

Bark for Better Mental Health

Media Kit



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Photos and Videos

tinyurl.com/BarkRRC





RED RIVER COLLEGE POLYTECHNIC WILL ALLOW EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS IN CLASSROOMS

Winnipeg, 21 November 2023 – RRC Polytech will allow emotional support animals (ESAs) into classrooms effective January 2, 2024. Students wanting to bring an ESA to campus will be required to submit an application and supporting documentation to Student Accessibility Services.

“We recognize the increase in students’ mental health struggles and see the ESA program as a needed step to provide support and make learning accessible to everyone,” says Karen Kabel, Associate Dean of Creative Arts & Applied Computer Education. “In order for our students to be successful, we must listen to their needs and concerns and provide support in any way we can.”

RRC Polytech will roll out this pilot program in two phases. Phase one will allow dogs only, and Phase two, which is planned to roll out in September 2024, will welcome other ESAs.

“Having ESAs in the classroom to provide support when needed most will be life-changing for some students,” says Stacia Franz, a RRC Polytech graduate who struggled with her mental health during school. “If I was able to bring my emotional support animal into class, I would’ve learned better and had a more positive school experience.”

RRC Polytech did a student mental health survey and extensive research into ESAs before deciding to implement this program. ESAs will help students struggling with their mental health by stabilizing their emotions, making them feel safe and secure, and improving their quality of life.

About Red River College Polytechnic

Red River College Polytechnic (RRC Polytech) is Manitoba’s largest institute of applied learning and research, with more than 150 full- and part-time degree, diploma and certificate options. Through hands-on and online learning opportunities and state-of-the-art instruction, we prepare our students to become leaders in their fields – while also ensuring they can meet changing industry demands and contribute to the province’s economic growth. Visit rrc.ca for more information.

High-resolution photos/videos and more information on ESAs and RRC Polytech are available at tinyurl.com/BarkRRC.

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How ESAs benefit mental health



Emotional support animals (ESAs) are an excellent way for those facing mental health challenges to get mental and emotional encouragement. They can help stabilize intense emotions, lower depression and loneliness, and generally make their owner feel safe and secure. Owners also get a sense of purpose from looking after their ESA. ESAs can even help normalize heart rate and blood pressure, according to the Alvarado Parkway Institute.

It is important to note that ESAs and service animals are different. Service animals are certified to help their owners with specific disabilities, such as a guide dog for a blind person, whereas emotional support animals are certified to offer emotional support, as the name suggests. ESAs do not require specific training, whereas service animals do.

Proper documentation is needed to get an ESA. A physician or mental health professional would need to confirm an animal is needed – in conjunction with other treatment for the mental health condition – through a prescription called an ESA letter.

ESAs can help with conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, specific phobias, depression, panic disorders/attacks, mood disorders, personality disorders, seasonal affective disorder, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and chronic pain, according to CertaPet.

Between October and December 2018, The Assistance Dogs Center (TARSQ) and CertaPet conducted a survey of 307 ESA dogs and 298 people from nine different countries. Each person answered 46 questions, most of which on the perceived changes stemming from having an ESA.

All participants said quality of life noticeably improved, and 96 per cent said they would want to have another ESA dog after their current one. The remaining 13 people said they would prefer a service dog since ESAs are not yet allowed in all public places.

Certified ESAs cannot go in most restaurants, malls, and other public places, yet they are allowed to live in no-pet rental properties and accompany their owners in domestic air travel at no additional cost.

RRC Polytech: a leader in EDI



Red River College Polytechnic believes that diversity drives innovation and makes the college stronger. With professional training for international students, fully equipped accessibility services, and mentorships for Indigenous students, RRC Polytech hopes to build a learning environment with as many paths to success as possible for students from diverse backgrounds.

RRC Polytech partnered with Canada Life to create an Indigenous-led mentorship program for students. The program was announced on June 29, 2023, and will help Indigenous students connect with mentors who can facilitate the transition into their careers. These mentorships aren't just professional connections, they also help RRC Polytech build a community that supports each other.

On June 22, 2023, RRC Polytech's Language Training Centre was re-named the Centre for Newcomer Integration. The change of title and signage was prompted by a donation of \$300,000 from BMO Financial Group. The funding will go toward language training, employment support, and other short-term interventions to help students feel prepared for their classes and careers.

RRC Polytech also has services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. ASL-English interpreters make appearances in the classrooms to ensure that nothing is lost in translation. Students may also access computerized note-takers. The College recognizes these services are in high demand and strives to meet students where they are to make classrooms comfortable and accessible.

Students are eager to learn and move on to careers that will support themselves and their families. Red River College Polytechnic's dedication to creating a place of learning for everyone reflects the values of Winnipeg – it's a place where hard work and community drives us all forward, but with historical and present barriers, it's our job to listen and create new systems that keep doors open instead of shut.

To learn more about EDI at RRC Polytech, visit www.rrc.ca/diversity/resources/.

Speech: Karen Kabel

Associate Dean, Creative Arts & Applied Computer Education at RRC Polytech



Good morning students, staff, and guests. Thank you for joining us today. In a recent national survey, 95 per cent of Canadian post-secondary students reported being overwhelmed and exhausted. Ninety-five per cent.

A new national survey on Gen Z Canadians by The Globe and Mail and marketing agency 55 Rush found that nearly 60 per cent of participants agreed that the pandemic was harmful to their mental health in a lasting way. Students need mental health support more than ever, and it is up to post-secondary institutions to provide those supports so students can reach their highest potential.

As an Associate Dean at the College, my colleagues and I are always working on how to better support our students' mental health. Since student's stress and challenges don't go away when they walk onto campus, we wanted to find a mental health support unlike any the College has ever provided before, a support that students can bring into the classroom every day.

Today, on behalf of Red River College Polytechnic, I am excited to announce that starting January 2, 2024, students will be able to bring emotional support animals into their classrooms.

An emotional support animal is a type of assistance animal that provides support to people living with a mental or emotional disability.

It has been proven that emotional support animals can improve the mental, physical, and emotional health of their owner. They can help students feel more motivated and secure, allowing them to reach their academic potential.

Emotional support dogs will be the only animal allowed on campus for this pilot program. Students who wish to bring an emotional support dog must first be prescribed this need by a health care provider.

To ensure the safety of all students, staff, and other animals, emotional support dogs will be assessed before being let into the classroom.

RRC Polytech will be joining other universities and colleges across the country who have put similar programs in place on their campuses to support student's mental health and increase their success in the classroom.

However, we will be one of the first post-secondary institutions in the country to allow emotional support dogs into the classroom. You may be wondering, why dogs? It's not because we're biased, even though dogs are clearly adorable and loveable animals.

Like everything we do at RRC Polytech, our decision is backed by extensive research, and it has been proven that contact with dogs can improve moods and reduce depressive or anxiety symptoms. In a study done by The Assistance Dogs Center and CertaPet, 98.6 per cent of participants found an increased sense of motivation in everyday life due to emotional support dogs.

As a dog owner myself of a Jackabee named Milo, I understand the power of animals. Whether I'm having a good day or a bad day, Milo is there for me. Animals provide you support and unconditional love when you need it. They can give you purpose.

However, I want to make it clear to students that this is not the only mental health support we offer at the college. Students have access to various supports, including student counselling services and insurance coverage for therapy under their student benefit plan.

I also want students to know that if they ever need support, they can go to their instructors, their chairs, the dean, and myself. We're all here to support you.

We want you to be successful and if we can help, we will. And that help extends today with our emotional service animal program.

Thank you.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech: Stacia Franz

RRC Polytech Alumni



Good morning. Raise your hand if you have pets in your home, just like my friend Dover here.

Many of you are familiar with the feeling of coming home every day to the warm welcome of dogs waiting for you.

It's comforting to know they are there when you open the door, ready to greet you with their gentle nuzzles, soft eyes, and wagging tails. Our dogs make us feel relaxed with their calming presence.

I was over the moon when I learned that Red River College Polytechnic has made another remarkable step toward being more inclusive and forward-thinking by allowing emotional support animals (ESAs) in classrooms.

Like many of you, I was once a CreComm student. I know the hours were long, and there was a lot of pressure to learn everything all at once. Looking back, having an ESA with me in those long hours of classes would have gone a long way.

My dogs are trained to be there for me when my heart rate increases or if I'm having panic attacks. Had they been there during CreComm, they would have supported me and helped me focus on learning instead of worrying about my heart rate.

A national survey of more than 8,000 students revealed that 95 per cent feel overwhelmed and exhausted, and about 80 per cent are lonely and anxious. This is why it's important to have this program.

We know how animals can contribute to our happiness and overall health just by spending time with them. I could quote a hundred studies to support this, but there's no need for that since you all know how good it feels just to see a dog's tail wag.

Right now, I have a job where I can work from home. I have my dogs and cats around me all the time. If needed, I get to go into my workplace and bring them. I feel relaxed just by having them sit beside me or on my lap while I'm reading or in a meeting.

They bring so much positivity and warmth. That is the power of animals. You get to take care of them, but they also take care of you.

I am glad Red River College Polytechnic moved to the next level to support students' well-being and guide them to their success.

So, cheers to the College for its unwavering commitment to making every student feel seen, heard, and supported.

Thank you.

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