



CONNECTING PEOPLE AND SHELTER ANIMALS THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMS AT RSPCA NSW

# CONNECTING REFUGEE CHILDREN AND SHELTER ANIMALS - **HEALING THROUGH EMPATHY**

A programme supported by Sydney Water through one of their many grants.

The innovative pilot program support positive interactions for refugee children and surrendered, abandoned or rescue animals in the greater Sydney region. It will create opportunities for mutual healing and a non-judgmental empathetic introduction to Australian culture using a particularly engaging method for children – animals.

The students will be introduced to various native and pet species, the Australian standard of animal care, and learn about different animal needs diet, enrichment, behaviour and consequences of neglect. The students will be encouraged to breakdown potential negative preconceived ideas of animals from their previous homes and learn English without judgement while developing empathy and reduce past traumas.

With increases in refugee population the need for RSPCA New South Wales to engage with communities diverse in culture, religion, race and language, has grown. Animals positively impact on children's health by reducing stress, increase social interactions and physical activity provide nonjudgmental connections crossing barriers like language, culture and traumas.

Our innovative program aims to support vulnerable young refugees experiencing trauma and loss by connecting them with animals who share similar experiences. These interactions maybe all these children need to find comfort and hope again in their new home.

The initiative funded by Sydney Water's community grants, provides a unique opportunity to communicate animal welfare messages to new immigrants through education. Understanding that some cultures have different norms about animal welfare than standards supported by RSPCA New South Wales, these positive interactions provide engaging introduction to the values of their new country.

Empathy motivates cooperative and prosocial behaviour and facilitates effective social communication. We aim for reciprocal benefits for children and animals, where shelter animals receive enrichment and attention and children's overall wellbeing it improved from their own isolation, loneliness, anxiety and depression. In addition, positive animal welfare outcomes are achieved when students share and promote their knowledge to their families and other refugee communities of greater Sydney. Furthermore, a safe environment is assisting trauma recovery and a means to improve English literacy - both essential factors of empowerment for new arrivals to Australia. ■