

# **The PetPlan animal management induction training program**

**Desirae French**

## **ABSTRACT**

While basic introductory job training has become an essential requirement for businesses today, finding cost efficient and conveniently accessible training is always a challenge for employers. This is particularly so when employing staff to work in the area of animal management.

This paper sets out the details of a particularly low cost delivery system for Animal Management Officer (AMO) training. Under the auspices of the Local Government Association of Queensland, PetPlan training providers are preparing to deliver this package, live, later this year. This is a highly portable training package and has the potential to be used anywhere in Australia. Consequently, observers (as well as trainees) are invited to attend this 'proving' session.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Importance of staff training and development**

The accelerated pace of change being experienced in workplaces today is a primary reason for ensuring the acquisition of appropriate skills and knowledge development for employees to ensure that organisations can best achieve their desired outcomes.

Research shows, however, that many industries are lagging behind in the development of their people. In a speech made by the Honourable Paul Braddy MLA, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations in March this year, Minister Braddy highlighted the training challenges Queensland is facing.

He referred to Dr Ron Cullen's findings. Dr Cullen, a leading expert on benchmarking and performance management, predicts that there will be shortages of skilled and qualified workers unless there is increased training in key areas.

The report estimated that if the skills gap is to be closed, some 250 000 more Queenslanders will need to have vocational education and training qualifications by the year 2005.

### **Job training**

When a person is employed it is unlikely that they will possess all the skills required to undertake the key responsibilities of their position in the short term. It is therefore necessary for an employer to provide appropriate knowledge and skills training to ensure that the employee is capable and competent for the performance of that job role.

Job training generally takes two forms:

1. starting with induction training for new employees; and progressing to
2. job skills training to fill any gaps.

After selecting the best person for the job, all new employees should participate in the organisation's structured induction program. Basic introductory job training has become an essential requirement for good employment practices — whatever the job, whatever the tasks.

Such a program welcomes new staff to the organisation and enables them to receive the information they need in order to settle into their new job role quickly and easily. Although it was acceptable in the past, it is no longer possible to just rely on the 'good old common sense' approach — which has the attitude that "They'll be right! They'll know what needs to be done!"

As a follow-up, further and on-going job training will then be necessary to fill the knowledge and skills gaps identified. No matter how small or large these gaps are, some further training will probably be required — unless you have been fortunate in recruiting a person 'who has everything you need'. As you would be aware this training can now be undertaken in a variety of ways — from off-the-job, on-the-job, self-paced, accredited, non-accredited, computer based etc.

So, having set the scene, how does all this relate to our topic today? What is the importance of staff training for animal management officers?

## **IMPORTANCE OF STAFF TRAINING FOR ANIMAL MANAGEMENT OFFICERS**

From a recruitment perspective, sad to say, but traditionally — within the area of animal management — the notion has existed that *anyone* can be an animal management officer. The belief has been that it is the sort of job for which staff can be expected to pick up the necessary skills as they go along.

The truth is quite the contrary. Think about the legal implications through enforcement of local laws, the emotive aspects of their job when dealing with animal owners, the potential risk aspects associated with the job and also the AMO's customer service role.

To do their job effectively and safely (especially for beginners), animal management field officers need training. The job is actually very demanding and as mentioned above, it can be risky. No council would expect (or for that matter allow) an employee to operate earth moving plant without being firstly trained and licensed to do so. It would be unsafe, the work would be badly done and the issue of employer negligence would loom large. It is the same in animal management.

## **THE NEED FOR COST EFFECTIVENESS OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING**

All of our research shows that there are very poor levels of funding made available for the training of AMOs in councils throughout Australia. Why? Well in most councils there are many competing and conflicting priorities: new roads to be built; new plant and equipment to be purchased; sports and recreational facilities to be maintained and the list goes on. As we all know, money doesn't grow on trees and in many councils, whilst the importance and value of training is well recognised, the allocation for funding for training is always tight.

Any kind of training (good or bad) is going to cost. From presenters, to training venues, to travel and accommodation to get to a course, to the time people are away from their jobs attending courses (and relief staff required), to the resources needed — there is no doubt, training **costs**! But, as we know, its benefits far outweigh the costs!

For expenditure on training to be justified, it must be beneficial for all. It has to be as inclusive as possible, as flexible as possible, as accessible as possible and as affordable as possible. Most important of all, it also has to be as useful as possible — to both the employer and the employee.

For many of the reasons given above, participation in the traditional 'institutional' training seems to be diminishing and many organisations today are exploring alternatives to meet the changing demands. PetPlan, is such an option for councils to consider. This alternative form of training is an initiative for AMO training which is accessible, flexible and more importantly, very cost effective.

## **THE GENESIS OF THE PETPLAN PROGRAM**

At the outset the PetPlan program, using an initial workshop and then computer based technology, was designed to provide the foundation for an efficient, flexible and accessible learning resource for induction training in animal management.

By using a balanced combination of formal workshop sessions and compact disc (CD) based 'take home' teaching modules, the PetPlan package makes the best of both types of teaching. It has been built to be as convenient and functional a training resource as you can get today.

No matter the mode of delivery, for any program to be successful, it must focus on the three main channels of training input and effort:

1. the employee;
2. the instructor;
3. the supervisor/employer.

The employee must provide their own motivation, the instructor must be 'on the ball' with current practices and the employer must provide workplace support for the trainee and their learning.

The Pet Plan CD, the workshop setup and the Book ('Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment') have all been created with the assistance of experienced AMOs. The central 'development' team (listed below) accessed a considerable resource of technical, teaching and practical experience:

- Dick Murray, BVSc, MSc, FAVA, MACVSc, MACTM;
- Helen Penridge, BSc(Hons), GDipLib, AssocDipProfWriting, GDipFET, BEd;
- Shane Scriggins, Technical Officer, Animal Management, Townsville CC;
- Les Penridge, BSc(Hons), GDip Comp, MIBiol, MACS, MIEE;
- Cynthia Humphreys, BA, GDip Teach.

The digital technology used in creating the CD lends itself to even more advanced methods of 'on-line' delivery, should the demand ever be sufficient to support this line of application. At the same time, because the CD was based on the content of a conventional text book (which accompanies each CD), trainees who still feel comfortable using books for learning are also catered for. The book-CD combination was intentionally utilised to help those who might otherwise struggle a little with newer computer based learning processes.

## **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND (LGAQ) INVOLVEMENT**

Recognising the need for suitable training for AMOS in Queensland, the LGAQ has committed to promote and support the PetPlan training program. Following this conference the LGAQ has arranged with the developers of PetPlan to host the inaugural program under conditions of official assessment and scrutiny by the LGAQ and other interested industry representatives.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the LGAQ is a registered training organisation and will seek formal accreditation of the PetPlan program with the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR). This will mean that trainees completing the program will achieve official recognition for their studies through the awarding of a qualification under the Australian qualifications framework system. Accredited courses are automatically recognised interstate.

Earlier this year, a full dress rehearsal of the PetPlan package was carried out at the Victoria Bridge Learning Centre in Townsville. AMOs from 4 different councils attended the 2 day workshop. The consensus of both the trainees and the instructors was that the two days went well. Feedback indicated that the interactive nature of the teaching with motivated instructors who had real time 'front line' experience in animal management was extremely beneficial, as were the explanations and instruction about the CD modules which were to be completed back on-the-job. The LGAQ program will follow the format of this successful trial.

## **ABOUT THE COURSE — COSTS, MATERIALS AND METHODS**

- The course is made up of two separate components:
  1. initial 2 day seminar/workshop training session;
  2. subsequent process of Work Centred Learning (WCL).
- The course is designed to take up to 3 months to complete. While the time frame is flexible the time from start to finish ultimately depends on the trainee and the trainee's work place supervisor. However, to prevent the WCL component from drifting indefinitely, the completed 'personal job manual' will not be assessed after the 3 months time period has elapsed.
- The cost of the 2 day workshop (for this exercise) is \$195 per day. This includes training venue/equipment hire and catering at the 2 day workshop. The material resources in this package include a copy of the text book 'Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment', which is valued at \$140. This text complements both the CD and the workshop sessions by providing a complete range of reference information.
- The workshop sessions, convened at the Newstead LGAQ training centre, will be structured around a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. Lecture copy, a second material resource, will take the form of headings and bullet points with room for note taking. The lectures and workshops will be delivered by the following three people:

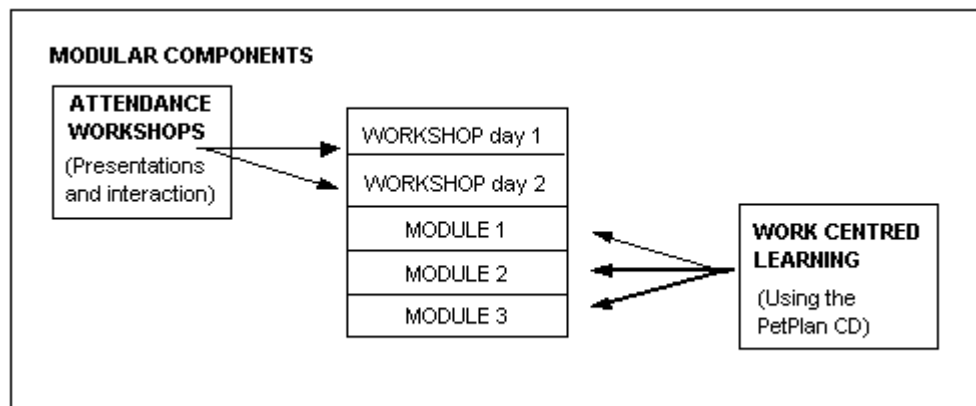
Shane Scriggins;

Dick Murray;

Tania Coleman.

- In addition, each participating council will need to purchase the CD at a cost of \$650 if they wish their trainee to complete the WCL component of the course. This is obviously not included in the workshop costs mentioned earlier. However councils need only purchase one copy of the CD no matter how many trainees they wish to train. Once purchased, the PetPlan CD remains the property of that council/organisation and can be used for subsequent trainees in subsequent years. Instruction in the use of the CD will be provided at the workshop on Day 1.
- To complete the CD based Work Centred Learning component of this course each trainee will need access to a Pentium PC with CD drive — preferably at the work place and preferably Internet linked. The PetPlan CD is the heart of the WCL course component and is structured into 3 separate training modules. The CD based WCL component is integral to the overall value of the training. A decision will have to be made by the employer as to whether or not they wish to take advantage of the greater depth of training this will afford.
- Each of the WCL CD modules is set up with specific learning outcomes and set assignments. A compilation of the 3 sets of module assignments is arranged by the CD's word processor to form the trainee's 'personal job manual'.
- WCL competency outcomes are assessed 2 ways:

1. each module assignment needs to be checked for completeness by the trainee's workplace supervisor;
  2. the completed (supervisor approved) assignments are then reviewed by one of the PetPlan training providers.
- A final and **very important** note about this program:
  - trainees will need to be genuinely committed. This is not the sort of program where trainees sit on their hands waiting to be 'spoon fed'. It will take **their** time and **their** effort to achieve the best outcomes. Poorly motivated trainees will derive equally poor results;
  - trainees will need the support of a competent supervisor at his/her place of employment. Supervisor assistance with course assignments is expected and necessary. The WCL component of the course work depends on 'in house' — 'on the job' competence assessment.



### **Workshop (day 1): workplace health and safety (WH&S) in animal management**

- The essential (generic) components of WH&S.
- Specific risk area — zoonotics.
- Specific risk area — animal handling/capture/lifting.
- Specific risk area — dangerous dogs.
- How to use the CD.

### **Workshop (day 2): the wrap (workshop 2)**

- Legal process — powers of entry, preparing evidence, court appearances etc.
- Handling difficult customers/situations — sources of conflict, methods, group activity etc.
- Take-home message — what now?

### **WCL (CD module 1) — getting oriented**

- Your council's vision and mission — how your work area fits in.
- Values.
- Working together.
- MPM measures.

### **WCL (CD module 2) — dog types**

- Why identify correctly.
- Rules for breed identification.
- Traps for the unwary.
- Joining community clubs.

## WCL (CD module 3) — more on conflict resolution

- Mindset of MPM.
- Types of interpersonal strife.
- 5 steps to resolving conflict.
- Being assertive.
- Who benefits.

## CONCLUSION

We are very excited about the program and believe that the introduction of this training is a vital and valuable tool for organisations to use to ensure that their Animal Management Officers receive practical and relevant induction training in a very user-friendly format.

The continued development of our people will enable them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to perform their jobs effectively.

At the same time, through providing an environment of progressive and innovative thought, organisations will be able to develop policies and programs that will improve the quality of service to their customers.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*This paper was put together as a joint effort because both authors believe with great conviction that workable occupational training for field officers is a key and as yet largely unavailable element in the pathway to better delivery in UAM.*

### **Desirae French**

Director Organisational Development Services, LGAQ  
PO Box 2230  
Fortitude Valley BC Qld 4006  
Ph. 07 3000 2233  
Fx. 07 3252 4473

### **Dick Murray**

Chiron Veterinary Services  
176 Thuringowa Dve  
Kirwan Qld 4817  
Ph. 07 4773 4111  
Fx. 07 4723 1043  
Email. murrayrw@usa.net

Desirae and her team work closely with councils to provide a range of organisational services in human resource management, training and development and industrial relations. With the motto of 'bringing training to you', the team either arrange specialist trainers or delivers training themselves, in a variety of subjects, throughout Queensland. Always on the lookout for new initiatives to assist employees perform their jobs in this competitive environment, PetPlan is a very welcome learning opportunity that will provide flexible, accessible and cost effective training to assist with the training and development needs of new Animal Management Officers.

Dick Murray has been heavily involved in Urban Animal Management for some 20 years now. While he owns and works in a busy veterinary practice, Dick's all consuming 'extra-curricular' activity is UAM.

If better UAM means better quality of life for pets, pet owners and indeed the whole community, it has to be a worthwhile exercise.

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