

# THE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP MODEL

ILLUSTRATED BY CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA THROUGH 2012

The Responsible Pet Ownership Model is focused first on supporting and incentivizing responsible behavior in pet owners and second, discouraging problematic behavior. Former Director of Animal & Bylaw Services for Calgary, Bill Bruce, elaborated on the why this is the focus of the philosophy, because “a positive change in human behavior will always yield a positive change in animal behavior.” Bruce explained, “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.”

Every community should identify what the components of responsible pet ownership should be. The City of Calgary enacted its Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw in 2006, based on five principles that enable cats, dogs, their owners, and neighbors to live together in “safety and harmony.”<sup>1,2</sup>

1. License and provide permanent identification for your pets.
2. Spay or neuter your pets.
3. Provide training, socialization, proper diet, and medical care for your pets.
4. Do not allow your pets to become a threat or nuisance in the community.
5. Procure your pet ethically and from a credible source.

Though the foundational points are simple, if all pet owners in a community did them, the majority of a community’s animal issues would be solved. Bruce explained, “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.”

Through 2012 Calgary achieved an unparalleled level of compliance with its easy-to-understand bylaw, through education that clarified the responsibility of all pet owners and programs that facilitated and incentivized pet owner compliance.

In 2012, public education programs included collaborative events with parks groups about pet owner’s responsibilities under the bylaw, as well as presentations on responsible pet ownership in English and French that reached 9,200 elementary and junior high students.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Calgary incentivized licensing for residents with a rewards program in collaboration with local merchants<sup>4</sup> and a “Drive Home Program” where pet owners could tangibly see the benefits of licensing their pets through a quickly returned lost pet that would be driven directly home, rather than to the shelter.<sup>3</sup> On the rare occasion when education did not produce the intended outcome, the Bylaw was rigorously enforced.

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## CALGARY ANIMAL SERVICES' SUCCESS THROUGH 2012\*

2012 Results:<sup>3,5,6</sup>

- Animal Services Operations funded primarily through licensing revenue.
- 92% of animal calls were “successfully resolved through compliance rather than strict enforcement options.”
- 108,688 dogs licensed out of a canine population of 122,325; 89% license compliance rate for dogs.
- 1,185 lost dogs were taken directly home through the Drive Home Program, avoiding the shelter.
- 201 reported dog bites in a human population of 1,120,225. 132 dog bite charges were laid.

\*In the years following 2012, Calgary’s Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw core programs, such as a focus on public education and licensing, have changed, and consequently, the results have changed. When animal control relies heavily on enforcement, as opposed to focusing on educating citizens on the benefits of the responsible pet ownership standards and facilitating and incentivizing compliance with them, the community results suffer.

As Bill Bruce notes, the “downward trend confirms that the Responsible Pet Ownership model does work and is not because Calgary as a community is an anomaly.” As the results show, when you “stop applying the model, the results will deteriorate back to the old animal control results.”

Updated February 2016

### SOURCES and NOTES:

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3. City of Calgary Community Services & Protective Services. (2012). *Animal & Bylaw Services: Annual Report 2012*. Retrieved from: [http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Documents/CSPS-Annual-Reports/ABS\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2012.pdf?noredirect=1](http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Documents/CSPS-Annual-Reports/ABS_Annual_Report_2012.pdf?noredirect=1)
4. City of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. (2015). *I Heart My Pet Rewards Program*. Retrieved from: <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Pages/Animal-Services/I-heart-my-pet-program.aspx>
5. The City of Calgary’s Census periodically reports the total dog and cat population – most recently in 2010: Calgary City Clerk. (2010). *2010 Civic Census Results*. Retrieved from: [http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Documents/Election-and-information-services/Census2010/2010\\_census\\_result\\_book.pdf](http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Documents/Election-and-information-services/Census2010/2010_census_result_book.pdf)
6. The 2010 total canine population was used to calculate the estimated rate of license compliance.