

Churchill Fellowship Research: An Urban Animal Management Journey Outside the Square

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Abstract

The opportunity provided by this Fellowship was not only fantastic personally, it also provided a very unique understanding of the "bigger picture" in regard to urban animal management in a number of places around the world. My tour included travelling extensively through the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. It served firstly to reinforce my understanding and appreciation of the value good urban animal management services provide for our community. Secondly, it served to broaden my horizons in terms of how we might shape our future in urban animal management to do even better still – much better. My recommendations may raise some eyebrows and if so, that's good if it means stepping outside the comfort zones of static inertia. No industry has the right to remain static, particularly if it is in the business of delivering an important service to the community.

Introduction

The opportunity provided by this Fellowship allowed me to travel extensively through the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to study the link between urban animal control and animal welfare. These are two very distinct areas of urban companion animal management that in Australia are managed by a number of different jurisdictions and different levels of government. I will admit from the outset I was worried about what I might or might not find. I even had personal thoughts which undermined this project, particularly in regard to the unknown. The reality of course most people have some level of trepidation when stepping into the unknown or starting a new project and perhaps somewhere in all these thoughts and feelings is the real driving force that compels someone to reach out and search for knowledge, better ideas and a new direction.



Photograph taken outside the War Room, London

The current Australian urban animal management process lends itself to issues including conflicting priorities and resources, inconsistent legislation, frustration and less than ideal training methods for people working within urban animal management. This is compounded further when the general public is confused with where the responsibilities of each agency start and finish. In the US, Canada and the UK they have bridged the gap with many agencies and jurisdictions working in both a control and welfare environment. The Louisiana SPCA in New Orleans is a good example of this.

The outcome of this Fellowship will work towards improving local processes, focusing resources, legislation and procedures where the skill level of staff improves, consistent legislation is introduced and delivers community based awareness and understanding. The reality for our urban companion animals is that any improvements we can introduce will positively impact their co-existence within our society.

This report provides a summary of urban companion animal management work practices, some considered best practice from around the world.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Churchill Trust and in particular the Northern Territory local committee for their faith and understanding of what I am trying to achieve within urban animal management in Australia. Thank you for this amazing opportunity.

Fellowship Program

14th – 19th October Los Angeles, California

- Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control
- Shambala Park and the Roar Foundation

21st – 26th October Vancouver, Canada

- Municipality of Vancouver
- Stanley Park Ecology Society

29th October – 2nd November New Orleans, Louisiana

- Louisiana Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (LA/SPCA)

5th – 9th November Miami, Florida

- Miami Dade County Department of Animal Care and Control

12th – 16th November Washington DC

- Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
- HSUS Disaster Services
- HSUS Companion Animals
- HSUS Investigations, Research and Video
- HSUS International
- HSUS Urban Wildlife Program
- Humane Wildlife Solutions

19th – 23rd November New York, NY

- New York Department of Animal Care and Control

26th November – 1st December London, England

- RSPCA Head Office Horsham
- RSPCA Local Government Advisors
- RSPCA External Affairs
- RSPCA Prosecutions
- RSPCA Inspectorate
- City Hall, Greater London Authority

5th December Return to Darwin via Singapore and Sydney NSW

If I were to "distil" an "essence" of four or five main observations from this overseas experience for the purpose of addressing this conference it would have the following makeup:

1. Ours is a confusing industry
2. Companion animal care and control can work together
3. Better options for training are available
4. Evidence based R&D is better than random remedies

In regard to research and development however there is much to do and I am certain in the coming years others will take on this challenge and we will learn more about this fascinating industry.

Summary

My Fellowship tour traveling to the US, Canada and the UK, when put together with my occupational experience here in Australia confirmed a number of my initial thoughts on what was needed to improve UAM in Australia. It also, at the same time, has confirmed for me that we already do many things right. I would dare to suggest at least some of our UAM programs would or should be considered current 'best practice' in the world. A good example of that is our work on the importance of accurate registration databases and how registration is often seen as a corner stone to good urban animal management. However we can do so much more, particularly in regard to consistent legislation, training and community education.

The reality is a good animal management program is a community responsibility and should be budgeted as any other program or service provided for the residents living in our communities. A poorly managed and resourced program can become a liability for local government and it needs to be said that the most common obstacle facing any urban animal management program is funding. There is evidence suggesting many jurisdictions are seemingly tempted to strip down programs to the point of ineffectiveness and many unfortunately have the opinion that 100% of a programs cost needs to come from animal fees and charges. Until our City Fathers recognize and appreciate that well resourced animal management programs can deliver so much more to our communities and can be shown the positive affect a good animal management program can have on our urban amenity our service levels, our training and our profession are always going to be limited to the extent of the cost to register your dog. I am so glad the same rationale is not applied to our Police Force and that their budget is limited to the cost of registering a car!

Having first drafted this paper I sought the opinion of Dick Murray (President AIAM) on how he thought it was shaping. He commented that that back in 1999 at the Gold Coast UAM conference a "Needs and Direction" workshop was conducted by AMO delegates attending. Key speakers from different States defined what it was that they needed to overcome the main difficulties they were experiencing in delivering animal management services to their communities.

The conclusion of that workshop was that some sort of peak body representing UAM in a national context needed to work towards the following important goals:

1. Uniformity of legislation providing consistency of policy and practice across municipal and state boundaries
2. Access to dedicated high quality training and qualification that would provide career path opportunity for their vocation
3. Recognition and appreciation of the value of the work they do for their councils and their communities
4. Authority to be included in the processes of formulating policy and practice methods for urban animal management service delivery
5. Provision of resources sufficient for them to meet the expectations of their employers and the communities they served (pers comm. Dick Murray, President AIAM, 2008)

It is very interesting that now, almost a decade later, these needs fit neatly with what I found separately through my own experience and through my Churchill Fellowship research. This does not make the findings of my trip redundant. In fact it reassures me that my Fellowship observations and conclusions are on solid ground.

So bringing this all to a conclusion, what is the real goal of a good urban animal management program? In my opinion it is responsible pet ownership! The road to this goal requires public education, sound and consistent legislation backed up by a well resourced enforcement program. Any Council or Shire who makes an investment in animal care and control (animal management) will create an environment where animals are both welcome and become an integral part of our community.

In conclusion

What does this all mean? The answer is: Absolutely nothing unless the right people provided with the right support drive this message and carry urban animal management in Australia to the next level. We do now have a "peak body" in the Australian Institute of Animal Management and here at this conference we are helping shape a dynamic future for urban animal management in Australia. But do we have the momentum? It is time for a quantum step change in this country, particularly in the way the industry works and is viewed by those who have the power to make necessary changes. If you are one of our chosen representatives, you have an opportunity to ensure we don't fall below the mark in the way we manage and treat our companion animals in Australia in the future.

Acknowledgements

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- Municipality of Vancouver
- Stanley Park Ecology Society – Robyn Worcester
- Louisiana Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – Gloria Dauphin
- Miami-Dade County Department of Animal care and Control – Dr. Sarah Pizano
- Humane Society of the United States – Mr. John Snyder
- New York department of Animal Care and Control – Mr. Richard Gentles
- RSPCA, Horsham, England
- City Hall, Greater London Authority – Natasha Fuchs

References

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