



## **Dog House Project**

Alberta SPCA Dog House Building Project off to Great Start



Peace Officer Stevenson Working With Students

Alberta dogs will be the beneficiary of a pilot program between the Alberta SPCA and Edmonton Catholic Schools. Students at six schools are building insulated dog houses in their construction classes. The houses will then be offered to needy dogs and their families. The families will be identified by Peace Officers through their regular duties.

"I can't express how happy I am right now," said Alberta SPCA Peace Officer Karen Stevenson as she watched students putting together the dog houses last fall. It was Stevenson who first proposed the idea of having students build dog houses.

"It's a project our whole office has been working on for a very long time," added Stevenson, "and when I walked in today, it just made me smile."

The Alberta SPCA provided the

materials and plans to the schools for the dog houses. The money to buy supplies was donated by Alberta SPCA supporters on Giving Tuesday - the first Tuesday after the American Thanksgiving dedicated to giving to charitable causes.

One of the most common complaints the Alberta SPCA receives is a lack of shelter for animals, especially for dogs. Peace Officer Stevenson says it's not unusual for her to

find a dog on a rural property where the shelter being provided is simply a space under an abandoned car. In other cases, straw bales are used as the shelter, but the dog has ripped them apart.

For the students involved, the project offers the opportunity to work on something that has social benefits.

"It feels good helping, just really anything," says Jordan Taubert, a grade nine student at St. John XXIII School in southwest Edmonton. "I'm a dog lover," says Taubert, "and knowing that I'm helping dogs just fills me with love."

The dog houses are insulated in all four walls, in the roof and in the floor. That ensures the dog's own body heat will create warmth, even on the coldest days.

...continued on p. 6

# Let's Talk **About Cats**

#### A New Approach to **Dealing With Cat Hoarding Situations**

The term "cat house" instantly conjures an image of sickly cats in a dilapidated home. And while that may be the case for some, many cases do not live up to this stereotype. Often, the owner genuinely cares for the cats and takes good care of them; often this person reports to us they are taking in cats so they won't be abandoned or euthanized by someone else. However, if the owner can't afford to spay or neuter the cats, the population quickly gets out of control.

In the past, the expectation was that Peace Officers would go in and seize all the animals immediately, but we have found that to be an incredibly stressful situation for the cats, for the animal owner, and for the Peace Officers dealing with the situation. This is why we have taken a more measured approach.



...continued on p. 2

INSIDE... p.2 From Our Legal Files p.4 Education Update p.5 One Family Welfare p.7 In Loving Memory





# FROM OUR LEGAL FILES

#### Man Fined After Dozens of Chickens Die

A southern Alberta man was fined \$1,500 after abandoning dozens of chickens inside a makeshift chicken coop in the Municipal District of Foothills. The Alberta SPCA received a complaint in March of 2019 about approximately 50 chickens that had been left in a travel trailer. When an Alberta SPCA Peace Officer arrived, he found about 35 dead chickens in the trailer and another 15 in distress with no food or water. The 15 live chickens were then provided food and water until they were rehomed.

The Alberta SPCA charged Donald Crevels with two offenses under the *Animal Protection Act* for causing distress to animals 2(1.1) and for failing to provide adequate food and water 2.1(a). Crevels pleaded guilty to the charge of failing to provide adequate food and water in Turner Valley Provincial Court on August 27, 2019. The second charge of causing distress was withdrawn.

## Man Convicted of Castrating Neighbour's Dog

On August 1, 2018 the Alberta SPCA received a complaint that a dog had been castrated by someone who did not have a licence to practice veterinary medicine. An Alberta SPCA Peace Officer attended the home near Bentley where the dog's owner claimed his dog has been castrated by his neighbour. After investigating, the Alberta SPCA charged Thomas Fredrick Smith with one count under the *Animal Protection Act* (APA) 2(1.1) of causing an animal to be in distress, and one count under the Veterinary Profession Act (VPA) 2(1) of providing veterinary medicine to an animal without a licence.

On September 18, 2019, Thomas Fredrick Smith pleaded guilty in Red Deer Provincial Court to a charge under the APA of causing an animal to be in distress. The charge under the VPA was withdrawn. Smith was fined \$2,500 dollars.

#### Let's Talk About Cats ...continued from front page.

A good example of this was a recent "cat house" situation in a municipality outside of Edmonton. The owner had 143 cats in a small home, and he cared deeply about them all. Still, the owner understood he needed to reduce his pet load to a manageable level; all he needed was a nudge to get him moving in the right direction.

Our Peace Officers decided a slow approach was best. We started removing cats 15 to 20 at a time. When the owner reached his emotional limit, we would stop, thank him for his time, and make arrangements to return in a week or two. The process would repeat itself each time. Given that the cats were generally in good health, we allowed the owner to select which cats he was comfortable to let go and we would do our best to catch them and take them to a shelter. The owner even delivered a few of the more difficult to catch cats to our office.



Some of the 143 surrendered cats

The cats were all taken to the Edmonton Humane Society where we paid for them to be checked by a vet, spayed or neutered, and cleaned up for adoption. Amazingly, only one of the cats needed to be euthanized due to medical distress. Many of the cats were rehomed quickly and many others were transferred to other shelters to await adoption to their new families.

The owner of the cats struggled to let his cats go, but the slow approach allowed him to process what was happening after each visit by the Peace Officers. The owner kept five cats, but he allowed us to spay and neuter them to ensure the previous situation did not develop again.

Our goal in any investigation is to help the animals and remove their distress, and that's what we did in this case. The animals were removed in the least stressful method possible, and their owner voluntarily surrendered them, saving everyone from an emotional, heavy-handed approach. While we would prefer that situations like this would never arise, we acknowledge they do and a slow, measured and compassionate response allows for the best outcome for all involved.



### How the Animal Protection Act Works for Us

In our province, the humane treatment of domestic animals is a legal requirement under Alberta's Animal Protection Act. Alberta SPCA Peace Officers have provincial authority to enforce this legislation, including the regulations dealing with livestock transportation. They work to ensure every file of alleged animal neglect and abuse is fully investigated and any impacted animals are appropriately managed.

It all begins with our Animal Protection Services receiving a call from a member of the public who provides critical information about an animal they are concerned about. The caller must provide information about the animal's condition, their location, and any other relevant information that helps our Peace Officers respond to the situation effectively. This information is what constitutes "reasonable and probable grounds" and provides our Peace Officers legal access to the property where the animals are located.

It must be noted that our Peace Officers, wherever possible, work in an educational capacity with owners to help them provide better care for their animals. It is more often than not that through talking with an owner about the condition of his or her animal(s) and identifying appropriate animal care needs, problems can be resolved before a more serious situation develops.

If, however, owners cannot or will not accept responsibility to properly care for their animals, our Peace Officers have authority under the Animal Protection Act, to do whatever is necessary to relieve an animal's distress, including taking animals into protective custody, e.g. effect the legal seizure of animals.

While in our custody, the animals will receive optimum care including appropriate food, water, shelter and any medically required treatments. To be clear, effecting a seizure is not intended to be punitive in nature. It is a tool our Peace Officers have to relieve distress in animals.

We acknowledge many of our supporters find it discouraging when aniamls are legally reclaimed by the owners or individual they were seized from. In these cases, the Alberta SPCA works very hard to ensure the seized animals have been relieved of their distress while in our care. The individual(s) reclaiming the animals must also demonstrate the needs of the animals, including available feed and shelter, will be met outside of our custody.

The Alberta SPCA remains concerned, however, with our inability to return to the property to ensure the care is being provided. Access to private property can only be accommodated if 1) the owner invites the Peace Officer to return to check on the condition of the animals, 2) there is a new complaint alleging animals are in distress on the property, or 3) there is a Judge's order allowing access to

the property to ensure the animals' ongoing care needs are being met.

While many people seek stronger sentences for those who neglect or abuse animals to act as a deterrent, the number one improvement to the Animal Protection Act that would create better conditions for animals is the ability for our Peace Officers to have ongoing monitoring of animals that were in our care but have been returned to their owners while their case makes its way through the courts. For us, the first priority is always the care of the animals.

**AnimalKind** is published by the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Alberta SPCA)

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To find out more about the work we do for animals across Alberta, visit our website at: albertaspca.org.

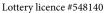
The mission of the Alberta SPCA is to protect, promote and enhance the well-being of animals in Alberta.

Not all the opinions expressed in AnimalKind are necessarily those of the Alberta SPCA.

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Domestic house cats have behaviours very similar to their wild cousins and understanding this innate behaviour helps us to provide a safe home environment which is critical to their welfare. Cats favour familiar environments where they have an idea of what and who is in them. If you have ever taken your cat to a new environment (like the vet) or introduced your cat to a new pet, you will understand! In novel situations cats will often have a fight-or-flight response and will try to hide or escape to cope. Sometimes they will fight, but it's usually when they feel that they have no other options (like escaping or hiding).

# Cats thrive on predictability, familiarity and routine! So how can we help?

- Provide your cat with several safe resting places where they can conceal or hide themselves. This could be a cardboard box, an open cat carrier, or a cat bed with high sides. When they are in their safe spaces leave them alone and teach kids to respect these spaces as well.
- Cats love heights! Provide your cat with an elevated perch where they can survey their environment below. Bonus points if they can look outside from here too!

- Make sure your cat's 'resources' (food and water dishes, beds, perches, scratching posts, and litter trays) are away from areas that may cause the cat to be afraid, such as next to a noisy appliance, or in a high traffic area.
- Although often regarded as independent, studies have shown that cats value consistent, predictable and positive contact with people.

Cats like to initiate their social time with you, and respecting their choices can help them to feel safe and in control.

#### If you have more than one cat

Some cats in multi-cat households get along very well. However, many cats in these situations merely tolerate one another, or they don't get along at all. When you have more than one cat, it's important to ensure that cats have access to their resources without competition from the other cats.



- Provide multiple feeding stations, water dishes. resting places, perches and litter trays in different locations which can reduce fear and gives cats a sense of control. A good rule to follow to determine how many of each resource you need is, the number of cats in your house plus 1 (or at the very least one resource per cat).
- As cats are solitary hunters, feeding them in separate locations can reduce anxiety associated with feeding competition. Cats also prefer to drink in a

location away from their feeding area.

 Provide your cats the opportunity to socialize and engage with you one-onone.

#### Not feeling safe leads to stress!

Not feeling safe in their environment and lack of control to improve their situation can cause cats to feel stressed. Stressed cats can develop a number of behavioural or physical issues such as toileting outside of a litter tray, excessive grooming, or even illness. Watch for changes in the behaviour of your cats. If you notice a change in sociability, eating, drinking, grooming or the development of undesirable behaviour, consult your veterinarian.

#### Challenge Accepted! Alberta students participate in Kindness Challenge

Students from across Alberta were busy this past December spreading kindness through their communities. Our annual Kindness Challenge encourages classrooms to do small acts of kindness towards self, others, animals, and the environment for 16 consecutive days. Helping a neighbour shovel snow, writing notes of appreciation, learning about how to help endangered animals, and spending extra time with pets were a few of the challenges the students completed. One grade two teacher informed us that her "students have been super excited every day to see what the challenge will be."

...continued on p. 6



Mrs. Bilyk's grade one class participating in the Kindness Challenge

To Contact the One Family Welfare Dept., Please Call 780-447-3600 ext 3750

## When People are in Crisis, Animals Are in Crisis

When people are in crisis, animals are in crisis; we have known this for a while, but we haven't always had the ability to help animals by helping their owners. That is why we launched the One Family Welfare (OFW) depart-

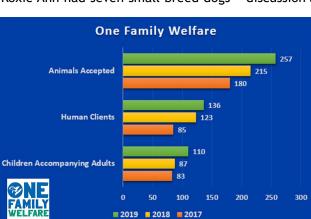
ment last year. Its focus is to help people in crisis by taking away the burden of caring for their pets for a short period of time so they can focus on their own well-being. We know once pet owners realize their animals are in a safe place,

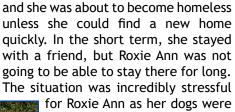
thev are much more likely to seek help for themselves.

It ensures both pets and their owners become healthy, mentally and physically.

Roxie Ann's story is one of those cases. She called our One Family Welfare department about a year ago completely distraught. Roxie Ann had been living on her own after fleeing an abusive situation, but now she was being evicted due to a situation out of her control.

Roxie Ann had seven small breed dogs





her only family and source of comfort; she could not live without them. Roxie Ann's mental health was declining as she struggled to find an appropriate place for herself and her dogs, while simultaneously dealing with other challenges including medical and financial issues, along with psychological distress from a past traumatic event.

Roxie Ann's Dogs at It was at this **Caretaking Facility** point the Alberta SPCA's One Family Welfare department became involved Roxie Anne's situation. While she didn't want to be separated from her dogs, Roxie Ann came to understand her Four Surrendered Puppies Roxie Ann's situation is dogs would be better off

> away from her for a period of time in order to allow her to get her housing and finances straightened out.

> During the intake process, after a long discussion with the Pet Safekeeping Co-

> > ordinator, Roxie Ann made the difficult decision to surrender four puppies to the Alberta SPCA because she realized it would be difficult to find housing for herself and seven dogs. The decision also allowed Roxie Ann the ability to properly care for the three remaining dogs as well as herself.

While most pets in the program stay with the Alberta SPCA for about a month, Roxie Ann's dogs had a much longer stay. Roxie Ann struggled to find housing and became homeless. During this time, she admitted to OFW staff the highlight of her week was getting an update on her dogs and she acknowledged her only motivation for getting her life turned around was knowing she wanted her pets back home with her. Despite this, Roxie Ann struggled to find the proper social supports until One Family Welfare staff made some calls on her behalf.

Four months after Roxie Ann first entered the program, she was finally in

> a stable situation where she could welcome her dogs home. As she left the program, Roxie Ann thanked the One Family Welfare program for not giving up on her. "I have happy tears because of you," she said on her discharge forms.



a typical one for clients

of our One Family Welfare program. People care deeply about their pets and many will not take care of themselves until they know their animals are safe and will be returned to them. Sometimes the best way to help animals is to help their owners first, and that is what the One Family Welfare department does every day.



Three Dogs After Reunion with Roxie Ann







# **ALBERTA SPCA NEWS**

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### What's Your Curious Question?

Animals are fascinating! In fact, many of the most popular videos online feature animals doing interesting things. From dogs kicking up grass after they poop to cats ramming their head into your face, animals definitely have unique behaviours. You are probably aware of some seemingly peculiar behaviours, but have you ever stopped to wonder why? The Curious Questions campaign urges you to do just that! This school year, younsters from across Alberta are encouraged to submit a question related to pets, farm animals, or Alberta wildlife they are curious about. Each week we feature a question and an expert answering it on our website and social media. Encourage the young people in your life to ask their most burning animal questions. Take a moment to observe interesting behaviour in your pets, observe the wildlife



Patrick asking about horse shoes

in your backyard, and send us your questions - our experts are waiting! Visit our webpage to watch the curious questions and answers! Anyone under 18 must have their question submitted through a teacher or a guardian.

Below are a few questions (and answers) we received from students so far this year. Did you know any of the answers?

#### Q: Why are donkeys stubborn?

A: Donkeys are often considered stubborn because people compare them with horses. However, donkeys have evolved as a mountain species and their reaction to fear or distress is to stand and be willing to fight. When a donkey does not move, people tend to think they are being stubborn, when in reality they are just doing what donkeys do.

#### Q: Why do dogs kicks up grass after they poop?

A: Dogs have scent glands in the pads of their paws and scratching is one way of leaving their scent behind that sends a message to dogs and other animals that they have been in the area.

#### **Dog Houses** ...continued from front page.

"The kids have played a lot of hide-and-goseek inside the dog houses and have tested them all out," says Chris Smith, the construction teacher at St. John XXIII School, "And they all say they would live in one of these outside for several days, for sure."

The Animal Protection Act requires owners to provide shelter to all animals that is appropriate for the species and breed. Even if a dog is a hearty, outside breed, a shelter must be available for the dog to use, if he so chooses.

The pilot program will see 22 dog houses built this winter and spring. And while no decision has been made on what happens with the dog house building project beyond this school year, everyone agrees it would be nice to continue with it in the years to come.

Watch students building dog houses https://youtu.be/o6I-OlsvVXQ

#### Kindness Challenge ...continued from p. 4

At the beginning of the challenge, classes selected an organization or cause in the community to help. Over the course of the challenge students were encouraged to do something to support the cause they picked. Miss Faganello's grade five class from Two Hills chose an awareness campaign to educate their community about pets in the cold. Students discussed the importance of having proper protection for outside pets and took what they learned to create a campaign informing their neighbours on responsible pet ownership, including information on appropriate outdoor shelters. The community was very receptive to the students' message and several people made changes to further protect their outdoor pets. Mrs. Bilyk's grade one class from Grimshaw held a bake sale at their school to raise money towards

buying gifts for seniors in their community. Her students raised enough money to purchase items to ensure three seniors had gifts to open on Christmas.

At the end of the 16 days, teachers and students took time to reflect on the challenge and how it impacted their class, school, and community. One teacher reported, "Our kindness challenge has gone really well... small differences are being made."



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