

## Access to the kennels and cattery from 1<sup>st</sup> May



The MSPCA are restricting Cattery and Kennel access to visitors from the 1st May 2017. Only staff and regular volunteers, and those genuinely looking to rehome a cat or dog, who have completed a matching form, will be permitted.



We're doing this as we know that a number of studies worldwide, as well as the experiences of many rescue centres who have implemented similar changes, have shown that a constant stream of strangers viewing dogs is extremely stressful for them, leading to excessive barking, hiding and panting; many cats meanwhile feel insecure if their safe place is constantly invaded by unfamiliar people. Subsequent to similar changes being made in other rehoming centres, noise levels and animal behaviours have improved.

Therefore in the best interests of animal welfare, MSPCA has taken the decision, to limit viewing to people who are actively looking for a new feline or canine companion. We understand that some people will be disappointed by not being able to visit the cats and dogs; however our animals' welfare is our over-riding priority and as an animal NGO that works wherever possible on an evidence-based and science-based approach to animal care, we have to make this change.

For dogs especially, the rescue kennel environment is extremely stressful. We have already introduced a number of techniques in 2017 to reduce negative effects (including reducing the level of visits and the walking routes in the centre and reducing the overall volume and nature of human interactions). This has brought some noticeable improvement in the dogs' behaviours and we are confident that further managing the number of visitors to the animal areas will significantly improve the welfare of the cats and dogs. Stress levels and the associated negative behaviours will be reduced.

Anyone looking to rehome a dog or cat will be asked to remain in reception to talk to a member of staff and discuss the rehoming process and suitable animals prior to meeting them. Meetings will only be carried out if there is a suitable match, and done away from the kennels in the case of dogs.

### FAQ's

#### **Q. Why are we no longer able to walk freely around the courtyard kennels and cattery?**

A. As a leading NGO we focus on providing the best possible welfare for the animals in our care. We believe by giving the public free access to the kennels we are not providing this. Studies have confirmed that allowing people to walk around the kennels can cause the dogs distress. This is then affecting the dog's mental and physical health. Similarly we know that cats do not benefit from a constant stream of visitors.

#### **Q. Why can't I choose my own dog or cat?**

A. We feel that generally the homing process goes better if we work with you to choose the right dog or cat for your lifestyle and needs. There is no limit as to how many animals you can meet, until you have found the correct one. You will still be able to meet them after our initial discussion with you but we will be able to highlight animals that would suit your needs. This also helps us to potentially introduce you to animals that you may not see when you initially walk round the cattery or kennels, as some hide away inside as they find the kennels overwhelming, while others behave significantly differently in the cattery or kennels rather than outside.

**Q. I like to come along / bring my children along to see the animals, why can't I do this anymore?**

A. Our main aim at the MSPCA is to rehome the dogs that have come into our care and to allow them every opportunity to be seen by their potential forever homes. If they are frightened and are hiding because of the volumes of visitors we see their chances lessen in finding a home quickly. We believe we are doing them a disservice to allow this to happen. We are a Rehoming Centre first and foremost and so have to focus on the visitors who are coming to offer a pet a home, many cats and dogs do find lots of visitors stressful. We have educational resources on our website and can arrange for speakers to visit schools and we believe this is a more productive way for children to learn about animal welfare.

**Q. How do you know that the animals are stressed?**

A. Unique in Malta, our team comprises professional staff who are qualified and have extensive experience in rescue centres around the world. Our teams have many years experience of working with cats and dogs, through this they are able to identify the signs of stress in the dogs they work with every day.

**Q. Why do other animal shelters in Malta not do this?**

A. We cannot speak for the professional standards of other NGOs and can only comment on the changes made here – but we hope that other NGOs, as their knowledge, learning and exposure to international animal welfare and care standards increases, may come to a similar conclusion.

**Q. I am an MSPCA supporter and have left a legacy in my will for the Charity. Why can't I see where my money will be spent?**

A. We are very grateful for the support we receive and we rely entirely on generous donations like yours. Hopefully you support us because you care about animal welfare as much as we do. Due to our findings regarding stress on the dogs we have had to review our procedures. However, please feel free to get in touch to talk further with us and we can personally show you around and discuss with you at length the reasons behind our decisions.

**Q. What about volunteers and students?**

A. We will work with our existing volunteers and interns, and any SOK students to ensure they can continue to come along to the MSPCA but this will be in a very structured way, aiming to give the dogs exercise and enrichment, and we will minimise the number of people each day.

**Q. How do you expect to rehome dogs and cats if no one can see them?**

A. We have spoken to other charities that have made this move and some of our staff teams have experienced this change elsewhere. They have found that their rehoming numbers have not dropped and in many cases they have increased. They have also found the success of their matching systems have improved, with the numbers of dogs returning to them falling and that staff can devote better resources to genuine adopters. Animal profiles will still appear in our reception and on our website and facebook pages.

**Q. Is this the only reason for these changes?**

A. As an NGO that takes in many vulnerable, sick or abused animals, we also see a potential benefit in reducing the potential for animal diseases to be introduced onto our site via the clothing or shoes of many visitors. Animals in rescue and rehoming centres tend to have reduced immunity and resistance to disease and so this measure will also protect them from illness.