

Jimmy Gonzalez February 18 at 8:52pm Report

Every year over 20 million animals end up homeless. Over 15 million of them are killed (euthanized is the nice term) in animal shelters. In Bridgeport alone, we impound between 1,500-2,000 animals a year, 57% are adopted, redeemed by their owners or still here waiting for a home, which means 43% are euthanized because of aggression, disease or lack of homes. Sadly, I personally assist in the euthanasia of every dog we "put down". This is why I believe so strongly in spaying and neutering and pet care and safety education. It has taken me a very long time to learn to deal with what I must do simply because of lack of education and irresponsible pet owners. I know that I do not kill these animals and the people who put them here do but I feel that I can change this and that I must.

Being the Chief Animal Control Officer for the City of Bridgeport for the last five years and managing the largest municipal animal shelter in the state, housing 80 dogs and 35 cats, has opened my eyes to the ever increasing need for animal safety and care education. About three years ago, my office manager and I created a non-profit called A Hand for a Paw, Inc. dedicated to a proactive approach to animal control. This all basically came together one day when we had an eye opening opportunity to reach out to a classroom of children. We were invited to Beardsley School (an urban school in Bridgeport, CT) to speak to a classroom of children about animal responsibility and proper care. We were supposed to talk for a half of an hour but instead we were there for over 2 hours. The children had so many great questions and stories; they never wanted us to leave. We really didn't have much planned out to discuss, let alone a curriculum but we made with whatever printouts we could find and it was such a success. We basically talked about the importance of the basic duties of being a pet owner, dog licensing and what it is for, the importance of spaying and neutering and we talked about the animals at the shelter that are up for adoption. Not only have we seen each and every one of those kids at the shelter to visit but they also gave us updates on their pets. They went home and taught their parents a few things about the importance of proper animal care and they have really followed up. They were just so proud to be able to tell their parents that they know us and proudly tell them what they learned from us. The best way to reach adults is through their kids. That was when we decided that we wanted to raise money to purchase a "real" curriculum and go school to school to teach our future pet owners what is entailed with owning a pet and how to properly react when approached by an animal. We also wanted to be able to raise enough money to buy at least one classroom per school a subscription to KIND News, which is a "newspaper" that teaches children the value of kindness toward one another, animals and the environment. Since our inception, we have already presented our power point presentation to over 800 kids and they truly love learning and talking about animals. You would be shocked and bothered to hear what these kids encounter. The first hand abuse that they see and don't even realize is wrong is heartbreaking and the comments made regarding simple animal safety is actually scary. At least 80% of these kids think approaching a hurt or sick animal is the right thing to do! This really can't continue and something needs to be done to reach these kids on a larger scale.

Another approach I have taken to reaching these kids is I have created a website called [www.bptanimalcontrol.com](http://www.bptanimalcontrol.com) where I have many links about responsible pet ownership, animal cruelty, spaying and neutering, diseases, and I even mention facts about wildlife since I am also experienced as a wildlife rehabber. I have even begun to take my Pet Safety & Awareness classes to adults and seniors. I recently spoke about Animal Safety for the Connecticut Association of Housing Code Enforcement Officials and I also spoke to a large group of seniors at the Fireside Apartments. Education is needed at all levels.

The most effective and cost efficient way to incorporate proper pet care and safety curriculum to the schools would be to create a website with printable worksheets for students. The worksheets could be geared towards what to do if you find an animal, how to react to an animal approaching you, spaying and neutering and basic pet care. The basis of the idea is that teachers would be interested in incorporating this curriculum into their lessons. From my experience, all of the teachers that I have worked with were very responsive.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of an issue that I feel so strongly about and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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