adequate enrichment and stimulation.

2. Freedom from discomfort by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; KINGDOM, U. 2017).

Aims: "Minimize discomfort and exposure and promote thermal, physical, and other comforts" (Mellor, 2017). Our dogs have their own safe space for rest areas, warm and dry inside their classroom. Bedding is kept clean and comfortable, with covered sleep spaces if the dog prefers, ensuring undisturbed sleep during the day, with predictable sleep regimes in the foster homes in the evenings along with weekend rest or on-site accommodation. Wherever possible, we seek to ensure that time within a kennel is minimised and contact with an attached figure is accessible to reduce stress exposure with the dog.

3. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease by prevention and/or rapid diagnosis and treatment (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011).

Aims: "Minimize breathlessness, nausea, pain and other aversive experiences and promote the pleasures of robustness, vigour, strength and coordinated physical activity" (Mellor, 2017). Example: Our puppies have a variety of floor surfaces and environments to explore and train around, with exercises to promote physical condition and muscle development. Our training incorporates proprioceptive awareness activities.

4. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions that avoid mental suffering (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011).

Aims: "Promote various forms of comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence and a sense of control" (Mellor, 2017). Example: "Provide safe, congenial and species-appropriate opportunities to have pleasurable experiences" (Mellor, 2017). Ensure the fit is good for the dog and the environment, population, and activity level. Our dogs are carefully desensitized to any environmental stimuli that may cause stress; at all times, a trained member of staff is able to prioritize dog safety and wellbeing above any other duties. All handlers are trained in Canine Body language and understand stress signals.

5. Freedom to express most normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities, and the company of the dog's own kind (Glenk et al., 2013; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011).

Aims: "Minimize threats and unpleasant restrictions on behaviour and promote engagement in rewarding activities" (Mellor, 2017). Example: Congenial company and appropriately varied conditions (Mellor, 2017). Being able to rest, play, and

engage in enriching activities that the dog prefers and enjoys. "Animals develop a better relationship with humans if, above the quality of interactions, their life conditions are appropriate" (Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011). The animal-human bond is central to all that we do, encouraging attachments and ensuring that any handler involved interacts in a caring and compassionate way at all times.

Standards of Practice for the Dog Handler/trainer

All training and handling methods should be designed to promote the welfare of the dog(s). Dogs should always be trained and handled in a positive and humane manner. When participants handle the dogs, they should be educated in the use of positive methods and respect for the dog (Mellor, 2017; One Health, 2019; Winkle & Ni, 2019).

Trainers and handlers will use least restrictive/intrusive, minimally aversive (LIMA)/positive reinforcement/reward-based (food, toys, verbal cues, touch, etc.) and humane training techniques to train and engage the dogs to the greatest degree possible (Glenk et al, 2013; Mellor, 2017). The dog handler must train the dog to respond to verbal and/or non-verbal cues. The training team will observe, intervening if the handler seems to be unaware of any mounting frustration or stress levels of the dog that they are working with.

The training technique must be compatible with the situation in which the dog will be working. For example, down stays could be taught so that the dog learns to relax in the position rather than be on high alert, waiting for the next cue.

The dog handler must comply with all the points in the behaviour contract that they sign when entering the program. They must always follow the direction of the training team and continue to learn and develop their own training skills while attending the Taking the Lead program.

The dog handler must show careful handling, supporting the dog when they require. The dog handler must encourage initiative, adaptability, and problem-solving skills while still maintaining control. This is important for the dog to learn to have genuine interactions with participants. During TTL work, the participants should be able to observe the TTL dog trainer's handling, always showing empathy

and kindness to the dog. This will help the participant to understand how to interact with dogs in a safe and positive way (Winkle & Ni, 2019).

We adhere to the AAll standards with regards to the emotional well-being of the dogs participating in our programs, which are as follows:

Be aware of how human emotional state (both from handlers and participants) and behaviour can influence a dog's emotional state/behaviour and vice versa.

Dogs should view the owner or handler as a secure base in order to explore the environment, play, and interact with strangers. (Topal, Miklosi, Csanvi & Doka, 1998; Vanfleet, 2017); however, the dog should be comfortable working directly with participants.

View the animal as a subjective participant instead of an objective instrument, assess the animal's behaviour and HAI, not just human's reaction. The animal is a key part of the intervention and can heavily influence the outcomes (Vitztum).