

The IAHAIO Rio Declaration on Pets in Schools

Given the strong evidence that has accumulated in recent years demonstrating the value, to children and juveniles, of social relationships with companion animals it is important that children be taught proper and safe behaviour towards those animals and the correct care, handling and treatment of the various companion animal species.

Realising that companion animals in school curricula encourage the moral, spiritual and personal development of each child, bring social benefits to the school community and enhance opportunities for learning in many different areas of the school curriculum, IAHAIO members have adopted fundamental guidelines on pets in schools at their General Assembly, held in Rio de Janeiro in September 2001.

IAHAIO urges all school authorities and teachers, as well as all persons and organisations involved in pet programmes for schools, to consider and abide by the following guidelines:

1. Programmes about companion animals should, at some point, allow personal contact with such animals in the classroom setting. Depending on school regulations and facilities, these animals will:
 - a) be kept, under suitable conditions, on the premises, or
 - b) be brought to school by the teacher, or
 - c) come to visit, in the context of a visiting programme, together with their owners, or
 - d) accompany, as a service dog, a child with special needs.
2. Any programme involving personal contact between children and companion animals must ensure:
 - a) that the animals involved are
 - safe (specially selected and/or trained),
 - healthy (as attested by a veterinarian),
 - prepared for the school environment (e.g. socialized to children, adjusted to travel in the case of visiting animals),
 - properly housed (either in the classroom or while at home), and
 - always under supervision of a knowledgeable adult (either the teacher or the owner);
 - b) that safety, health and feelings of each child in the class are respected.
3. Prior to the acquisition of classroom animals or visitation of the class by programme personnel with companion animals that meet the above criteria, both school authorities and parents must be informed and convinced of the value of such encounters.
4. Precise learning objectives must be defined and should include:
 - a) enhancement of knowledge and learning motivation in various areas of the school curriculum
 - b) encouragement of respect and of a sense of responsibility for other life forms
 - c) consideration of each child's expressive potential and involvement.
5. The safety and well-being of the animals involved must be guaranteed at all times.