

Basic requirements for starting a guinea pig rescue as a representative for the Australian Cavy Sanctuary

Would you like to join the team and start a successful guinea pig rescue?

Australian Cavy Sanctuary is so far the only Guinea Pig Rescue organization in Australia. In order for us to expand and spread guinea pig awareness and welfare we are aiming to have rescue branches of ACS throughout Australia. Linking arms and joining forces is the best way to keep something going strong and by setting up your own rescue and representing ACS you will be able to not only help us but also you will have backup and support to keep your own rescue going strong. In order for rescues of ACS to be efficient we all need to be running under the same basic guidelines and requirements. Personally I have seen other organizations with many branches that are technically under the same guidelines, yet many don't seem to perform or conform to the same standards and this is where you will get differing responses from the public and can in some cases run into trouble. In order for us to keep our high standard we all need to conform to the same set of basic requirements and guidelines and these are stated below. Australian Cavy Sanctuary not only focuses on "rescue", we focus on "re-home". Some rescue organizations put so much effort into operating a fantastic rescue system yet can lack in the area of screening and approving new homes when animals are adopted back out. When a guinea pig leaves one of our rescues we are 100% sure that the animal is going to live in a happy, healthy and safe environment and a permanent new home that passes the sanctuary's adoption terms. This is something we pride ourselves on.

Things to consider before deciding to start a rescue:

- Do I have the time to run a rescue?
- Do I have the finances to run a rescue? (Because we are all non-profit it is good to keep in mind that many of the expenses that go into the overall running of a rescue come from our own pockets).
- Do I have good knowledge of correct guinea pig care and do I have good knowledge of the medical symptoms and treatment required for an unwell guinea pig?
- Do I have a presentable and good sized area/space where I can setup the housing for my rescue guinea pigs?
- Do I have good communication and organization skills?
- Will I be able to keep my rescue running long term?
- Do I have a reliable and knowledgeable small animal/guinea pig vet close by that I can rely on when needed?

If you answered YES to most of the above questions then you're definitely on your way to a good start and have considered some of the most important factors involved in running a rescue.

How to start your rescue:

1: Legal Requirements

If you are running your rescue from your own private residence then the legal requirements and costs should be minimal to none. Please research this area if you have any doubts or questions in relation to legal requirements of running your rescue. There is no legal limit to date on the amount of guinea pigs you can keep on one property as long as they are housed/kept correctly.

2: Planning my rescue setup

We pride ourselves on the presentation of our rescue setups. What we present to the public is what they see and will believe is the correct keeping of a guinea pig. You will need to have an

area you can keep clean and presentable for when visitors come over. It is a good idea to have a **quarantine/treatment** area separate to your adoptables area so there is no risk of disease spreading to the healthy animals at the rescue. It is also a good idea to have an information desk or information posters on a wall with anything from care guides, connect-a-grid cage information, to the sanctuary business cards for visitors to read and take. You want your visitors to feel welcome and adding plants or other décor really adds that feeling of warmth and welcoming to your setup.

Housing: Cage size for the rescue guinea pigs is important. It is required that the minimum for 2 guinea pigs is a cage 1.2m x 60cm, for one guinea pig 60cm x 60cm. For three or more guinea pigs the minimum per guinea pig is to be at least 60cm x 60cm.

Connect-a-grid cages are fantastic as part of the setup as we present these on our website and it is good for the public to be able to view what these look like.

Large Aviaries are good or raised hutches.

Lawn cages and lawn runs are fantastic for rescues to get some exercise and playtime in.

Bedding and Feed: Feed and bedding general information is stated on the website. Absorbent bedding such as Hysorb wood shavings, hay, recycled paper kitty litter, or newspaper are all appropriate forms of bedding. Bedding is to be kept clean and changed regularly as you would with the keeping of your own animals. Diet is completely up to you and would consist of veggies, water, hay, and a good grain or pellet mix.

3: Paperwork

Keeping records and paperwork of everything that happens within your rescue is a must or things can become very messy and unorganized. It is best to purchase a filing cabinet for storing all your paperwork in. You can pick-up excellent quality filing cabinets from as low as \$15.00 on EBAY and your local trading post or weekend shopper.

Things to consider:

- All rescues are required to have an **adoption certificate**. We can provide you with the template for the ACS adoption certificate which can be edited using Microsoft publisher or word or you can create your own. It is a good idea to print yourself a copy of the certificate along with the person that adopts out the animal. This way you both have a signed copy for your own records.
- **Surrender form or book**. When people surrender a guinea pig it is a good idea to have a surrender form or to buy a surrender book where people can leave basic details such as phone number, name, location and details of the animals they are surrendering. You never know when you may need to use these details as a reference.
- **Financial Report**. A financial report is basically where you can write down all the spendings you have made towards the rescue throughout the year. It is good to have this so you can keep an accurate reference and monitor your spendings so you do not end up in debt.
- **Guinea Pig Stats Table**. A stats table is something you can type up using Microsoft word or you can handwrite it in a notebook although keeping records saved on the computer is an accurate and legible way of recording information. Your stats table is simply a record of the guinea pigs you receive throughout the year. On your table you will have a column with the name of the guinea pig surrendered then you can have columns beside the guinea pigs name that you can tick so you have a reference where guinea pigs are coming in from. Column names can include private, pet shop, born at rescue, other etc. You can also include a column with the dates guinea pigs are surrendered if you wish. At the end of the year you can total the amount of guinea pigs that were surrendered for the year. For an example stats table please view below.

Name	Private	Petshop	Born at Rescue	Other
William				x
TOTAL				1

- **Foster Carer/Volunteer Book**

You are more than likely to receive offers from the public to foster animals or volunteer their time to either help you at your rescue or behind the scenes. You'll need to have a notebook or online record of all your foster carer and volunteer contact details.

4: Naming your rescue

You can choose a name for your rescue. Keeping the name simple yet catchy will make your rescue easier for people to remember. Even though you are a representative for the sanctuary you are still your own branch of the sanctuary.

5: Printouts/Handouts

When people come to visit your rescue have some information available for people to take home with them. When you open your rescue the sanctuary will provide you with free business cards and information handouts. Other handouts which can prove effective are care guides, connect-a-grid cage information brochures, general care information.

6: Medical Equipment/First Aid Kit

Naturally you will receive guinea pigs that are unwell. When guinea pigs arrive at your rescue it is best to bath them in a mite treatment to eliminate the spreading of mites to your other rescues. It is a good idea to quarantine every guinea pig that comes into your care for at least 2 weeks even if they appear healthy.

Medical Equipment and a first aid kit is a must. Below is a list of handy items to include in your kit. If you require further information on the items below, where to purchase, need prices or information on essentials to include in your kit please email the sanctuary and we will discuss this further with you. Having what you need on hand is very important and in some cases can mean the difference between life and death of a sick animal.

- Towels
- Tweezers
- Toenail Clippers
- Combs
- Tissues/Baby Wipes
- Cotton Buds/Tips
- Eye drops
- Revolution and/or Ivomectin (for treatment of mange mite infestation and worming).
- Quit-Itch (Similar to betadine for use on wounds/dry skin/fungal infections).
- Baytril (Can only be purchased from local vet. Antibiotic for use in respiratory infections and pneumonia). An essential in your kit. If your local vet will not provide this treatment over the counter the sanctuary is able to supply you some if needed. Speaking to your local vet about your rescue and teeing up this treatment to be able to purchase over the counter for when you have guinea pigs with respiratory infections should be ok. If in doubt simply ring the sanctuary and I will speak with your local vet over the phone.
- Nutrigel (Recommended palatable energy/vitamin supplement for sick animals or to stimulate the appetite of an animal that has gone off its food).
- Vitamin C supplements (tablet or powdered form)
- Rehydration Fluids (Powder or liquid form. Vitrate is a powdered form that can be purchased from your vet or produce store. It is very effective and can be stored.
- Senega and Ammonia (to relieve chest congestion/mucous). Only a few dollars a bottle can be purchased from your local chemist. Extremely effective for guinea pigs suffering colds, respiratory infection or pneumonia.

For further items please click on the following link:

<http://www.geocities.com/fizzygirl28/enchantingfirstaidkit.html>

7: Contacts/Referrals

Get sources of referral lined up with your rescue. Call your local RSPCA or animal shelter, your local vet, your local produce store and any other appropriate animal facility in the area to

offer to be a contact for them in the taking in of unwell, sick or found animals. Mention the sanctuary and hand out our website link. Offer to be a foster carer or to help out if they ever become overcrowded. Offer to be an information source if they ever need advice on guinea pig care. These places will refer callers to you and become a great way to get the word out there about your rescue. Some will even ask you to their events or to hold a display at an event.

8: Publicize

This is the number one way you can get word out about the sanctuary and your rescue. It is what can make or break the overall public response and involvement in your rescue. If you have adoptables at your rescue and need some rehomed printout information about the rescue or your current adoptables and place it on public noticeboards or advertise in the paper in your local area. Write a magazine article about the sanctuary and your rescue and have it printed. Place ads and contact information and links to our website on online forums/classifieds/animal welfare websites. The sanctuary itself would not be running as efficiently or getting the response from the public that it has, without our regular advertising to the public it really is essential to keep you and us operating and getting a good response.

9: Adoptions

Finding good homes for your adoptables is the most challenging task. Number one and most importantly GO WITH YOUR GUT FEELING! It will never let you down.

Around half the phone calls that you will receive you will have to reject because they simply won't be able to provide an appropriate home for a guinea pig. The value of guinea pigs in Australia is something that is still a large scale battle and this is why a large number of homes simply aren't suitable for guinea pigs because guinea pigs are still seen today as disposable pets, children's pets, cheap pets and can still be viewed as only requiring very little space and very little attention. It is our job to be able to tell the difference between a potentially good home and a potentially not so good home. There are several types of people and good applicants are very easy to spot. They will either have a great wealth of guinea pig knowledge and are the perfect home right from the start or they won't have much knowledge of guinea pigs but are willing to listen and be eager to apply the information given to them. In a lot of cases they will ask a lot of questions to make sure they are able to care for the guinea pig properly.

Screening Enquiries:

When someone enquires about your adoptables there are a few main questions you need to ask first. The first is housing and the second is feed. Don't give them the answers wait to see if they have a good knowledge of guinea pigs first. Ask them if they have a cage (and cage size) and do they know the feed requirements for a guinea pig? Wait for their answer. If they don't answer correctly then spend some time talking them through the correct housing and feed for a guinea pig. If they are willing to listen and apply what you've said then it is a good sign that they are thinking of the animals best interest and you'll need to wait for them to apply the correct requirements before letting them adopt one of your guinea pigs. If they mention they don't want to pay much for feed etc then I would already be quite concerned about the animal being cared for correctly.

Many people that enquire will mention they want to get a guinea pig for their children. Infact one in ever two callers usually have children. Age is the number one question you need to ask. If someone has a child under the age of 5 then a guinea pig simply is not suitable for a child of this age. They are fragile and the child is more than likely to grow out of their pet. If the parent wants the guinea pig long term for themselves as well and is willing to monitor the child when holding the guinea pig and understands the information you've told them about children and guinea pigs then this can clear up potential worries and I wouldn't turn down a buyer that does take this into account. Anyone that wishes to breed with an adoptable guinea pig should not be allowed to adopt. Anyone that wants a SINGLE guinea pig you need to discuss with them that guinea pigs need a companion and why. If they agree to adopt a pair then that's fantastic, if not, then they are selfishly thinking of themselves and not the animal's best interest.

Send all that enquire about adoptables straight to our website. All that enquire need to read and agree by our Adoption Terms before anything else can go ahead. Having the website with adoption terms and guinea pig information I have found to be an essential when I screen applicants. Once they see the website they will either call you back if they are still interested and have agreed by the sanctuary's terms or you will not hear from them again. It is a timesaver of questions and worries for both yourself and the applicant.

Follow Up. Sometimes it is a good idea to follow up on an adoption. Most that adopt will usually give you an update before you get the chance to though.

10: How many rescues can I accept?

You need to have a limit on the amount of rescue guinea pigs you can accept and house. Have a limit and definitely stick to it. If your numbers begin to rise and you are coming close to your limit then it is time to take steps to re-home guinea pigs via advertising and publicizing using the methods mentioned in section 8. It is always good to keep a couple of cages spare you never know when you may need them. Never let your rescue reach its full limit.

You'll want to try to keep things at a level pace, having guinea pigs adopted out as often as they come in. You can control this by using all the resources you have to the best of their potential.

If you have someone that needs to surrender a large number of guinea pigs or if you are close to your limit and cannot accept anymore guinea pigs, then being a rescue for the sanctuary you can pass on callers or guinea pigs to one of our other rescues and hopefully one of them will be able to take on the guinea pig/s. Never turn down a guinea pig that needs to be surrendered as one of the other rescues' are sure to be able to help out or work out transport for the animal to their shelter.

11: Use of the Australian Cavy Sanctuary Website

As a rescue representative for the sanctuary you are entitled as a partner to use any aspect of our website. You are able to place your contact details and any information about your rescue on our website. You may include photos of your setup. You are entitled to advertise your adoptables on the website. You can place any latest news or events on the website. We will either provide you with a password for use of the website or you may email our base refuge with any information you want included on the website and we will place the information on there for you.

12: What about events/displays?

You may hold your own displays and events throughout the year. Please email our base rescue (Enchanting Cavy Sanctuary) so that we can discuss what you will need. If you wish to borrow our banner or any of our information for a local display we are able to loan items out to you for your event.

13: Keeping in contact/communication

We ask that all rescues keep in regular contact with us throughout the year. This is so that we all can keep up to date with each other on how we are running and so that we can share any important information and happenings with each other. Communication is the best way that we can keep things running efficiently and it is always lovely to hear updates on how each rescue is doing☺

From here please email the sanctuary if you wish to start a rescue or if you have followed the guidelines above and are ready to open your rescue and we can discuss things further and hopefully will be welcoming you to the team very soon.

Regards
Jessica - ACS Manager

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