

Education in action

John Dommers

ABSTRACT

"There is so much to do and so little time to do what we already have to do."

"We don't have funds in our budget for humane education."

"I can't take a person out of the field or the office to service as a humane educator. I'm short of staff as it is."

Excuses, excuses and more excuses.

In the early 1970s, just after becoming president of the largest animal protection organisation in the USA, The Humane Society of the United States, John A. Hoyt stated: "For too long the humane movement in this country has been on the defensive. We have so preoccupied ourselves with responding to the consequences of cruelty and abuse, that we have neglected the more important task of building an ethical system in which kindness to animals is regarded as the norm rather than the exception".

Think about that statement for a moment ... in other words, animal protection and control agencies have been responding to and *treating the symptoms* instead of *preventing the disease!*

A well-rounded and effective animal management program not only responds to the consequences of animal abuse, *it works to prevent the problems*. Humane education must be an integral part of an animal management program. It should begin in-house and extend outward to the community.

This session will provide some guidelines and materials to help initiate or expand a humane education program.

INTRODUCTION

If you think you do not have the time, money or peoplepower for humane education, think about this: *we are in business to put ourselves out of business!* Time and resources must be found for education programs. A humane education program:

- doesn't have to be expensive;
- doesn't have to take a great deal of time; and
- doesn't require a full time staff person

But a humane education:

- does require preparation and planning;
- does require commitment; and
- **does make a big difference.**

The three humane education program areas I will be addressing are:

1. In-service humane education that begins in-house.
2. Humane education programs for schools.
3. Community humane education.

IN-SERVICE EDUCATION

The very fact that you are at this well-designed education conference proves that in-service education is important to you. But what about the receptionists, secretaries, accountants, kennel workers, investigators, newsletter editors, public relations directors, vet technicians, animal control officers, board members, volunteers and others? Each of them is a representative and spokesperson for your organisation, agency or business while on the job or in the community. They are a part of your organisational or business family and want to feel valued. The more they know about the programs and policies of the organisation and the major issues it addresses the more efficient and effective they can be in their respective roles.

If you have an in-service education program in place for the team at your facility I congratulate you! If you do not, it is time to start one. It should be given a top level spot on your priority list. Also, if you do have an in-service program, it may be just the right time to re-evaluate it. No matter how good you think your in-service education program is it can always be made just a little bit more relevant, enriching and enjoyable. Many of the ideas you gain at this conference should be of help.

Although there are things you want the staff to know remember, there are things that they want to know too. If you have regularly scheduled in-service education sessions then invite the staff to submit written questions they would like to have addressed at meetings. Have them suggest topics for speakers to present and discuss. Many resource people from the community or other agencies would welcome an invitation to speak on specialised topics of interest.

If you receive new videos or books consider reviewing and critiquing them with the staff. Ask for their evaluations, criticisms and suggestions. If no new videos or books are available copy a feature article from *Animal Sheltering magazine (The Community Animal Care, Control, and Protection Resource)* published by the Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L St NW Washington, DC 20037 asm@ix.netcom.com (e-mail). The magazine's reprint policy approves such copies for educational purposes. Major topics in recent issues include Customer Service, Parvo, Managing URI and Kennel Cough and The Microchip Dilemma. Circulate copies of the article to the staff a week ahead of a scheduled in-service education session and ask them to read it in preparation for the gathering.

At the meeting, begin a discussion by asking questions such as:

- 'What parts of the article were most impressive and helpful to you?'
- 'What parts did you like the least?'
- 'Was anything unclear or confusing?'
- 'Can anyone help clarify the confusing part?'
- 'Based on your experiences, what would you add to the article to help people who read it?'
- 'Were there any suggestions that we should consider adding to our procedures?'
- 'What do you intend to do differently based on what you learned?'

In the future have staff members submit for consideration any articles they think would be interesting for the group to read and discuss. You will be amazed at how many staffers will begin researching and reading material related to the field in which they work.

The bottom line for in-house in-service is that the team will become more knowledgeable, cohesive, and self-confident.

HUMANE EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS

Sooner or later you may be asked to present a program in a school. If such an invitation is not forthcoming then you may want to invite yourself to present a school program.

Before providing suggestions for school programs I want to read a small portion of the preface of a book I have brought with me. Listen carefully and try to guess the date it was published. The person who comes closest will win a prize:

The object of this book is to teach children to treat all living creatures with considerate kindness and to appreciate the services of man's helpers in the animal world.

In many homes this teaching is entirely neglected, and it is left for the school teacher to arouse interest in the animals dependent upon us, and to encourage pity and compassion for their suffering.

Sir Arthur Helps says: "The great advancement of the world, throughout the ages is to be measured by the increase of humanity and the decrease of cruelty".

The child does not realise that he is cruel, until he is shown the ways in which the lower animals suffer and are made miserable.

Children have tender hearts and quick sensibilities, but they sometimes lack imagination and sympathy through their ignorance of actual conditions. They are easily influenced by one whom they love and respect, and the teacher's power to make the world better by pointing out the great duty of humanity should find more scope than it has done in our educational systems. "The humane movement is a broad one, reaching from humane treatment of animals on one hand to peace with all nations on the other. It implies a step beyond animals' rights. It implies character building. Society first said that needless suffering should be prevented; society now says that children must not be permitted to cause pain because of the effect on the children themselves."

This book, compiled by Sara J. Eddy and published by Ginn and Company in Boston, Massachusetts was published in 1899 almost 100 years ago and yet it sounds like it may have been written recently. The reference to the importance of school teachers should be noted.

Humane education is not a new concept, but how we package it is new and important. As we heard, it was recognised very early that teachers are key players in helping to shape the attitudes and behaviours of young people. When I worked for the New Haven, Connecticut, Public Schools I was based at a nature centre to teach environmental education. It was evident to me that teaching teachers was critically important to helping students develop a life-long appreciation for and functional understanding of animals and the environment. I was only able to spend a few hours each year with each class of students visiting our outdoor facility. Teachers in the US, on the other hand, spend an average of 1250 hours with their students each school year. Through the example they set, and their careful selection and use of materials, teachers are a powerful influence on their students.

Just about every major special interest group would like to have access to students through a variety of teaching materials and programs. Teachers continually receive requests to present special topics on drugs, alcohol and substance abuse; fire prevention; vandalism; recycling; nutrition; and the like. If the materials and programs do not fit into or complement curriculum requirements they probably won't be used. It is extremely important that programs and materials offered to schools blend into and complement standard curriculum areas.

The most ideal school education program is one that works to teach teachers and to provide curriculum-blended materials that are approved by the schools. Training programs and materials for teacher education are offered by some organisations with full-time educators but they are generally far beyond the financial reach of most humane societies and animal management agencies. Many organisations have part-time educators who work with school administrators, teachers and parent organisation leaders to bring selected animal care programs to the classroom. Others make time available for staff members to visit schools or they make use of volunteer educators.

If you plan to attend Animal Care Expo 98 in San Diego this coming February you will be able to get lots of excellent suggestions for humane education programs on a shoestring budget. The Western Humane and Environmental Educators Association (WHEEA) will hold a full-day education program on Thursday February 19th that will focus on successful school and community programs that can be easily duplicated. Details on the full day program will be available from Liz Baronowski, The Pasadena Humane Society & SPCA, 361 South Raymond Ave, Pasadena, CA 91105 (818) 792-7151 Ext. 114, (818) 792-3810 fax.

In addition to WHEEA, The National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (the youth education division of The Humane Society of the United States) will be represented at Animal Care Expo 98. You will find a vast array of humane education resources and materials at the show that can be 'tailored' to fit almost any program design.

When you are ready to begin developing a program for schools you should work to assemble a teacher advisory committee. You should note that because teachers are generally asked to serve on many school committees many decline to take on more responsibilities because of time constraints. You might want to set up a dinner meeting for them or offer some gift certificate incentives to attend. Ask actively involved parents who have an interest in humane education to join the committee (parents can be extremely powerful allies or adversaries depending on how they perceive programs at schools). Invite these teachers and parents to your shelter for a tour.

Listen to teachers and *hear* what they are saying and suggesting. Work to fill their immediate and long range needs. You may have a burning desire to address pet overpopulation, pet abandonment, or some other issue that is very personal to you because of your work. They may not yet be ready for these topics. I firmly believe that it doesn't matter where people start on the circle of humane experiences. Eventually they will come around to the points of concern that you feel are most important to end animal cruelty and abuse. So if you are invited to address a specialised animal topic that the class is studying just do it, as the Nike ads say. Once you establish your credibility in the classroom you will surely be invited back to conduct another program. At this time you may be able to suggest and work in the topics you feel are important for teachers and students to know about and act upon.

It is very important to offer to participate in a *career education program*. Studying the careers of animal control officers, veterinarians, wildlife officers, animal trainers, groomers, etc allows the presenter a special opportunity to discuss topics such as spaying, neutering, euthanasia, responsible pet care, pet abandonment and other concerns that would otherwise be *very difficult* to introduce by themselves in a classroom setting. Let guidance counsellors know about you too - especially at the high school level. They will happily work you in as a presenter on a career awareness day. You will be able to dispel any misinformation, stereotypes or myths about your job during a question and answer period. *Career awareness programs offer some of the best education in action opportunities available to you.*

Familiarise yourself with several good videos to review and discuss with students as part of your school presentations. Two examples of outstanding films by Pyramid Film & Video will be briefly shown and discussed during this UAM conference session. They are both available from Educational Media Australia, 7 Martin Street, South Melbourne, 3205 Tel 03 9699-7144.

In my opinion, Pyramid Film & Video in Santa Monica, CA produced and distributes several of the finest films for humane education ever offered to schools, animal protection groups and educational TV. The ones I am referring to were written by Erik Friedl, an extremely progressive, perceptive and talented film maker who does his research and homework very carefully on each humane issue of concern he brings to the screen. His films have won prestigious awards including the coveted Genesis Award and have been featured on national TV. *The titles include: Kiss the Animals Goodbye, Protecting the Web, Friend for Life, A New Friend for Life and The Power of Compassion.* I hope you will take the time to review each of these films sometime soon.

Friend for Life, 15 min, Primary, Intermediate Levels

Young pet owners teach responsible pet care to their peers in this film. From the practical how to's of daily pet care to the importance of spaying and neutering, this film explains both the responsibilities and the rewards of pet ownership. It helps children consider the consequences before adopting a pet, how to introduce their pet to a new home, how to keep their pet clean, safe and healthy and how to train and play with their pet.

The Power of Compassion, 22 min Junior High, High School + Levels

Using scenes of sensitively-handled euthanasia, abused and neglected animals and everyday abandonment, this film stresses the immediacy of the crisis surrounding companion animals. Aimed primarily at teenagers and young adults - those who offer the best hope of reducing the amount of animal shelter cases now and in the future - this compelling documentary uses the power of film to strike both intellectual and emotional chords with intermediate to adult level audiences. In doing so it impels them to positive action by offering key solutions to overpopulation and animal abuse. Above all it emphasises compassion toward all living creatures. Its wisdom is simple: if we can teach young generation members to care for and respect animals, we can teach them to care for and respect their fellow humans and, ultimately, the world.

These films would be ideal for animal management officers to have immediately available to share with school and community groups. *The Power of Compassion* (in whole or part) would also be very helpful to review with politicians, legislators and civic leaders who need an additional incentive to support and fund animal management requests. Hearing and reading about the problems you have to deal with and solve every day is one thing. Seeing the problems and consequences clearly and dramatically depicted on a TV screen is another. *If a picture is worth a thousand words*, think about what video images will generate!

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community education is just as important as school education programs for action education programs. Although there are many options for community education - including radio, TV, newspaper columns, letters to the editor and outdoor advertising to name a few - face-to-face meetings with the public always seem to work best.

A community education booth is an ideal means through which to interact with the public. The award-winning Animal Sheltering magazine referenced earlier had a very timely article on How to Set Up a Community Education Booth in its September-October 1997 issue. A reprint of this step-by-step article will be provided to all in attendance at this conference. Others may request a copy from the address listed above.

One suggestion I would like to add is - once you have designed a booth display, and calculated its cost, try to get a respected area business to sponsor the booth. This will help reduce the production costs as well as provide a working community partner to help promote your messages. You may even find it is possible to get multiple sponsors for your booth.

In closing I want to thank you and wish you a great deal of success in all your humane education endeavours. They are worth all the time and energy you put into them. ***They do make a difference.***

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John J. Dommers
Director/Coordinator
Animal Care Expos
5810 Soledad Mountain Road
La Jolla, CA 92037
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Ph: (619) 459 6131
Fx: (619) 459 7706

John J. Dommers graduated from Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana with a degree in Biology. He was employed by the New Haven (Connecticut) public schools from 1966-1972 as a special assistant to the Supervisor of Science. He was based at the city's West Rock Nature Recreation Center and developed the country's first full-scale park-school environmental education program for elementary level students.

In 1972 John went to work for The Humane Society of the United States as the Director of Education for the New England Regional Office, covering a six state area. He later became the Society's National Director of Education and he headed the National Association for the Advancement of Humane Education, now called the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education. Later he became the New England Regional Director for the Society. In 1991 John became the Director of Animal Care Expo, the world's first full-scale trade show designed for animal rescue, sheltering, care and control personnel. The show holds the record for the largest gathering of animal sheltering and care professionals and volunteers in the world, averaging well over 1300 participants per year in its seven years of operation. Before moving to San Diego, California from Madison, Connecticut in 1989, John taught a graduate course for teachers, Environmental Education 404, at Connecticut College in New London, CT.

John wrote and photographed a four colour book series for young people titled Focus on Pollution that was published by Xerox Education Publications. He has also written and photographed articles for the national Wildlife Federations' Ranger Rick nature magazine and several professional teacher magazines. John's wife, Gail, is a full-time middle school teacher in La Jolla, CA. Their four sons all reside in the San Diego area.

[UAM 1997 Index page](#)