Holding facilities

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INTRODUCTION

The Lost Dogs' Home has operated from its North Melbourne base since 1914. It was one of Melbourne's first pounds, and its design was based on that used by the Battersea Dogs Home, London. (Both our Shelter and the one in Battersea were known in those days as a 'Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs'). Almost all of the holding facilities at The Lost Dogs' Home conform to the Victorian Code of Practice for Pounds and Shelters (Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, 1990).

VICTORIAN CODE OF PRACTICE FOR POUNDS AND SHELTERS

In recent years many of the historic old kennels have been demolished to make way for those that conform to the present Code. This means one dog per pen. Pens for dogs 30 cms or more at shoulder height must be a minimum 2.5 square metres with a minimum width of one metre. Smaller dogs may be housed in slightly smaller pens of minimum width of 900 cm. Up to four pups can be housed in a pen.

The Code is less specific about cats. A quarantine area can be set up with a bank of cages in a well ventilated room. For adoption, each cat must have a floor area of two square metres and an individual sleeping area.

However the Code as it presently stands is inadequate. It urgently needs updating. It also needs legislative teeth, because up until now it has been a voluntary code. That explains why many shelters and pounds still don't match up. They don't have to. In addition, there is, after all, a lot more required by way of animal welfare services these days than adequate temporary accommodation and feeding facilities. Mere compliance with a fairly tame code is therefore no reason for undue pride. The issue is also caught up in the vortex of political and economic change into which Victoria had been drawn over recent years.

In proclaiming that most of our facilities comply with the Code, I am therefore merely pointing out that we are doing the right thing. It says nothing of our ability to adapt to the changing scene. That's what I'd like to cover now.

My paper therefore will:

1. discuss how and why the Code of Practice should be updated;
2. discuss influences on future admission figures;
3. outline the ancillary services which should be provided along with the basic accommodation facilities; and
4. review the role that animal shelters will be called upon to play in the provision of animal control services in our new entrepreneurial political/economic environment.

WHERE THE CODE FALLS SHORT

All well and good, but the Code does fall short of any ideal. The minimum pen width of one metre is not enough for large dogs. They need at least 1.5 metres to give them enough room to move about. Food and water bowls can also be placed at the front of the pens instead of close to their beds. The extra space makes for more efficient cleaning and better hygiene.

I am also opposed to a limit of one dog per pen - a ruling meant to reduce the risk of disease spread. However most dogs prefer companionship to solitary confinement - which often leads to abnormal behaviour and fretting.

This is especially so when two animals arrive together - only to be separated for a reason that is not valid. I am therefore strongly in favour of a Code which would require kennels to be at least 1.5 x 2.5 metres (3.75 square metres) and which thus allows for the possibility of, where desirable, two dogs per pen.

In the case of cats however, which tend to be solitary animals, problems arise with rules which are lax. It is easier to find homes for cats if they are displayed separately - people don't like separating perceived 'pairs'. Moreover cats low in the social 'pecking order' have trouble in getting their share of food. They go into hiding - sometimes forever. I well recall that when the old cat shelters were demolished at the Cat Protection Society, skeletons were found in the rafters.

The trend in the United States is to build pounds and shelters that are all indoors (Miers and Hoffman, 1994; Shapiro, 1995; Cox, 1995). The advantages of such systems are that (1) the environment can be completely controlled; (2) the amount of noise coming from the shelter can be reduced and (3) the pounds and shelters can therefore be located more conveniently for the general public. The present Victorian code provides very little information on the minimum standards required for indoor only facilities.

INFLUENCES ON FUTURE ADMISSION FIGURES

Let us now examine what the future holds in terms of the number of animals that will need shelter care over the coming years.

Two major changes in Victorian legislation will have a dramatic impact on the number of animals admitted to pounds and shelters. When proclaimed next year the new Domestic Animals (Feral and Nuisance) Act 1994 will result in a very large short term increase in cat numbers as councils implement the new provisions. Our own facility for cats will need to double its capacity immediately, since we will (legally) have to hold healthy stray cats for eight days rather than the four days we have (voluntarily) held them in the past.

The new law will enable people who have had to put up with cat nuisances, to do something legally about the problem by contacting their local council. I estimate that councils can expect to receive as many calls about cats as they do about dogs.

On the other hand it seems likely then there will be an increase in the number of registered (and therefore identifiable) dogs and fewer unregistered (and therefore unidentifiable) dogs. This, linked to the increased tendency for councils to return lost dogs to their owners in preference to impounding them, will mean smaller pound intakes and a higher claim rate than has been the case in the past. Ergo - the number of pens required will decline.

This is borne out when we speculate on what sort of figures we should expect, in light of hopefully intelligent estimates of the impact of current changes, and our experiences of the past 25 years.

	Victorian dog population	Stray dogs admitted to home	Dogs surrendered by owners (% of total intake)
1970	500,000	30,000	20%
1980	600,000	20,000	25%
1990	750,000	15,000*	33%
1994	800,000	12,000*	35%

- Figures adjusted to compare the same catchment area

Which means the estimated dog population increased by 50%, whilst the number of strays admitted to the Lost Dogs' Home halved. Whilst this trend needs to be taken into account when making future estimates, it also seems likely that more dogs will be surrendered by owners. In the United States some shelters deal almost exclusively with dogs surrendered by owners. After several visits to USA and Canada the writer formed the opinion that a ratio of one stray to 10 surrendered is not uncommon.

As mentioned above there will most likely be a short term increase in cats admitted - either surrendered or dumped - when the new legislation comes into effect in April 1996. It is very likely that most regions will handle more cats than dogs over the next few years. Obviously handling facilities must be designed to meet any new regulations, and to meet the changes in demand created by new legislation.

ANCILLARY SERVICES

Hardly any form of community service has escaped the need to expand its areas of expertise and activities in modern times. 'Providing the basics for the less fortunate' was the name of the game in the Victorian era - as the old style 'workhouses' and 'poor houses' and 'homes for fallen women' testify.

Similarly the provision of basic holding services was all the community expected from animal shelters. Things have changed. They continue to change. Supporters of The Lost Dogs' Home of earlier decades would no doubt be surprised to find what the old place is involved in these days.

Our mission is not just to care for Melbourne's lost, sick and abandoned animals. It is to look after, and reduce the incidence of, lost and abandoned animals (Fradkin, 1994). The key difference is enshrined in the word reduce. It demands that we strike at the causes of the these situations rather than just address the consequences. This holistic approach is a water-shed development which must be understood by any student of today's urban animal management scene. The above has been the motivation and *raison d'etre* for the still ongoing expansion program at the Lost Dogs' Home and Cat Shelter over the past ten years.

Our veterinary facilities have been expanded so that we can offer the community an alternative veterinary service. The private veterinary practice is a by-product of our core activity in looking after stray and unwanted animals.

Our ambulance rescue service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A 'normal business hours' service would suffice if animals could only learn to avoid falling sick or becoming injured outside those hours. They never will - so the service we offer will always be a must.

Our cat trapping service is also in constant demand. Without it the community would find it impossible to deal with problems created by dumped or abandoned cats, left to their own devices to scavenge for food, fight with other animals, and spread disease and destruction in their wake. Without it more cats would suffer from starvation, disease or motor car accidents.

Our adoption service has adapted to the needs of domestic animal welfare in the nineties. First, only animals medically and temperamentally safe and suitable for adoption make it to our adoption pens (pens, which incidentally received high praise from the Hong Kong Government which is using our plans and layout to build new facilities).

Animals put up for adoption are routinely vetted. Even so, the new owner has the security of one months free health cover in case some latent problems develop during that initial period. We also take an animal back if the buyer decides that the new pet 'isn't working out'. Better that, than it being dumped and left to fend for itself. All adult dogs and cats are desexed before release for adoption. Pups and kittens come with a free desexing voucher to be used to have the animals desexed on maturity.

There is not much chance of any of our pets becoming lost, and ending up in some shelter at the end of the line because there is no way to trace the owners. Every adult dog and cat released from the Home has three forms of identification - a coded identification collar tag which provides a finder with a phone number to contact; an ear tattoo identification; and a coded implanted microchip. All pups and kittens come with the tags and microchips; the ear tattoo comes when the animal is desexed at our clinic.

Lack of identification is almost always the reason why it is impossible to trace owners of straying animals. The Home decided therefore that one of the most effective ways of reducing the incidence of strays would be to provide identification tags to all pet owners prepared to take the tags. Nationally only 6% of dogs admitted to pounds and shelters are identified. The identification rate for cats is only 0.1%

Hence the introduction of our **National Pet Register**. Over the past few years the numbers have grown to 140,000 registrants (more than 2% of Australia's total pet population). Every day we answer calls from all over Australia as people telephone to report finding straying dogs. The daily average of pets being restored to their owners in this way now ranges between 4 and 6. The Register is therefore making a valuable contribution to reducing the incidence of untraceable strays Australia wide.

As any shelter must, ours has always acknowledged the need for public education on responsible pet ownership and animal welfare issues generally. We have visited schools and been visited by school classes. We have published literature on the various topics: choosing a pet, animal care, responsibilities of animal ownership, etc. Many councils take quantities of our newsletter every quarter for use in their educational activities on these topics.

We have plans for a new pet ownership and animal welfare education facility to be built on our grounds in the near future. Children will be encouraged to visit it and learn the basic principles of animal welfare and responsible ownership through our interactive computer programs.

We are of course well aware of the information revolution and are already exchanging news and information with animal shelters and organisations around the world through the Internet. Internet users can obtain information on the Home and its services.

ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICES

Hardly any form of community service - from such major basics as the supply of power, water and telecommunications, to council garbage collection, has been unaffected by today's entrepreneurial political/economic climate. Privatisation is the name of the game. If you want in you must learn the rules, acquire the skills, and hope you can cut it. Animal control services are no exception.

Until now pounds and shelters simply needed to be there, to help local councils to cope with their animal welfare responsibilities, or, if not that, to make their own independent contribution to the task. Now we see animal control as a job to be tendered out by councils to organisations equipped with the necessary knowledge, experience, expertise and resources. The new Compulsory Competitive Tendering requirements have been a sharp and powerful stimulus to this development.

So suddenly we find that we must become skilled in the subtle nuances of tendering for work often when the councils concerned have not thought through the extent of the animal control services they need. The game after all is as new to them as it is to us.

The Home has devised a scale of animal control services charges ranging from housing impounded animals, through to a complete service which takes over all aspects of the work councils have done in the past - even law enforcement where government regulations permit. It isn't an easy task - especially when this will include regulated cat control - a task for which no council (apart from a few in selected conservation areas such as Sherbrooke) has had any experience. Moreover a shelter may well have to tender against an internal bid from the council concerned!

Many at this conference will remember Lou Leather of Wood Green Animal Shelters in the United Kingdom. You will recall him as a key speaker at last year's conference in Canberra. The current issue of Wood Green's magazine (Fuller, 1995) outlines some of the services offered in this area. Wood Green Enterprises provides 12 local authorities with 14 animal wardens trained at the Wood Green Shelter.

The Shelter provides made-to-measure Animal Control Officer training. If an authority needs wardens for educational duties only, or a combination of education and enforcement, or even enforcement only, there are courses to suit. It is an interesting and up-to-the-minute approach in providing facilities which local authorities now expect from animal welfare organisations. It is the direction in which all animal shelters, that want to be part of the action in future, should be heading. It is an important way by which we will be asked to earn our keep in the future.

Finally we must be able to deliver an efficient, humane and cost effective animal welfare service. Our future costs will depend on the numbers of stray and unwanted animals. How for instance can we best assess how many stray and unwanted cats and dogs there will be in the future? Who will be asked to bear the burden of such costs?

Modern management practices cut costs these days by 'out placing' specialist tasks. This cuts down on heavy capital expenditure or high salary costs for specialist staff where out placing can get the job done just as efficiently at less cost.

Such considerations are not new to large corporate organisations, nor indeed to most businesses striving to compete in a global market. At The Lost Dogs' Home we have tried to apply these principles to our animal welfare business. Hopefully in the new climate where emphasis is placed on customer service we will be given more opportunities to demonstrate our skills in the animal welfare area.

At first glance the subject of 'Holding Facilities' may seem a straightforward and uncomplicated topic. I hope the thoughts which I have shared with you through this paper have indicated that it is as complex as the subject of animal welfare itself.

It will demand and deserve constant attention from those concerned with urban animal management up to and beyond the year 2000.

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