

ANIMAL SERVICES AND THE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP MODEL

In North America, the vast majority of animals that fill our shelters or end up on our streets have arrived at that situation because a human relationship has failed them. The solution lies in responsible pet ownership and responsive animal services – not animal control and not building more shelters to fill.

Responsible Pet Ownership is a model that focuses on changing the behaviour of pet owners from problematic to acceptable. A positive change in human behaviour will always yield a positive change in animal behaviour. The foundation of any successful program starts with collaboration between all agencies involved with animals and a common understanding of the community's acceptable standards. With this knowledge, we can create programs and self-sustaining services that foster responsible pet ownership through education and recognizing the benefits of compliance, rather than relying solely on compulsion. Certain traditional approaches only create barriers to responsible pet ownership. We must identify what the components of responsible pet ownership should be. For my community, responsible pet ownership can be summarized in four points:



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- Provide a license and permanent identification
- Spay and neuter your pet
- Provide the proper medical care, socialization, training, diet and exercise
- Don't allow your pet to become a threat or nuisance in the community.

Think about it - if all pet owners in your community did these simple things, which are within everyone's capability, you could solve most of the community's animal issues. Licensing and identification quickly reunite lost pets with their families; spay and neuter initiatives reduce unwanted litters humanely; proper training and care produces safe, healthy animals; and proper management prevents pets from becoming a threat or nuisance, and reduces community complaints about animals.

A fifth component completes the responsible pet ownership community: responsible procurement of pets. When a family is adding a new pet, we always want them to ask where the animal came from and under what conditions it was produced. They should select their pets from ethical breeders, shelters or rescues when making this choice. In the animal services world, no officer ever gets called out to a property because the neighbour's pets are too good, never bark or howl, never threaten or bite and are well cared for. Our goal is to build communities where this is the standard – for our communities and for our pets.