

## Animal Management Services - Working together

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### Abstract

No matter what size your Council is, or how many officers you have on the ground, it's amazing to sit back and think about the number of resources you have around you – but are you making the most of networking?

The reason we are here is because we share a love of companion animals and care for their welfare – whether cats or dogs – and we are here to help them build a relationship with their owner.

The animal industry is a huge one with experts around every corner – seize the opportunities, knowledge and expertise around you to improve the status of the pet in your community.

### Background

When I entered the animal management industry in 1997, the role of an AMO was to respond to calls to collect dogs that were reported out, to take them to the pound, try and locate their owner, issue a fine and that was the end of the job. The role was on-road focused, with barely the time, or necessity, to sit at a computer.

In 2007 there are many expectations that need to be met by Animal Management Services. Now the expectations of an AMO are increased to include; education of the community on responsible pet ownership, compliance with State and local legislation, providing advice on health, behaviour, welfare issues, addressing overpopulation and high euthanasia rates and..... the list goes on. The AMO now has to work smarter to ensure their portfolio is covered.

Victorian legislation, the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act* was amended in 2005 to introduce a Domestic Animal (DAM) Plan. This legislation requires all Victorian Councils prepare a plan at three yearly intervals on activities, services, training and projects they will undertake during this time.

I was fortunate to be involved with the Department of Primary Industries, Bureau of Animal Welfare in the development of a manual on preparing a plan for Councils. From this experience, past relationships and researching projects being undertaken globally, I would like to explore options available to AMOs in the development of mutually beneficial relationships that can be incorporated into future planning.

We can't tackle all of the animal management issues on our own, but if we research and plan before embarking on a new project, the joint outcomes can be better than we imagined.

### Strategic planning

First and foremost, develop a strategy for the future. Whether it is a requirement, as the DAM Plan is in Victoria or just a framework to give your organisation direction for the future, plan ahead, being aware of what the issues are and may arise in your municipality.

Investigate the trends and drivers that are influencing your environment. The trends listed below are taken from the Knox City Council's Four Year Focus paper from 2006, and highlight some of the factors to take into consideration in forward planning.

- **The demand for transparency** – The growth and speed of information and communication systems and the subsequent demand for information regarding organisational performance is growing at an ever increasing rate and is placing increasing pressure on organisations to be transparent to a range of organisational stakeholders. This demand is also being fuelled by legislative and regulatory compliance requirements that are seen to be focused increasingly on the social and environmental aspects of an organisations performance<sup>i</sup>.
- **Changes in community values and expectations** – There is seen to be an increasing recognition of the communities changing societal and environmental values and expectations and the associated impacts on business and government. An increasing awareness of these values and expectations is informing both community and employee choices and behaviours<sup>ii</sup>.
- **The concept of time** - The concept of time is changing for many organisations both in terms of the immediacy of information transfer and the challenge to think beyond the short term. Long term thinking is already seen to be presenting challenges that are impacting on the typical corporate plan and business planning cycles<sup>iii</sup>.
- **Risk management** – Risk Management is now one of the most critical governance issues for Local Government to deal with both in terms of providing a safe community and workplace and in limiting Council's financial risk. Increasing litigation trends and compensation amounts have contributed to largely increased insurance premiums, which now include a heavy component of risk management performance in their calculations. Council is the subject of frequent audits and inspections and must continue to consider and embody Risk Management in all of its actions and decisions.
- **Fuel costs** – The increased cost of fuel and the associated economic and social costs will have a significant impact on the community as well as Council operations. The implications are significant levels of social disadvantage for young people and persons over 60 - identified as regular public transport users (93% & 55% respectively<sup>iv</sup>). Those communities, such as Knox, which are highly car dependant, will be further disadvantaged by rising fuel costs, as a higher proportion of their disposable income will need to be spent on basic travel requirements.
- **Rapid expansion of e-business and internet usage** - The number of Australians accessing the Internet at home has steadily increased since 1998, rising from 13% of adults to 43% in 2002<sup>v</sup>. Australia ranks third in the world in terms of Internet and telephone use, according to a report released by the National Office for the Information Economy. Sixty seven percent of Australian households own or lease a computer, which is only second behind South Korea at 70 percent with 49 percent of households connected to the Internet via their home computer<sup>vi</sup>.
- **Age usage and the internet** - Late adoption of the Internet by older Australians is driving growth in overall Internet usage, according to a report by analysis company Red Sheriff.

The survey of 700 metropolitan residents, aged 16 years and older, found that Internet usage among younger age groups had reached saturation point. However, growth in older age groups and women using the Internet drove the number of people who had used the Internet at least once up from 65 percent in 2001 to 73 percent in 2003. This was expected to increase to 79 percent in 2004<sup>vii</sup>.

- **Social attachment** - Relationships and networks are at the core of society and are essential to individual wellbeing. People are linked together with family and friends, and in wider communities characterised by shared interests, sympathies or living circumstances. Individuals may also form looser networks with people encountered through various activities and life situations. A person's networks may be concentrated in a local area, or more dispersed and sustained by travel and communications systems.
- **Community support and volunteerism** - Many people provide support to the wider community by voluntary work through organisations. Generally, the rate of volunteering differs little between the sexes, but does differ with age, life cycle and location. Issues impacting on people contributing as volunteers include the increasing complexity of roles, legislative requirements and responsibilities (eg OH&S, public liability, police checks, training, etc.)
- **From urban growth to consolidation** - as the city moves from a development or growth phase to a consolidation phase, this will place emphasis on different forms of development. In residential areas this continues to be seen in the form of medium density or multi-unit developments, particularly in association with activity centres. This is also attributable to demographic trends which indicate smaller household sizes in the municipality which are expected to be an average of approximately 2.4 persons by 2031<sup>viii</sup> which is a decrease on the existing 2.8 persons per household. It is estimated that Knox will need to accommodate an additional 12,000 persons and 15,000 households by 2031. This will place additional pressures on the management of traffic issues, waste collection, the pressure on existing infrastructure (ie stormwater drainage) and open space.

Similarly, there will be pressure on existing non-residential land uses, particularly in association with activity centres. As land becomes scarcer, there will be urban renewal activities occurring, which will impact on Council's management of open space and infrastructure. This may be through the management of development proposals that are not "typical" for Knox.

From this information it can be established that in the future, the population of Knox Council will be stabilising but the demographic will be changing. Open space for development will become non-existent, so any areas designated for off-leash parks will need to be considered in corroboration with existing stakeholders. Utilising volunteers in our work is becoming more complex, and the internet is having an extreme impact on service delivery. The introduction of virtual pets, with games such as Nintendogs, and the attempted introduction of 'rent-a-pet' from overseas will have an impact on animal management. Smaller properties and properties with multi-dwellings will mean smaller areas for pets to be confined in and will impact on pet selection and exercising options.

Within Local Government there are frameworks to consider before approaching any new project - Community Consultation Framework, Strategic Planning Frameworks, Risk Management, Occupational Health and Safety, and budgetary constraints. Any future planning will need to take all of this, and more into consideration.

## Why should we network?

One of the issues faced by AMOs is inconsistent interpretation of legislation and different Local Laws or Orders from one municipal area to another. Pet owners often travel and participate in activities over a number of locations and we need to ensure that information on local conditions are made available and are easily interpretable by visitors as well as local residents. Being an AMO is a profession, not just a 'job', but to achieve the status that we deserve we need to be transparent and consistent in our approach.

A lot of the benefits for networking listed below are twofold.

### Benefits to Local Government

- Pooling resources - less cost on individual projects means more projects can be undertaken
- More time spent on proactive educational work, less time needed for enforcement
- Alignment with Community and Council Plans
- Fewer problems in the community, a smaller number of complaints coming in, fewer prosecutions
- Increase in registration numbers
- Increase in compliance with microchipping legislation
- Increase in the number of impounded animals being returned to their owners
- Increase in the number of animals desexed, again fewer numbers in the welfare and pound situation being destroyed

### Benefits to partners

- Credible partnerships are developed
- Greater awareness of issues and options available to pet owners
- Greater exposure and publicity to potential clients through more than one source eg websites, newspapers, telephone on hold messages, posters, flyers, signage, newsletters
- Larger budget for projects
- More resources - staff for open days etc
- Power in numbers - multiple agencies all speaking same message showing a united front

## What are the current issues?

The issues that require attention may not vary significantly from Council to Council in animal management. The main areas that we need to focus on at this stage include, dog poo, dog attacks, off-leash areas, selection of the right pet, barking, registration, desexing, and cat control - curfews, owned, semi-owned and unowned. Often the results from one area of education will diminish another issue.

## What are the opportunities for education?

**The written word is a powerful tool and can be presented in many ways.** Newsletters, posters and brochures can be distributed through council service centres, vets, schools, shelters, training, breeding or rearing establishments, pet shops, general stores and stock feed suppliers.

Brochures can be ordered in Victoria through the Bureau of Animal Welfare on many topics including Pet Registration, Confining your dog or cat, Safety with children, preventing dog attacks in the home or community and barking dogs. They can also be printed from bromides from a website designed by the Department of Primary Industries, Bureau of Animal Welfare Responsible Pet Ownership Program AMO Extranet.

Check with your state's governing agency to see what is available to you.

Collaborate with neighbouring councils on issues that cross council borders. Sharing the cost of printing will allow for a larger range of media to be printed and ordering larger quantities will also cut costs.

Media releases are also available on the AMO Extranet web site covering topics such as; pet selection, stray dogs, nuisance cats, barking dogs and pets outgrowing their owners.

Children play a large part in education and need to be the focus of AMOs in the challenge to educate the community. Children teach their parents what they have learnt if the information is fed to them in a way that can be digested positively. In other words – it has to be fun and interactive!

Collaboration with external organisations can include:

#### ***Microchipping days/Pet Expos/Open Days/Festivals***

With legislation in Victoria requiring new registrations or transfers from other municipalities to be microchipped, microchipping events play a vital role in communicating educational material. These pet owners are attending your event, so make as much information available to them as possible, including off leash requirements, local laws, other council events that you may be involved in and any projects currently being undertaken.

Pet Expos or Pet Care Days have been around for a number of years now, but still have a popular following. If organising a day, try and include as many activities that encourage participation for kids, pets and adults. Vary the types of pets showcased on the day, as residents may attend looking for the right pet, and perhaps the dog or cat isn't the right one for them. Many of your local domestic animal businesses, shelters and vets will want to attend to increase their exposure to the community. Source stall holders from other animal events and markets; there you will find toy makers, pet food stalls and pet accessories.

Choose your dates carefully, ensuring that you don't clash with a major local sporting event, or a similar event in a nearby municipality. Apart from affecting the number of attendees, it will also impact on the number of stalls that attend on the day. Seek sponsorship through local businesses and stock feed suppliers for giveaways on the day, or for marquee hire. Your local newspaper may also provide sponsorship on the day in exchange for the exposure.

Many shelters and vet clinics run open days that Councils can take part in, to be proactive of the compliance issues that they face. Participation costs can be kept down with sponsorship of a marquee from the local hire company or by sharing costs with another local organisation and information and displays can be borrowed from organisations such as the Bureau of Animal Welfare in Victoria. The Responsible Pet Ownership Program offers flyers, posters and banners and, depending on your timing, an educational officer may be available as well.

If promotional material is minimal, contact your marketing department for assistance for the day. Brochures are available for many brochures and posters on the AMO Extranet. If you are having a theme topic on the day, the Extranet also provides media release samples to assist in promotions through local papers.

If your Council is holding an event or festival, you may be able to share a site with another department, cutting costs further. Other Council events are the perfect opportunity of promoting your own event or project. Don't forget to utilise 'on hold' messages to get information about coming events or important dates into the community. The calendar of events on the council's web site and council newsletters to the community are other useful tools.

#### ***Desexing***

Desexing is a hot topic at the moment, but essentially, to reduce the number of animals coming through our pounds and shelters, the numbers of unwanted litters must be reduced.

Currently in Victoria there are a number of options if you are looking at introducing a desexing scheme. The National Desexing Network (NDN) offers discounted rates to pet owners who meet the criteria for desexing through participating clinics. NDN also promotes National Desexing Month in August each year and provides posters and flyers to assist in advertising. Refer to [www.ndn.com.au](http://www.ndn.com.au) for further information and participating veterinary clinics.

In Victoria the Australian Veterinary Association in conjunction with the Municipal Association of Victoria coordinates a desexing voucher scheme, in which council's subsidise the fee by one third.

Check with your local animal shelter if they offer a scheme, and perhaps arrange for promotion of this service. Discuss options with local vets and create a municipal scheme.

#### ***Dog training***

Speak with local dog trainers to set up a dog training program. Exposure and support through Council may be sufficient advertising for the training to be offered free to residents of your municipality. Training of dogs will improve the use of off leash areas, minimising the number of dog attacks and improve social skills within the community.

#### ***Seminars and pet information sessions***

There is often a problem with pet selection, and if the right one was chosen to begin with, nuisance complaints or welfare checks would not be necessary.

Getting back to basics is often the first step in educating the community on responsible pet ownership. Speak to local dog trainers, shelters or vets and organise seminars at your Council, shelter or local hall on issues that will assist you and the speaker in your day to day work. The advertising of the local businesses or organisations through Council mediums such as 'on call' messages, the web site and through posters and flyers in the municipality may encourage new clients and the speaker may charge only a minimal fee.

#### ***Internet***

The internet is quickly becoming the easiest source of information – whether it be giving or receiving the information. The number of visitors to Knox City Council's website daily has been averaging 1115 (actual visitors, not hits) in 2007, up from 516 in 2006, and this far exceeds the number of customers who phone or call in to the offices. The *Animals and Pets* page is the twelfth most accessed page on the website. The *Calendar of events* averages 928 visitors each day. Information is available 24/7 and can be updated as soon as is required. Posters, brochures, fact sheets, forms and competitions can be accessed easily – just remember to keep file sizes down.

#### ***School programs***

Children are the future when it comes to change. Any major change campaign has a target audience of children. There was minimal recycling done 20 years ago, but the current generation of school age children have been exposed to the message year after year. If we can get our messages of responsible pet ownership out to them early and regularly, they will remember it.

In Victoria, Pet Educators and their dogs from the Bureau of Animal Welfare's Responsible Pet Ownership Schools Education Program visit schools and interact with thousands of school and kindergarten children and their parents each year.

Contact them, or your State's equivalent for a timetable of when their curriculum based sessions are on in schools in your municipality and join them to personalise their messages to your area. This will not only give you the opportunity of handing out local brochures, but will teach the children to recognise and be familiar with council's AMOs.

### **Puppy schools**

Many vet clinics, shelters and dog training facilities offer puppy school to residents. Approach them to arrange for an AMO to attend and you will have a motivated captive audience. If you are unable to attend, offer brochures, stickers and/or fridge magnets offering responsible pet ownership tips for inclusion in any training notes or show bags that they may supply.

### **Community projects**

The most topical subject for a community project appears to be dog faeces. If you are interested in conducting a project to educate the community on the impact of dog faeces and the importance of collecting after their pet, contact the Victorian Litter Alliance at [www.litter.vic.gov.au](http://www.litter.vic.gov.au). In conjunction with the Department of Primary Industry's Bureau of Animal Welfare, they have developed a Dog Poo Litter Kit which can assist you.

The kit contains information such as pre and post project media releases and surveys, resource contacts and tips on incentives, infrastructure, enforcement and regulation. There are case studies to check against the outcomes and information on developing a network within your own council. There are many departments that can assist you with a litter project including waste management, parks, planning, customer service, marketing and engineering. Investigate purchasing large magnets for AMO vehicles to promote current projects. Find a partner and share the costs.

Expand the impact that such a project will have by inviting community groups to participate. Look for dog walking or dog owner groups, 'friends of' groups or walking groups who will all have an interest in promoting the cause to pick up after your pet. If your municipality is near a national park, approach the leading authority, eg Parks Vic to team up with on such a project. The benefits of working together will be twofold, and costs may be cut by sharing the expenses for advertising and promotion.

The trends for the future point to increases in fuel costs, which in turn may reflect on the number of pet owners utilising parks closer to home and walking, rather than driving to a park in another area. An aging population will mean there will be an increase in non competitive informal recreational activities, so walking and cycling will become more popular, and this will put an increased demand to ensure shared pathways through open space are safer.

Off-leash parks designed specifically for dogs only are becoming more popular. Multi unit development has affected the numbers of dogs, and smaller yard areas are increasing the use of parks. As not everyone loves dogs, it is important for Councils to consider areas designated for this purpose. There are arguments 'for' and 'against' the separation of dogs and children, but Council needs to investigate the risks associated with this.

With open space at a premium, the opportunity for networking internally and externally exists. Checking Open Space Strategies and working with Parks, Planning and Infrastructure departments to utilise parklands will assist in securing a dog park. Operating the dog park could be negotiated with local dog obedience clubs or contracted out privately, and incorporate a training facility or grooming business.

Work with animal shelters, vets and pet shops to develop an education program that will lift the profile of the cat as a family member. Identify and promote the benefits of owning a cat.

### **Registration**

During the last twelve months the Bureau of Animal Welfare has conducted a Pet Registration Incentive Scheme in Victoria. Upon payment for a new registration, pet owners receive a voucher booklet with a value of \$40 to receive discounts off pet food or pet products, admission to the movies or discounts on subscriptions.

The AMO Extranet also has information on creating your own council's incentive scheme with tips for obtaining sponsorship through a sponsorship framework. Look at what you can offer the sponsor to ensure value for money. Exposure through advertising is often the most beneficial for businesses.

### **Responsible Pet Ownership Competition**

Obtain sponsorship from businesses in the community or approach dog and cat food manufacturers for treats and embark on a positive experience. Reward responsible pet owners by nominating them for having a pet that is registered, desexed, microchipped if the owner is carrying a poo bag, or has an enclosure for their cat. Enter them into a competition to win monthly prizes and promote the competition in the local paper regularly.

### **Funding opportunities**

Each year thousands of dollars of funding is offered by organisations such as 'Voiceless- the fund for animals', and the EPA to assist organisations with projects targeting issues that can often be related to animal management. Check out [www.voiceless.org.au](http://www.voiceless.org.au) and [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au) for dates and specifications for application. Seize these opportunities to plan a project with a community group and the financial burden may be resolved.

### **Summary**

There is an unknown quantity of experience out there in the animal management industry and whether you are the sole AMO for your municipality or a member of a 20+ strong team, there is a level of education that you can accomplish by working together with other agencies.

The opportunities are endless and planning is the key to ensuring a successful project. The outcomes that we are trying to achieve in the animal management industry are the same, so let's work smarter and combine our experience and resources.

#### **Notes:**

- i Elkington J (1997) Cannibals with Forks - The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business
- ii Elkington J (1997) Cannibals with Forks - The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business
- iii Elkington J (1997) Cannibals with Forks - The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business
- iv Knox Integrated Transport Plan (2004)
- v Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003)
- vi The National Office for the Information Economy (2003)
- vii ZDNet Australia (2003)
- viii Eastern Regional Housing Working Group - DSE demographic data projections (2005)

### **About the Author**

Elke Tapley is currently employed as the Local Laws Coordinator with Knox City Council, in Victoria. She has worked in Local Government for over 10 years in the roles of Municipal Laws Officer and Municipal Laws Project Officer with Nillumbik Shire Council. Elke is currently undertaking an Advanced Diploma in Business Management and a Diploma in Business (Human Resources). Elke was a member of the AMO Team of the Year in 2001.