

05

Getting 2 Zero—A whole community change model to increase responsible ownership and prevent unwanted animals

JOY VERRINDER

Strategic Development Officer AWLQ & G2Z

Abstract

Over the last 8 years, Gold Coast City has had a steady reduction in “euthanasia” of stray and surrendered cats and dogs. In 2009/10, 85% of all incoming stray and surrendered dogs and cats in Gold Coast City (pop. 500 000) were reclaimed or rehomed i.e. 91% of dogs and 76% of cats. This included all healthy and sociable dogs and cats and the majority of treatable animals. As well over the past few years there has been a reduction in the numbers of incoming unwanted kittens in Gold Coast City.

Based on the strategies used to achieve this success, AWLQ has developed the Getting to Zero Model to assist other communities to prevent unwanted cats and dogs and reduce euthanasia rates.

This presentation explains the Getting to Zero Model and how Animal Management Departments can benefit from it.

Background

Most Council’s Animal Management Departments around Australia are still struggling to manage large numbers of stray and unwanted animals and the increasing demands from their communities for abandoned animals to be cared for and rehomed. While the proportion of dogs euthanized in many pounds is gradually reducing, kitten season results in a flood of surrendered cats and their litters. If surrendered cats are not accepted, or the surrender fee is high, or the public are aware that the kittens will most likely be euthanized, more cats and kittens are abandoned to fend for themselves, resulting in further breeding of cats.

Animal Management Officers also have to respond to large numbers of nuisance complaints from barking dogs, safety issues from menacing dogs, as well as wandering dogs and cats. It is often difficult to gain

public support for animal management, with the added stress of caring field officers and pound staff having to euthanase healthy and treatable pets.

It is difficult to know the exact numbers of abandoned and euthanized cats and dogs in Australia. Only the NSW Government reports statistics on the fate of pound animals annually¹. However, these statistics do not include those abandoned to animal welfare shelters and rescue groups, vet clinics, or those abandoned to become free-living cats and dogs.

Data for 2009/10 from NSW government pounds plus two major shelter organisations i.e. RSPCA NSW and AWL NSW, extrapolated using numbers of abandoned and killed in relation to the ratio of human populations of NSW and Australia, indicate approximately 400 000 dogs and cats entered pounds and shelters in Australia and 180 000 (80 000 dogs and 100 000 cats) were killed, as a conservative estimate².

Some pet industry groups have estimated lower numbers, by only including those recorded as euthanized for “no room”, and excluding those euthanized for “medical or behavioural” reasons. However euthanasia of dogs and cats for medical and behaviour reasons is largely due to the pound/shelter environment e.g. dogs and cats get colds or flu from stress in unfamiliar or crowded pound/shelter facilities or are too timid or react aggressively out of fear and frustration. In responsible caring homes, the majority of impounded or surrendered dogs and cats would not have a health or behavioural problem, or would be treated for these problems. They would not be euthanized. In fact, data from whole cities in Australia³ and internationally⁴ show that at least 90% of stray and surrendered dogs and cats are either healthy or treatable. Based on consistent ethical treatment of companion animals, and community expectations, these animals can and should be rehomed. By definition, euthanasia should only occur

1 Division of Local Government Department of Premier and Cabinet (July 2011). Analysis of Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2005/2006 to 2009/2010. http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Pound_Data_Report_-_2005_06_-_2009_10.pdf

2 Estimated Number of dogs and cats abandoned and killed in Australia 2009/10 www.g2z.com.au

3 AWLQ Statistics 2009/10 <http://www.awlqld.com.au/statistics.html>

if an animal is irremediably suffering. In addition, there may be some animals that have been so badly treated or trained by humans that they are a danger to others. Thus, at most, only 40 000 of the total intake of approximately 400 000 dogs and cats may currently be untreatable, and, with more responsible breeding and rehoming resulting in fewer abandoned animals, this figure will be much lower.

Regardless of the national figures, those who work in pounds and shelters know only too well the tragedy of killing healthy or treatable abandoned animals, which if they were our own companions in our homes, would not be suffering the same fate.

In 2009/10, on average 30-40% of stray and surrendered dogs and 60-70% of stray and surrendered cats⁵ were being killed in pounds and shelters in Australia. While the proportion of dogs killed in pounds in NSW has reduced from 40% to 31% since 2005/6, the proportions of cats killed in NSW pounds had only fallen by 1% to 67%.

What is being done to address this?

AWLQ has been working intensively on two key goals over the last 8 years:

1. To achieve zero killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs in one large Australian city, and
2. To develop a strategic model that can be applied in other cities and shires around Australia to Get to Zero nationwide.

This has resulted in the **Getting to Zero Model** which outlines the principles, structures and strategies for working progressively towards zero killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs (more than 90% of all incoming stray and surrendered cats and dogs) in **whole communities**.

Simultaneously, in the United States of America, the No Kill Movement has been developing. It identifies similar strategies, providing evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies in a range of communities. However, the Getting to Zero Model also provides the structures needed so that strategies can be applied effectively.

The Getting to Zero Model results in:

- A sustainable reduction in abandoned and euthanized animals
- Reduction in the oversupply of kittens
- A higher proportion of desexed & identified animals which cause fewer nuisance issues
- Communities more aware of overpopulation & more involved in preventing the problem
- Increased community support for councils and animal management officers
- More job satisfaction and less emotional trauma for rangers and pound staff

What has been achieved?

The lowest euthanasia rate for a large city of 500 000 people or more in Australia has been achieved through applying the G2Z Model. Other pounds and animal welfare organisations in Australia and internationally have been working on similar strategies and are also making great progress.

Gold Coast City has a population of 500 000 people and is growing by 13000 to 16000 each year. Because AWLQ is the only shelter which manages the pound animals for Gold Coast City Council and accepts all the unclaimed strays and the cats and dogs surrendered by their owners, it is an ideal position to apply strategies and track their impact on a whole city.

Through the strategies in the Getting to Zero model, 85% of the 7000 stray and surrendered cats and dogs in Gold Coast City were reclaimed or rehomed in 2009/10. This includes 91% of **all** incoming dogs and 76% of **all** incoming cats in 2009/10. Only 9% of dogs and 25% of cats were killed, a reduction from 30% of dogs and 57% of cats killed in 2001/2 (proportions similar to current national averages).

Another benefit of the G2Z Model is that there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of incoming stray and surrendered kittens from Gold Coast City residents over the last eight years, while other communities have maintained or increased their intake.

Zero euthanasia of all healthy sociable dogs and cats in a whole city has been achieved.

Saving every treatable cat and dog in a whole city is the next goal, which has been getting closer.

Less than 10% of the 7000 abandoned cats and dogs in the whole city i.e. 8% of incoming dogs and 9% of incoming cats were euthanized because they were untreatable in 2009/10 (i.e. very sick or aggressive, with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation).

Transferring cats and dogs from one city or shire to a shelter in another location puts an extra rehoming burden on that community. In 2009/10 almost 3000 additional cats and dogs from surrounding cities and shires in SE Queensland were accepted by AWLQ at its Gold Coast Rehoming Centre. While support for animals from other communities continues, other communities are now being encouraged to adopt the G2Z Model and take responsibility for preventing and rehoming stray and abandoned animals in their own communities.

For the complete 2009/10 Statistics Report go to: <http://www.awlqld.com.au/statistics.html>

The G2Z Model

The G2Z model includes:

- key principles or beliefs that are needed to drive community change
- 4 elements i.e. 2 preventative elements and 2 elements which focus on maximizing the saving of existing abandoned animals.

It is important that Animal Management Departments embrace the principles or main beliefs of G2Z. Even though legislation permits killing healthy and treatable animals, local government responsibilities should reflect the ethical concerns of their community and emphasize prevention of stray and abandoned animals. G2Z therefore requires a belief that:

- Each community should take responsibility for saving its own abandoned animals
- Zero killing of 90% of abandoned cats and dogs in each community is achievable
- All cats and dogs are equally deserving of our utmost efforts to preserve and enhance their lives

The 2 main prevention elements include:

- A Community Vet Clinic focusing on desexing support & promotion for owned animals
- Community Education, Legislation and Support Programs

The 2 elements which maximize saving lives are:

- Proactive Rehoming Strategies
- A Shelter Clinic to enable desexing, microchipping and treatment for abandoned animals.

These are outlined fully in the G2Z brochure (Appendix A) and can be printed from www.g2z.com.au for distribution to Councilors, Council staff and community stakeholder groups.

Progressing G2Z Australia wide

G2Z belongs to every organization (government and non-government) which shares a common belief that we can get to zero killing of healthy and treatable stray and surrendered cats and dogs (at least 90% saved) in each community, by implementing strategies, sharing progress, and working collaboratively to improve and keep on track. A number of local governments and animal shelter organisations have already adopted G2Z principles and strategies to help drive improvement in their communities.

Local governments, pounds, shelters, rescue groups, vets, pet industry representatives have been attending the **National G2Z Summits** since the inaugural event in 2006, with the most recent being held in September 2011. These Summits enable all stakeholders to share successful strategies and

learn more from international and national speakers who are committed to Getting 2 Zero. Resolutions have been developed from these Summits and are gradually being progressed.

A **National G2Z Steering Committee** comprised of representative organisations which have demonstrated commitment to G2Z principles and strategies from each State has been formed to help progress G2Z in each state/territory. A G2Z Sydney workshop was held in May 2011, a G2Z Qld workshop in Sept 2011 and further workshops are being planned for other states to work towards effective and consistent state and national strategies.

A **G2Z website** www.g2z.com.au has recently been established to enable ongoing communication of strategies and progress. It is an independent national site for all stakeholders to share and progress effective strategies, resources and solutions.

All local government animal management departments and pounds, animal welfare groups, shelters, rescue groups, breeders, pet shops and pet industry organisations, veterinarians, university vet schools and community members are invited to be part of G2Z through the following actions:

1. Read the **G2Z Model**
2. Complete the **Getting to Zero Checklist** to identify which elements your city/shire has in place in terms of implementing Getting to Zero. A quick Checklist is available at www.g2z.com.au. For a more detailed appraisal of G2Z strategies currently in your community, email info@g2z.com.au for a G2Z Audit Form.
3. From this checklist/audit, identify the strategies that are currently not in operation in your community and **develop plans** for effective facilities, policies and procedures to align with the principles and strategies of G2Z.
4. Develop a city/shire stakeholder coalition. Use information and resources on the G2Z website to explain G2Z to the key stakeholders in your community e.g. Councilors, Animal Management leaders, rangers, pound staff and volunteers, animal welfare shelters and rescue groups, breeders, pet shops, animal trainers and groomers, wildlife groups, teachers, community groups and the general public.
5. Share your progress, successful strategies on the G2Z website. Increasingly, the general public wants to see evidence of progress. Being involved in G2Z will help develop support from your community.
6. Increase knowledge by attending and offering presentations at G2Z State workshops and National G2Z Summits – see G2Z Events on website.

- 7. Seek assistance in planning the way forward with the G2Z Team. For inquiries please contact info@g2z.com.au.



Getting to Zero is a successful model for local government animal management departments to use to drive community change and achieve ongoing sustainable reductions in killing of abandoned animals. It is hoped Getting to Zero will provide ongoing support and motivation for all stakeholders and communities to share resources and progress solutions. By working together zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals is achievable—sooner rather than later.

References

- i Division of Local Government Department of Premier and Cabinet (July 2011). Analysis of Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2005/2006 to 2009/2010. http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Pound_Data_Report_-_2005_06_-_2009_10.pdf
- ii Estimated Number of dogs and cats abandoned and killed in Australia 2009/10 www.g2z.com.au
- iii AWLQ Statistics 2009/10 <http://www.awlqld.com.au/statistics.html>
- iv Winograd, Nathan (2009). Can We Save all the Lives at Risk in Shelters? <http://www.ndn.org.au/files/SummitProceedings/Nathan%20Winograd%20-%20Saving%20All%20Animals.pdf>
- v RSPCA Australia National Statistics 2009-10 <http://www.rspca.org.au/assets/files/Resources/RSPCAAnnualStats2009-2010.pdf> and Division of Local Government Department of Premier and Cabinet (July 2011). Analysis of Council Data Collection System for Seizures of Cats and Dogs 2005/2006 to 2009/2010. http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Pound_Data_Report_-_2005_06_-_2009_10.pdf

◎ BIOGRAPHY

Joy Verrinder

Animal Welfare League, Qld

Email: joy@awlqld.com.au; joy@g2z.com.au

Joy Verrinder has Masters Degrees in Business Administration and Professional Ethics and Governance. She has been working with local and state governments, animal management departments, shelters, breeders, veterinarians, and universities, for the past 9 years as Strategic Development Officer for the Animal Welfare League of Queensland (AWLQ), to increase responsible animal breeding and ownership and reduce the killing of cats and dogs in pounds and shelters at local, state and national levels. She is currently the national coordinator of Getting to Zero (G2Z).

Attachment A: G2Z Model

A Whole Community Change Model

Developed by AWLQ, Gold Coast, Australia



This model provides the key elements for Getting 2 Zero killing of healthy and treatable abandoned cats and dogs in YOUR city or shire. It has been developed and trialed successfully over the last few years by AWL Qld.

It can be adopted by local government animal management departments or animal welfare shelters, and preferably, partnerships between the two.

① COMMUNITY VET CLINIC

② SHELTER VET CLINIC

**PREVENT
ABANDONMENT**



**SAVE EXISTING
LIVES**

③ COMMUNITY EDUCATION,
LEGISLATION & SUPPORT

④ REHOMING CENTRE

Principles for Getting 2 Zero

Community Responsibility

Each community takes responsibility for saving its own abandoned animals.

Pounds and shelters inform the community of the number of animals who are abandoned and killed each year in their community and involve them in the solutions. Animal owners, breeders, pet shops, vets, dog trainers, governments, animal shelters, rescue groups, wildlife groups, teachers, students and community groups all contribute to prevent abandonment and save existing lives.

90% Savable

Zero killing of at least 90% of all incoming animals in a given community (i.e. all healthy and treatable cats and dogs) is achievable.

The managers and staff of pounds and shelters believe it and want to achieve it. They continually add and improve strategies to get closer to zero killing every year.



Save Healthy and Treatable Animals

All cats and dogs are equally deserving of our utmost efforts to preserve and enhance their lives.

This includes the stray and unowned animals, the cross-breeds, the boisterous untrained adolescent dogs, the timid cats, the sick, the young, the old, and those lacking the "cute" factor. Only those animals that are irretrievably suffering, or vicious with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation should be killed.

A Whole Community Change Model

Developed by AWLQ, Gold Coast, Australia



1 Community Vet Clinic

Preventing Abandonment of Owned Animals

A **Community Vet Clinic** is owned/managed by an individual or group with a strong commitment to saving all healthy and treatable animals in the particular community. It provides access to affordable veterinary care to ensure that no animal has to lose his/her life because of owner's financial disadvantage or mismanagement. It also allows access to desexing services to prevent unplanned litters and for ease of compliance with legislation e.g. breeder permits, desexing for subsidised registration.

Services:

- a. Low cost desexing and microchipping as standard practice
- b. Early age desexing from 8 weeks of age and 1 kilo in weight for kittens; puppies approx 2 kg for average size breeds
- c. Desexing campaigns and regular promotion
- d. Other veterinary services at reduced rates (where possible)
- e. Ongoing subsidies/free services to end the cycle of unwanted litters through:
 - i. Last Litter Fund – desex mother cat or dog of a surrendered litter
 - ii. Pound Fund – desex reclaimed animals at point of release
 - iii. Membership of the National Desexing Network
- f. Wholesale desexing prices prior to sale or transfer for pet shops, breeders and rescue groups.
- g. Volunteer pick up service for collection of animals so that all animals can access services



2 Shelter Vet Clinic

Saving and preventing further breeding of pound/shelter/rescue animals

A **Shelter Vet Clinic** offers full veterinary services for all pound/shelter animals preferably on site. For smaller pounds and shelters/rescue groups, shelter vet clinic services can be provided by the Community Vet Clinic.

Services:

- a. Desexing, microchipping, health checking, worming, providing flea treatment and heart worm testing prior to being placed in the rehoming area
- b. Early age desexing from 8 weeks of age and 1 kilo in weight for kittens; puppies approx 2 kg for average size breeds
- c. Daily health checks of all animals
- d. Treatment of sick and injured pound/shelter animals
- e. Free veterinary support for foster carers of pound/shelter animals
- f. After sale health guarantee work for rehomed pound/shelter animals
- g. Training of vet students in early age desexing (where possible)
- h. Veterinary support for Trap Neuter Release programs in appropriate environments



Charlotte Reeves Photography 2011

A Whole Community Change Model

Developed by AWLQ, Gold Coast, Australia



3 Rehoming Centre

A **Rehoming Centre** saves all healthy and treatable stray and surrendered animals in each community (i.e. at least 90% of the community's animals)

Care of Pound/Shelter Animals

Services:

- a. Capacity of rehoming pens sufficient in relation to numbers of incoming stray and abandoned animals
- b. Efficient movement through the system for animals to be rehomed as quickly as possible
- c. Substantial fostering program
- d. Large network of volunteers
- e. Size and structure of pens allows animals comfort and ability to express normal behaviour
- f. Enrichment and socialization for each species to reduce stress
- g. Training of animals to increase rehoming ability
- h. Rehabilitation for treatable cats and dogs with emotional disorders

Finding Responsible Homes

Services:

- a. Focus on increasing reclaim rates each year
- b. Focus on increasing rehoming rates each year
- c. An easily accessible location
- d. Open when public are available – late in afternoon, weekends, public holidays
- e. Positive communication, promotion and marketing of animals
- f. Bright inviting environment
- g. Pre-adoption interviews to find the best match
- h. Off-site adoptions through pet shops/mobile rehoming units
- i. Involve the community in the zero euthanasia goal
- j. Involve community networks to help rehome animals
- k. Data gathering to assess rehoming progress



4 Community Education, Legislation & Support

Community Education, Legislation and Support provides knowledge and sets the standards for all stakeholders to prevent animals from being abandoned.

A. Whole Community Involvement

Services:

- a. A coalition of stakeholders including state and local governments, breeders, vets, pet shops, wildlife groups, and shelter & rescue groups to develop cooperative involvement in solutions
- b. Education of the whole community on euthanasia rates in their own community and how they can help get to zero

B. Legislation

- a. Responsible breeding legislation to include:
 - i. A user-pays Government Breeder Permit system with pre-inspections based on a Code of Practice for the well-being of breeding animals and their litters.



Image © Charlotte Rees

A Whole Community Change Model

Developed by AWLQ, Gold Coast, Australia



4 Community Education, Legislation & Support *continued...*

- ii. Desexing of kittens by breeders prior to sale or transfer (unless being sold to another person with a breeder permit)
 - iii. Publishing of Breeder Permit Numbers for consumers to recognize responsible breeders
 - iv. Microchipping of all cats and dogs, including all kittens and pups prior to sale or transfer with the microchip of the breeding animal, breeder and breeding address on the microchip details of all kittens and puppies.
- b. Legislation which supports rehoming i.e. foster carers and rescue groups, excess animal permits for owners of desexed rehomed cats and dogs (based on inspection to determine capacity to care for responsibly rather than set numbers of animals)
- c. Research and development to implement best solutions for the care of responsibly managed cat colonies
- c. Comprehensive information and support for new and inexperienced owners
- d. Post adoption support - phone calls, and problem-specific information and training
- e. Pet friendly accommodation support
- f. Cat safe fencing education
- g. Early age desexing education

C. Owner Education and Support

Services:

- a. Animal Management Officers return animals home rather than impounding, provide advice/support to owners to prevent straying, and efficient systems for matching lost and found animals
- b. Pre-surrender interviews to educate and offer alternatives to surrender e.g. training courses, advice

D. Pre-school to University Student Education

Services:

- a. Presentations to schools, P-10 curriculum units (on-line) and teacher support to develop awareness of the numbers of abandoned animals and commitment to responsible animal care: DESEX IDENTIFY TRAIN KEEP SAFE
- b. Hands-on programs working with shelter animals for primary & secondary students
- c. Trainee teachers visit pounds/shelters and are well-informed of the problem and solutions for inclusion in their teaching.
- d. All vet student courses to include a shelter medicine component, work experience in pounds / shelters, benefits and hands-on training in Early Age Desexing for private practice.



Working Together

Through implementing and sustaining these services, each community in Australia can Get 2 Zero.

A G2Z website www.g2z.com.au is being developed to offer information and assistance to governments, pounds, shelters, rescue groups and interested community members. All groups working towards zero killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs are encouraged to share their progress and strategies through this website.

Funding G2Z

The Elsie Cameron Foundation has provided some funding for community vet clinics and other approved G2Z services to assist Australian organizations with Getting to Zero.

Substantial donations from governments, other organizations or individuals to implement G2Z infrastructure and services around Australia are needed.

To get involved or to donate email: info@g2z.com.au