

animal assisted activity

Since the beginnings of Volkshilfe Wien (VHW), volunteering has become an essential component. In the future too, there will always be new challenges for social organizations, which will require the support of volunteers and professional development in this area. (Doris Moravec, Handbuch Freiwilligenarbeit, 2017)

Target group

The project "animal assisted activity" links different objectives of three groups of people:

1.1 Group 1

People who are in the care of the Vienna homeless assistance (WWH) who are able and willing to take on partial responsibility are motivated by volunteering

- Support people who are generally or temporarily overburdened with animal care
- To engage in a meaningful, fulfilling activity through its commitment, i.e. to have a job and to be "important".
- Make new social contacts
- To take responsibility in a structuring environment

People who are in the care of the WWH and do not own a pet, since they are overwhelmed with its 24/7 care and the associated responsibility have the opportunity through their commitment

- To build social contact with an animal and other people and so gradually to be introduced to more responsibility, structure...

1.2 Group 2

The project "animal assisted activity" offers a great opportunity to volunteers to get in touch with persons supervised by WWH. Due to the voluntary commitment of the members of Group 1, they find motivated and committed partners here. Potential fears of contact can thus be reduced, the inhibition threshold lowered, and new volunteers more easily addressed.

1.3 Group 3

Animal keepers in the field of WWH as well as in the field of social housing, who are unable due to mental and / or physical impairments, to employ their pet species-appropriate and to ensure sufficient movement of the animal.

2 Objectives

Voluntary engagement of people under the care of WWH is seen as a process of self-empowerment. People in situations of lack, deprivation or social exclusion are strengthened - according to their individual situation - to take on more responsibility. At the same time, the positive feeling of helping others to contribute something meaningful to the well-being of society will increase self-esteem.

Many people are willing to volunteer in social areas such as WWH. Unfortunately, however, the commitment often fails due to existing inhibitions. By "approaching each other" Volunteer of the groups 1 and 2 arises for both sides an open impression of commonality, inhibitions to get involved are lowered.

Pet owners being emotionally attached to their animals, but unable or no longer able to deal with and move them in an appropriate manner, are relieved without having to give up their beloved pet.

3 Procedure

The care and coordination of the volunteers from the groups 1 and 2 takes place through the Volkshilfe Wien. Similarly, the allocation of volunteers to members of Group 3 takes place by the Volkshilfe Wien.

WWH potential volunteers undergo a selection process to evaluate which activities they are interested in and which of them they can handle. Here, the employees of the supervising institutions of the WWH are consulted.

The initial contact between volunteers of Group 1 and those of Group 2 is always in attendance of a caring social worker at Volkshilfe Wien. Appointments between volunteers of both groups and persons of Group 3 are made either directly on site or through coordination by the project management. There is no disclosure of contact information to members of each other 2 groups.

4 Benefits for volunteers

4.1 Training

Volunteers of groups 1 and 2 are being prepared for their activities. In obligatory taster days (with certificate) topics of the volunteer work are explained:

- Dos & don'ts of FW work in the social field
- borders (own and those of others)
- Basics of the planned methodical approach
- Privacy Policy

In addition, these taster days offer the opportunity to get to know the other group for the first time. For volunteers without dog license a basic course (free of charge, with certificate) with animal trainers is obligatory.

4.2 Feedback

Volunteers from both groups have the opportunity to exchange their experiences in socially assisted mixed reflection meetings, to support each other in their work and to benefit personally.

In addition, both groups are scheduled to have one-to-one feedback sessions with both SA and animal trainers to promote and consolidate the skills acquired during the project.

5 Budget

The social impact achieved, both in the area of carers and members of both voluntary groups, is achieved by relatively small means. Depending on additional funds (recognition fund), the payment of a therapeutic pocket-money for group 1 volunteers is possible in the future.