



## **10 strategies for change at your local Council pound**

If you are a volunteer worker or rescue volunteer at a Council Pound and are concerned about circumstances there, here are some things you can do.

The scenario across the numerous Council Pounds around our country will be extremely varied.

Some are facilities with caring management and staff, who do their best for the animals whilst in their care i.e. they provide adequate food, clean water, warm or cool kennels (depending on the time of year), a high standard of kennel or cage hygiene, good programs of environmental enrichment for the animals (including adequate walking and exercise regimes for dogs), and play areas for cats.

These more responsible Council pounds will also have motivated volunteers working there to provide services that assist staff to keep the standards high, and the animals healthy and as happy as they can be under pound conditions. They almost certainly have good relationships with local Rescue groups and the community, which results in high numbers of animals reunited with their owners, or rehomed into new families.

### **Poorly run facilities**

Sadly the opposite can also be the case.

At poorly run facilities, you will find:

- Animals crowded and stressed
- Poor hygiene regimes, resulting in high numbers of sick animals
- Unmotivated staff, who have poor relationships with volunteers and the community
- Little in the way of environmental enrichment and exercise for the animals
- Cruel and stressful treatment of animals
- Poor or no relationships with local rescue groups
- Poor procedures, or non-existent for rehoming strategies for animals in their care – and, consequently, a very high number of animals killed by the facility

**If you believe you are witnessing unacceptable conditions or practices at your local Council Pound, here is what you should do:**

#### **1. Gather evidence.**

You must document what is happening and, if possible, take photos.

If anything is to be done to rectify the situation, you must have evidence: photos, names, dates, circumstances, who else was involved? what was the outcome? A one-off situation might be just that – a one-off. However, repeated patterns of behaviour and situations need to be documented.

Keep in mind that, in less caring pounds, you will likely meet resistance from staff, so you'll have to be discreet as you collect your evidence. It's not worth making an issue out of something if the result is that you are banned, or prevented from attending the facility. It's better for the animals in the longer term if you keep a low profile, and quietly go about collecting your evidence.

## **2. When you have enough evidence**

Arrange a meeting with the senior manager responsible for the facility and calmly explain your concerns. Have these in writing. Explain that you are concerned with the animal welfare and /or poor rehoming levels and explain that things don't need to be done this way. Find out if the Manager sees it the way you do – maybe he/she does and just needs help to move things along. Be careful not to go into any blaming of the staff (even if this is warranted), as often the senior manager will be protective of their staff. Focus on the behaviour – not the people. Don't say "Mary never takes the dogs out for exercise". Say, "4 days out of 5 we are seeing that the dogs are not exercised". Or "These 4 were friendly healthy cats or dogs and have now been killed, when they could have been re-homed. That is not acceptable".

Explain clearly that you are not intent on making things difficult for staff or making them "wrong", but you do intend on seeing basic animal welfare rights put in place, and numbers of animals re-homed increasing. Make sure that you understand and can speak coherently about some of the basic No Kill or getting to Zero strategies.

Find out what are any objections they may have to making changes. There are answers to all these objections, and we can help you with these.

Ask the manager if they will investigate and come back to you with some corrective actions, and agree a date. Give them a chance to make some changes, and if they do, remember to give positive praise and reinforcement!

Remember to give them the documents that explain many facets of improvement in council pounds, associated with this document. It's essential that they see that there is much information available that shows that pounds can become effective animal welfare rehoming centres, and practical ways of doing this.

If nothing has changed after a reasonable period of time, tell the manager that you need to escalate this up the command chain, and that you will do so.

### **Find an ally at a high level.**

When you feel you have enough evidence, **you need to find an ally at Council level.**

Do your home-work! Find out which Councillors are animal lovers and would likely be concerned if they know what you have uncovered. Go and meet them privately and discuss your findings. Find out which Councillor would stand up and take up this cause. Show them how this will help their popularity and standing with the community. They will be your biggest asset in creating change.

## **3. Be psychologically prepared.**

You don't want to make enemies at the Pound if you can possibly avoid it, but be aware that, while some pounds will be helpful in addressing changes and comments, there will be others who will be

very defensive and object actively to any change. When you report what is happening, keep your focus on the facts and the behaviours – not the people. Example: Not "Jim Smith never cleans out the cats' litter trays", rather "I have noticed that cat litter trays are left uncleaned for a week at a time. I observed this over five weeks."

Remember that if changes are to be made, it is the management and staff who will need to make them, and you will need to be able to work with them or communicate with them later. They often despise what they see as "emotional, illogical" members of the public, so always be "reasonable". Reasonable, but strongly assertive.

## **4. Make a presentation to Council.**

Every Council has a format at certain of its Council Meetings to allow members of the public to make representations. Usually this is something like a 10-minute slot where the person can present for five minutes, followed by five minutes of question-and-answer time. Here you can present your case, state

that you are very concerned, and ask them to investigate and take action.

If possible, present a petition you have collected with hundreds of signatures. Prepare beforehand, a report and portfolio of information you can give each Councillor, the Mayor and the General Manager or Chief Executive Officer of the Council. This will all go into Council records of the meeting.

Do NOT take a position of blame or ridicule, but rather state your case calmly and professionally, demonstrating clearly that the Council is being seen by the public as not providing a high enough standard of service to the community. This is the angle that most Councils fear most – being seen to provide poor service.

In addition, make the point that the community is paying x dollars (research this figure beforehand) to run the animal care facility, and that the money could be better spent. We know that it costs something like \$800,000 per annum to run a medium-sized pound. Go armed with practical and possible solutions – don't just bring problems to the Council. You want them to see you as a calm and professional ally – someone who they might be able to turn to, to help solve the problems you have highlighted.

**However, they do need to be made aware, in no uncertain terms, that that the situation will not be tolerated by the public.**

#### **5. Work with your ally.**

Another winning formula is to work with your Councillor ally to influence them to present a motion to take action on a certain issue at the Council Meeting e.g. conduct an investigation, increase staff numbers, allocate more funding, make specific changes etc.

#### **6. Bring lots of support.**

If you go to present at a Council meeting, or your Councillor ally presents a Motion, make sure you attend with lots of friends and colleagues in the Public Gallery. They can't comment or make noise, but a large presence makes the Council sit up and pay attention.

#### **7. Detect and capitalise on pre-existing concern and inside support.**

Don't exclude the possibility that there might be staff or management who actually want help with all this. In your earlier investigation phase, carefully sound out people to see if they see a problem, and if they see any solutions. Unbeknownst to you, you may have some internal friends who can help.

#### **8. The power of the press.**

Remember the media! Councils hate adverse press. And the media wants stories.

Make these two factors work in your favour. When you have enough information, go and speak with your local community paper.

Find a journalist who is interested in a story. Locate any journalist who has a history of writing on behalf of the animals.

But, always remember that journalists will invariably present their story as they see fit – all you can do is to give them your information. Don't expect them to present YOUR case – it doesn't work that way. Also remember that journalists are dictated to by editorial policy. A good story can be cut or modified by the Editor, and that is often out of the control of the journalist.

#### **9. Progress**

Don't forget to recognise any progress! Make this public.

## 10. You are not alone.

There is help potentially – other people have trodden this path and will be willing to give you advice.

Contact Deathrow Pets (by emailing [info@deathrowpets.net](mailto:info@deathrowpets.net).) We may be able to connect you with people in your area who have experience in dealing with these issues – and getting results.

**These are papers that you should download from the Deathrowpets website and provide to the Pound management and Councillors:**

- Animal Welfare League Queensland – Getting to Zero
- Nathan Winograd- saving all animals
- Nathan Winograd – turbo-charge pet placements
- Is pet overpopulation really killing our cats and dogs?
- Nevada Humane Society – How we did it
- New Zealand RSPCA – Saving Lives
- Temperament testing in the age of No Kill

**Finally** - It is very important to understand the focus for Council operated facilities is strongly influenced by the regulatory responsibilities placed on Council by the Companion Animals Act and Regulations. Many well intentioned Council staff and animal welfare advocates alike can find themselves in dispute simply by failing to understand and acknowledge the constraints and direction being taken by each side.

It is therefore imperative to be aware that Council staff may assume you are trying to interfere with their regulatory role.

Try to understand that role and seek to reassure Council that your concerns are more to do with standards of animal care and welfare including finding alternatives to euthanasia for all saveable animals.



**You CAN do something positive to reduce the 250,000 healthy cats and dogs destroyed in Australian pounds and shelters each year**

**If you really care about animals, you will want to be part of the solution  
Thank you for your support**