

Breed Specific Legislation in Ontario

A look at why BSL has never worked for its intended purpose and why Ontario needs to be more proactive in promoting public safety.

By Nancy Radovic

Meet some of the Ontario Rescue Dogs!

(Formerly Known as the Chatham 21)

Where Are They Now??

MEET HANSEL, THE FIRST “PIT BULL” TO BECOME AN ARSON-DETECTION K9 OFFICER

By Alaa Elassar, CNN

Updated 9:40 PM ET, Sun January 19, 2020

Hansel the pitbull is believed to be the first arson detection K9 in the country.

(CNN) A New Jersey fire department's pit bull just became the first of its breed to become an arson detection K9 officer. Hansel, a 4-year-old pup known for his cheerful energy and constant kisses, graduated from training on Friday, officially becoming a member of the Millville Fire Department. “He's extremely excited,” Tyler Van Leer, a Millville firefighter and Hansel's handler, told CNN. “Whenever I ask him, 'Are you ready to go to work?' and bring out the harness, he starts doing laps around the crate.”

Rescued from a dogfighting ring

Hansel was rescued from a dogfighting ring in Ontario, Canada, when he was only 7 weeks old. A global campaign called #Savethe21 was created to fight against the euthanization of the 21 dog fighters, including Hansel's mom, who were rescued from that ring. Five of the rescued dogs, including Hansel and his sister Gretel, were later taken to Throw Away Dogs Project, a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia that rescues "unique" dogs and trains them to become K9s all over the country. “If Hansel hadn't been rescued, he and his sister would have also become dog fighters”, Carol Skaziak, the founder of Throw Away Dogs, told CNN.

This is Hansel and his handler, Tyler Van Leer.

Van Leer and Skaziak believe that Hansel is paving the way for a brighter future for pit bulls as a breed. Other departments that were in attendance of Hansel's graduation and witnessed his progression over the past year already expressed interest in bringing in other pit bulls as arson detection dogs, Van Leer said. “We need police chiefs and fire chiefs around the country to want to do this too. This is the first step that could make a Huge statement for this breed that has been

so misunderstood,” Skaziak told CNN. While Hansel is ready to help the Millville Fire Department save lives, the sweet pup is also busy bonding with his handler, now his best friend. “We are just inseparable.” Van Leer said. Everyone here at the firehouse loves him. He is just an awesome dog. I wouldn't ask for any other dog.”



Hansel can now sniff out 14 different ignitable odors.

Hansel trained with Throw Away Dogs for a year before enrolling in a 16-week K9 academy with his handler to become a certified arson detection K9 officer. Hansel was given to the Millville Fire Department, who was in need of an arson detection dog, at no cost.

“He was trained or imprinted on 14 different odors and once he was imprinted on all the odors, he was eligible to graduate,” Van Leer said. Hansel is a single purpose arson detection K9, meaning he is specifically trained to identify ignitable liquids, such as kerosene, gasoline and diesel. While the future hero will begin taking on jobs immediately, Hansel will also be available to aid other police and fire departments outside of Millville. Part of his mission includes education to help the fire department teach students about fire prevention around the area.

Hansel is paving the way for other pit bulls

In addition to being a very good boy, Hansel is making history, according to Skaziak. “I am 100% sure Hansel is the first pit bull arson detection dog in New Jersey,” Skaziak told CNN. “I have done so much research and I don't believe there are any other pit bull arson detection dogs in the entire country. I have not found any others.” CNN could not independently confirm that Hansel is the first pit bull to hold the position.



THIS PIT BULL WAS BRED FOR DOG FIGHTING. NOW HE'S JOINING A POLICE FORCE.

By **Nancy Dunham**

September 28, 2018 at 4:56 p.m. EDT

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly reported several pieces of information about Dallas, a pit-bull-type dog who was involved in a court battle in Ontario, Canada, and is now in training to become a K-9 dog for a Virginia police department. The original article reported that Dallas was one of several dogs seized during a 2015 raid on a dog fighting compound in Ontario. It also said he was one of 21 dogs that the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) later applied to euthanize based on a behavioral assessment. In fact, Dallas had not yet been born at the time of the raid; his mother, who was pregnant at the time, was seized, and Dallas was born while she was in the care of the OSPCA. Additionally, while Dallas's mother was one of the 21 dogs referred to in the application to euthanize, Dallas was not. The article also reported that Pit Sisters, a Florida-based dog rescue, took in 10 dogs involved in the Ontario case. Thirteen dogs, one of whom was Dallas, were transferred from Ontario to Pit Sisters.

The 3-year-old pit-bull-type dog's radiance makes it difficult to believe he escaped a life as part of a Canadian fighting ring and later became the subject of multiple court battles in a region where his breed is banned.

Now Dallas's demeanor is leading him to a new chapter in life: He is among a small but growing number of pit bulls to train as a police K-9. Next month, after about six weeks of training to sniff out narcotics, he is set to join the force in the southwest Virginia town of Honaker.

His love for balls was key, said Jen Deane, the founder and president of Pit Sisters, a Florida rescue group. "We knew that his combination of ball drive and his wanting of human praise was the perfect combination to be a police dog," she said.

That would have been hard to predict in 2015, when police and agents from the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals seized Dallas's mother and 30 other pit bulls from a compound in the Canadian province. She was pregnant — with Dallas and other puppies that might have become fighters themselves.



Dallas's ear-to-ear grin and bright brown eyes seem to sparkle with joy.

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According to court documents described by Canadian news media, the dogs were chained to metal stakes in the ground, and evidence of fight training — including schedules, muzzles, sticks, steroids and suture kits — was found on the property. An inspector noted “severe scarring consistent with dog fighting,” the Globe and Mail reported. Five people were charged with weapons and animal cruelty violations, as well as with breaking an Ontario ban on pit bulls.

Rob Scheinberg, the co-founder of a rescue and sanctuary in Ontario called Dog Tales, said that when he read news accounts of the raid, he knew he wanted to save as many of the seized dogs as possible. “I thought, ‘There is no way there are not a few good dogs,’ ” Scheinberg said. Soon he had hired a lawyer, and for two years he waged a court battle in protest of an OSPCA application to euthanize 21 of the dogs based on a behavioral assessment that deemed them dangerous. Dallas’s mother was one of them. By this spring, celebrities had gotten involved, and #Savethe21 was circulating on social media. After various twists and turns, the court eventually ordered the dogs’ owner to surrender 18 of the animals, including Dallas’s mother, for rehabilitation; two others died in OSPCA custody, and a third was deemed dangerous and ordered to be euthanized, local media reported. The owner also relinquish custody of Dallas and other puppies born while the investigation was ongoing, none of which were considered for euthanasia as part of the court process, according to the OSPCA.

It helped that Dog Tales had pledged to pay for the care of the animals and their transport out of Ontario, where a pit bull ban made their presence illegal. “We were relentless,” Scheinberg said of the court fight. “They knew we were not going to stop.” The 18 dogs were sent to rescues or were adopted, as were the puppies. Four adult dogs and nine puppies, including Dallas, were transferred from Ontario to Pit Sisters. Dallas was enrolled in the group’s program that matches hard-to-adopt dogs with prison inmates, who socialize, train and care for the canines. “When Dallas arrived, he was always alert and attentive to everything and everyone. He would stay standing in his kennel looking around his surroundings and wag his tail when someone would walk by,” Nicholas Ramos, an inmate who worked with the dog at Lawtey Correctional Institution, southwest of Jacksonville, said in an email. “He loved attention and was very affectionate toward people.”

Deane said it didn’t take long for her and the prison program’s administrators to decide that Dallas would be a great K-9. But K-9 training is expensive and intense. Enter Carol Skaziak, the founder and chief executive of a Pennsylvania nonprofit group called the Throw Away Dogs Project, which says it seeks to “repurpose unique dogs.” Some go on to be adopted by families, she said, while others have become service dogs for veterans and children with disabilities. After Deane contacted Skaziak and sent her videos of Dallas in action, Skaziak and a police K-9 trainer her group works with, Bruce Myers, traveled to Florida to assess him. “We knew almost right away that we had to do this,” Skaziak said.

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Myers, an 18-year veteran of training police dogs, is working with Dallas in as many as three daily sessions aimed at teaching him to sniff out narcotics. “He will save many lives,” Myers said. “If he helps take one brick of heroin off the street, that can save 1,000 people. And he will be incredibly proficient by the time he leaves here.”

Hundreds of miles south in Virginia, Honaker police are preparing to welcome the soon-to-be K-9 narcotics officer. They had long wanted such a member on the force, Police Chief Brandon Cassell said, but the town of about 1,500 couldn’t spend the \$10,000-plus needed for such a highly trained dog. Dog Tales, the Canadian rescue group, covered the training costs and is donating Dallas to the department.

“We are going to treat him just like a regular officer,” said Cassell, who added that he has no concerns about working with a pit-bull-type, even though they’re more often associated with dog fighting than with crime fighting. “We know what he is going to wear, have ordered him a badge and are going to welcome him to the department just like we would a human officer.”

When Dallas finishes training, he’ll live and work with Honaker police officer Cody Rowe. A former K-9 officer with the Virginia Department of Correction, he lobbied to establish a K-9 program in the police department.

“I worked with a lot of German shepherds, but I remember many handlers worked with pit bulls,” Rowe said. “They are incredible police dogs. ... It’s amazing to watch them work.”

Myers, the Pennsylvania trainer working with Dallas, said that shouldn’t surprise anyone. “Pit bulls are misunderstood because many are improperly trained,” Myers said. “Dogs aren’t born vicious. We make them vicious. Don’t blame the dog. Blame us.”



K9 Dallas and his partner, Officer Cody Rowe

Meet Narcotic Detection Dog, K9 Nibbles!

K9 Nibbles, another pit bull rescued from the dog fighting in Tilbury (Chatham) Ontario also has a law enforcement job. Throw Away Dogs reported on Tuesday, January 21st, 2020, that Nibbles will be joining the Craven County Sheriff's Office in New Bern, North Carolina.

“That’s right, you’re looking at the future Narcotics Detection K9 Nibbles!” posted a very proud Skaziak, founder and CEO of Throw Away Dogs Project. “It’s about repurposing misunderstood dogs and giving them a second chance” Skaziak says of her teams mission with the dogs they train.

There is no doubt that more amazing information and reporting will follow this very special dog in his new life fighting crime.



Pit Bull from Dog Fighting Ring Placed on Death Row, Now Changing Lives With Her Second Chance

After escaping death row, Cuddles got a PhD in good behavior

By Kelli Bender

February 25, 2019 11:50 AM

FB Twitter

In her short life, Cuddles has been pulled from a dog fighting ring, sentenced to death, given a second chance at a prison, earned her PhD and changed a veteran's life. It's a life worthy of an Oscar-winning biopic, but she is content enough winning the hearts and minds around her.

The smiley pit bull's story starts in a dark place. In 2015, Cuddles and 20 other pit bulls were pulled from a dog fighting ring bust in Ontario, Canada. Unfortunately, escaping this abuse didn't put an end to the dogs' suffering. After being removed from the dog fighting ring, all of the canines were taken to Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) where their behavior was evaluated before next steps were decided. The evaluator recommended having all of the dogs destroyed because they were too dangerous to be re-homed, a decision that was likely colored by Ontario's breed specific legislation, which places severe restrictions on owning a pit bull or pit bull-like dog.

A death sentence did not stop animal advocates from fighting for these dogs, know as the Ontario 21. Groups like King City, Ontario's Dog Tales Rescue and Sanctuary, took the case to court, and after a nearly 2-year legal battle got the approval to bring in a third-party evaluator to assess the dogs again.

That evaluator ended up being Jim Crosby, a retired police lieutenant out of Jacksonville, Florida, who has devoted his post-retirement years to learning about dog behavior, especially aggression in dogs. Crosby is a Certified Behavior Consultant-Canine-Knowledge Assessed (CBCC-KA), has a Master's degree in Veterinary Forensics and has assessed dog behavior in dozens of dog fatality on human cases.

With his understanding of dog behavior, aggression and rehabilitation, Crosby looked at the Ontario 21 — now the Ontario 31, due to puppies born after the dogs were seized — with fresh eyes.



Photo from Pit Sisters



Photo from Pit Sisters

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“When I go in, I go in basically and start each dog at a 0 regardless of what I am told,” Crosby said of his process. “I don’t go in looking for a pass fail, I look for triggers and problems.”

Crosby looks to see if a dog would respond to training and a constructive, caring relationship with a human.

After his evaluations, Crosby cleared 29 of the 31 dogs for retraining and eventual placement. Cuddles was among those 29 canines and after getting her stamp of approval, she was sent to Florida and put in the care of Pit Sisters - a non-profit dedicated to finding pit bulls, often those unfairly labelled as too dangerous, loving homes.

Jen Deane, Pit Sisters’ founder, placed Cuddles in the organization’s TAILS (Teaching Animals and Inmates Life Skills) prison program. Here, Cuddles worked with an inmate to learned basic obedience and received much needed socialization. Cuddles responded so well to the program and the individual attention it provided her that she graduated with a PhD from The Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT), the highest honor APDT offers. She also earned a AKC Canine Good Citizen certification.

After turning a death sentence into a second chance, Cuddles finally got her happy ending in fall 2018, when Deane drove her from Florida to her new forever home in New York with a retired firefighter and veteran, Billy Brauer, who was looking for a friend after suffering a stroke.

“She is a true companion. She gives him a reason to get out of the bed every morning. He feeds her, talks to her, plays with her, grooms her and loves her,” Brauer’s daughter, Carolyn Schwerdtfeger, told PEOPLE, adding that her father was depressed and anxious before Cuddles bounded into his life.

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The pair became fast friends. Cuddles immediately warmed up to Brauer, 73, and is ecstatic to finally have a bed and loving person of her own. “She smiles and her tail is constantly wagging. She is always happy to see everyone and just wants love,” Brauer said. “She gives kisses and high fives.”



Photo from Pit Sisters

Brauer, who smiles a lot more these days, added that he is looking forward to nurturing Cuddles for the rest of her life. He hopes the Cuddles’ story shows that everyone should get a second chance at life and that every dog should be able to have access to the resources they need to overcome abuse.

It’s a sentiment that everyone who has met Cuddles echos. “The biggest lesson from this whole thing is that not everyone has the ability and resources to help dogs like Cuddles, and that is something we need to work towards, but where we have the ability to give dogs a second chance, I think we have an obligation to do that.” Crosby said. “Some dogs that come from the worst scenarios, have the potential to succeed if we find the time and place for them.”

Cuddles is a shining example of this.

“Cuddles was raised and trained to fight and kill other dogs,” Crosby added. “But with a second chance, despite the abuse she has suffered, she is now assisting someone who needs her help and they are working as a team.”

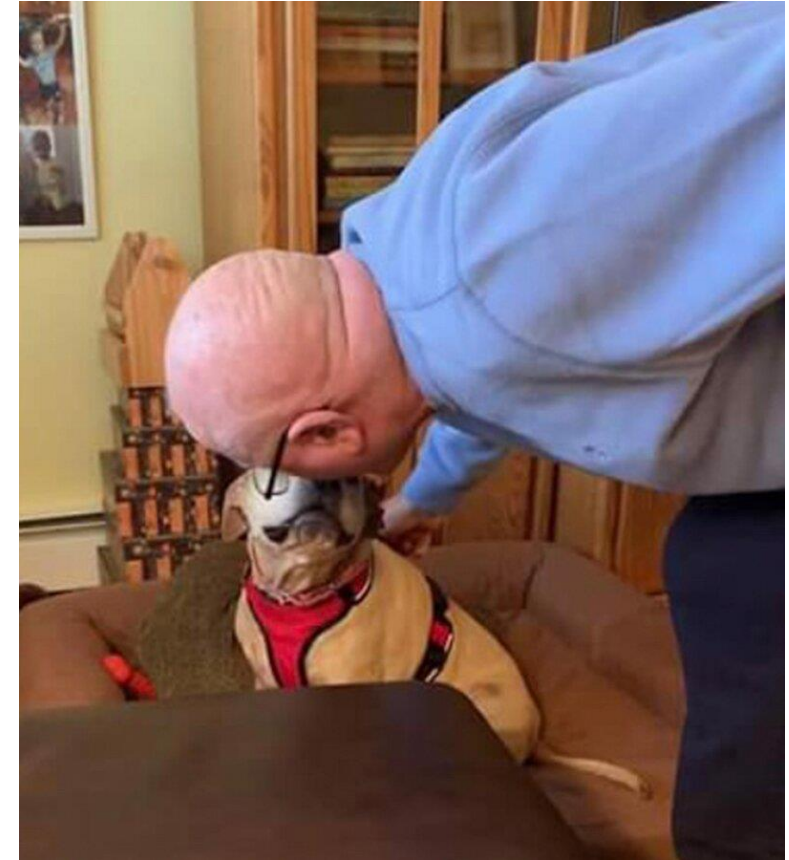


Photo from Pit Sisters

Littlefield Police Department K9 finds over 8 lbs of marijuana

By **Harrison Roberts** | December 30, 2019 at 12:13 PM CST - Updated December 31 at 1:23 AM

Littlefield, Texas (KCBD) - At about 3:15 p.m. on December 22, 2019 a Department of Public Safety Trooper, T.J. Duffield, conducted a traffic stop about one-mile East of Littlefield on U.S. Hwy 84 according to the police report.

The trooper asked for Littlefield Police Department assistance in a vehicle search.

K-9 Pepper and her partner, Officer Matt Howard, arrived on scene and a search of the vehicle was conducted.

K-9 Pepper discovered 8 ½ lbs. of marijuana inside of the vehicle.

One person, Leroy Perez, 37, of Marysville, California was arrested and taken to the Lamb County Jail where he was booked and released to their custody according to the report.

Littlefield K-9 helps to discover meth during Tuesday traffic stop

By **Michael Cantu** | August 28, 2019 at 1:19 PM CDT - Updated August 28 at 1:19 PM

LITTLEFIELD, Texas (KCBD) - A police K-9 with the Littlefield Police Department is said to be responsible for catching two people who had 12.5 grams of methamphetamine in their vehicle.

The seizure came after a routine traffic stop around 9 p.m. in the 1900 block of Hall Avenue, according to the Littlefield PD. Officers with Littlefield PD were asked to help the Department of Public Safety with the traffic stop.

K-9 officer Pepper was called in and sniffed out the 12.5 grams of meth. Both people in the car were arrested and taken to the Lamb County Jail.



**Now for some other amazing “pit bull”
type dogs making a difference in their
communities**

Meet K9 Wildflower, a single purpose Narcotics Detection K9 from the Calvin Police Department in Hughes County, Oklahoma

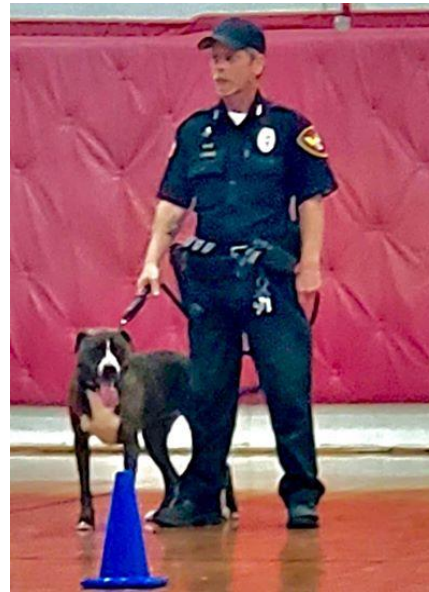


K9 Wildflower

On Wednesday, January 15, 2020 at 6:45 p.m., Calvin Police Department K9-Unit was requested at Hwy 75 and county road 139.

K9 Wildflower was deployed at the request of Hughes County Deputies Kendra Goodwin And Kile Turley. Calvin K9 Officer Wildflower from the Throw Away Dogs Project made several positive alerts on the suspects' vehicle.

Deputies searched the suspect vehicle and recovered what preliminary field testing showed to be crystal meth. Drug paraphernalia and a open bottle of alcohol was also recovered from the vehicle. 2 suspects were taken into custody.



Newly minted pit bull police dog fights crime, as well as savage stereotypes

David KlepperThe Associated PressPublished Friday, November 13, 2015 8:54AM EST

STONE RIDGE, N.Y.

The new rookie at one New York police department weighs 60 pounds, has a big, lolling tongue, a soft caramel coat and a chance to fight stereotypes in addition to crime.

When she graduates Friday from K9 training school, Kiah will be one of just a few pit bulls to serve as a police dog. It's a job usually given to breeds that don't come with the pit bull's reputation – deserved or not – as a savage animal fit only for the company of criminals. “The breed isn't important,” said Brad Croft, who trains dogs for law enforcement and the military and found Kiah in a Texas animal shelter after her previous owner was arrested for animal cruelty. “It's what's inside of the dog that's important.”



In this Wednesday, Nov. 4, 2015 photo, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., police officer Justin Bruzugul looks on as Kiah runs an obstacle course at K9 school in Stone Ridge, N.Y. (AP Photo/Mike Groll)

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German shepherds and Belgian Malinois are most commonly employed as police and military dogs, trained to chase and detain suspects or find drugs, cadavers and missing people. Beagles, collies, retrievers and bloodhounds are also used. Pit bull police dogs are almost unheard of.

Kiah will be a sniffer for the Poughkeepsie Police Department, used to detect drugs and track missing people. She's also a goodwill ambassador, for her breed and for the police. “She wants to work,” said Kiah's handler, Officer Justin Bruzgul. “She's high-energy. Affectionate. I couldn't ask for a better partner.”

Croft often visits animal shelters looking for abandoned dogs that he thinks would make good police dogs. He selected Kiah after a worker at the shelter recognized something special in the dog. Kiah was given to the department at no cost thanks to a partnership between Croft's company, San Antonio-based Universal K9, an Austin animal shelter and Animal Farm Foundation, a non-profit based in New York's Dutchess County that works to ensure “equal treatment and opportunity” for pit bulls.

Traditional K9 breeds cost as much as \$15,000 per dog.

Despite frightening stories from around the country -- a 9-year-old girl was fatally attacked by a pit bull this month on Long Island -- advocates say the breed's reputation for violence is undeserved, the result of the breed's use in dogfighting and as a status symbol for gang leaders. Bernice Clifford, Animal Farm's director of training, noted that the term “pit bull” itself is misleading, since it is often applied to any dog with a muscular frame and block-shaped head. As a result, she said, many are condemned to shelters and euthanasia simply because they were labeled a pit bull.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, there is no evidence that laws banning particular breeds reduce dog attacks. A 2014 report from the Animals and Society Institute reviewed several years of data on fatal dog bites and found no correlation between dog attacks and breeds.

There's also little connection between a dog's breed and their aptitude for police work, according to George Carlson, the Ulster County sheriff's deputy who trained Kiah in Stone Ridge, New York. He said a dog's drive, energy and eagerness to please are more important factors. Kiah is the only pit bull police dog that he's heard of on the East Coast, Carlson said. He calls her a “sweetheart” and expects her to excel in her new job.

“Dogs are individuals,” he said. “They have their own personalities, just like people. And I'd rather train dogs than people.”

K9 Jet, a former shelter dog, makes big drug bust

NEW HAVEN, Mo.

One K9 hasn't even completed his first year on-duty and is already making big moves.

K9 Jet used to be a shelter dog before he became a member of the New Haven Police Department in Missouri in May 2019.

According to police, on Dec. 30, Jet's K9 unit was requested by Missouri State Highway Patrol to assist them on Interstate 44, west of Highway 47. K9 Jet alerted his fellow law enforcement officials of a "controlled substance" coming from a vehicle.

During a search, authorities found 25 pounds of marijuana, 8 kilos of cocaine and multiple paraphernalia items used for packing and selling narcotics, they said.

It led to the arrest of 40-year-old Dwayne Carlton Ambrose and 38-year-old Nikia Christine Robinson.

K9 Jet was initially rescued from an animal shelter in Philadelphia, reports FOX 2 in St. Louis. Animal Farm Foundation paid for Jet's training in Texas. Through the organization's grant program, shelter dogs can be trained to become detection dogs in police departments.

His handler, Officer Kyle Walters, said Jet was chosen because of his willingness to work. "It's amazing that you can take a dog like this that was in a rescue, in a shelter, and make him a working dog," Walters told FOX 2, "And he loves it and he's great at it."



**Meet Some of the Dogs
Who Changed History:
The VICKTORY Dogs**

A SECOND CHANCE

Twelve years ago, 47 dogs were rescued from Michael Vick's dogfighting operation and allowed to live. They've enriched the lives of countless humans and altered the course of animal welfare.

By Emily Giambalvo Sept. 18, 2019

KANAB, Utah — Not long before lunchtime, Mya's wagging tail splashes as she waits for the tank to drain. The bowlegged black pit bull just finished a three-minute hydrotherapy session, guided by treats offered from a staffer reaching down into the apparatus. But while Mya walks slowly on the submerged treadmill, she notices Laura Rethoret's car through the window. Once the tank empties, Mya scurries down the ramp as fast as she can with her weakened legs, which have splayed more as she's aged.

"Good morning, beautiful!" says Rethoret, who embraces Mya with a towel. "I'm right here!"

Rethoret loads Mya and her runmate, Curly, into her car and drives to the quiet office where the dogs hang out a few times a week. These dogs are reminders that even now, 12 years later, survivors of former NFL quarterback Michael Vick's dogfighting operation live on in pockets throughout the country, including here at Best Friends Animal Society's 3,700-Acre sanctuary.

Vick pleaded guilty in 2007 to running an illegal dogfighting ring in southeastern Virginia, a scandal that cast a spotlight on the problem of dogfighting rings around the nation. But for 47 dogs pulled from Bad Newz Kennels, there was another, less publicized development that helped change how dogs taken in large-scale dogfighting busts are treated. Rather than being euthanized, the Vick dogs were given a chance to live.

The dogs became ambassadors, tail-wagging proof of what's possible through rescue and rehabilitation. In doing so, they changed how the public — and some prominent rescue organizations — view dogs freed from fighting rings. Dogfighting remains prevalent, but now, in large part thanks to these dogs, others seized in fight busts are evaluated to see if they can become pets.

The Washington Post tracked down all 47 dogs and compiled a comprehensive look into their post-adoption lives and the families they joined. They landed in homes from California to Rhode Island, embraced by people with jobs ranging from preschool teacher to attorney. Some adopters love sports. Others had never heard of Vick, once the highest-paid player in the NFL who at the time of the bust starred for the Atlanta Falcons. Some of the dogs struggled to heal emotionally and remained fearful through their lives. But they all found homes far more loving than the horror-film kennel that made headlines around the globe.

"While Michael Vick [was] a deplorable person in a lot of ways, the fact that he was the one that got caught was really a big boom for this whole topic and for these animals," Best Friends co-founder Francis Battista said. "It just catapulted it into the public eye."

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In late August, just a few weeks after her therapy session, Mya spent her final moments lying on blankets and surrounded by Best Friends staffers, including Rethoret, whose face turned red as Mya slipped away. She's one of five of the Vick dogs who have died in recent months, leaving just 11 survivors. They are poignant reminders of their tragic beginnings but also of the grace, patience and unexpected opportunities that followed.



Left: Mya, getting her head scratched, was among the 22 most challenging cases from Michael Vick's dogfighting operation taken in by Best Friends. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

Right: Meryl, believed to be 16 years old, rides on a golf cart with caregiver Jeff Jabs at Best Friends. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)



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When Vick's dogfighting operation was broken up, animal rescues from around the country understood the gravity of the case but also the opportunities it presented because of the NFL star's fame. Eight organizations received custody of the animals. Some groups placed a single dog into a foster home. Best Friends agreed to give the 22 most challenging cases a place to recover and, for some, a permanent home.



John Garcia, petting Curly at Best Friends, said the rescued Vick dogs will never be forgotten. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

The organizations worked to redefine what made a dog adoptable. The dogs were seen as victims, not irreparably damaged. They weren't just pit bulls or fight dogs. They became Mya and Curly, Frodo and Zippy.

"Michael Vick brought dogfighting into the living room of every American," said Heather Gutshall, who adopted Handsome Dan and later founded a rescue organization that aims to help survivors of dogfighting. "Am I glad it happened? No. Am I glad, that if it was going to happen, that it happened the way it did? Absolutely. They changed the landscape."

Marquee moment in animal welfare

In southern Utah, the city of Kanab makes the NFL feel like a distant enterprise. The feature of the town, which has fewer than 5,000 residents and two stoplights, is that it once served as the backdrop for Western films.

As the highway curves from the tiny town center and through a scenic southwestern landscape of vast skies and towering orange cliffs, one right turn leads into Best Friends, a haven for second chances that is home to 1,600 animals, including dogs, cats, horses and birds. Dogs cruise by with caregivers on golf carts. The chorus of barking chaos quiets as you venture deeper through the sandy trails. It's busy and boisterous yet vast and peaceful.

John Garcia, who at the time of the Vick case co-managed the Dogtown at Best Friends, grew up in a neighboring town without a TV. He doesn't watch sports. Garcia only learned of Vick through his case, but he remembers the message from the rescue's senior leadership: "Hey, if we get involved in this, it's a big deal," he said. "We may be able to change the world."

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The pressure to help the dogs — and to prove they could indeed be helped — was palpable. Because Vick's fame turned the dogfighting bust into a national story, not just a conversation in the animal welfare community, many watched with curiosity or skepticism, wondering whether a dog from a traumatic past could ever live normally in society.



Tim Racer of the rescue group BADRAP, holding an article on Vick. The organization knew the dogs weren't a lost cause. (Carol Guzy/The Washington Post)

BADRAP, an Oakland-based organization, emerged as an early voice advocating for the dogs. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Humane Society of the United States thought they should be killed, in keeping with their long-standing belief that the emotional trauma such dogs had suffered would be too much to overcome. Of the 51 dogs listed in court documents, just one needed to be euthanized for behavioral reasons. One, named Rose, was euthanized for medical reasons, and two died in care.

BADRAP had worked with individual dogs seized from fighting situations many times, which gave the organization confidence. Donna Reynolds, the director of BADRAP, said once staff members met the dogs for evaluations in Virginia, there was a sense of relief — “wiping brow with back of hand,” she called it. They knew they’d be able to work with them.

Pit bulls continue to face breed discrimination, with blanket bans in parts of the country. As of this year, however, 22 states have provisions against this type of legislation, and Best Friends has spearheaded initiatives to increase that

number. Rehabilitating the Vick dogs has helped further the argument that the owner, not the breed, dictates a dog's behavior. And this marquee moment in animal welfare preached values that extend beyond just pit bulls and into the overarching no-kill movement.



Little Red won the hearts of everyone who met her with her adorable floppy ears and passionate personality. She spent her days with her mom, Susan, and her 5 canine siblings in Wyoming. There she learned to love again, and could be what she was born to be: a loving, incredible dog.

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“This is what really excites me because it goes to that pushing the boundaries and the demonstration of what is adoptable,” Best Friends CEO Julie Castle said. “That flag has always been something that we’ve held.”

Most involved with the Vick case, from the adopters to rescue staffers, express indifference toward the former quarterback himself. Visitors often ask Michelle Weaver, who once co-managed Dogtown and now oversees all animal care at Best Friends, what she thinks about the quarterback who abused dogs such as the ones that have lounged in her office for years. Her answer: She doesn’t think about Vick. Her energy usually goes toward the dogs. Is Curly feeling okay? He’s been slowing down lately. How’s Cherry, whose photo hangs near Weaver’s desk, doing in his Connecticut home?

“There’s not the anger. I think in the early days there was,” said Stacy Dubuc, a Green Bay Packers fan who adopted Ginger from the SPCA for Monterey County in northern California. “Honestly at this point, I hate to say it, but somehow [Vick] is involved in my life. And I have the best dog possible because of it. He was the face of dogfighting. It took a celebrity to become that. And I don’t talk about him.”

A little distraction goes a long way when you’ve received a life threatening diagnosis.. This is what Jonny Justice, a former fighting dog saved from the cruelty of Vick, provides to children, while he volunteered as a therapy dog to many children in need



Vick, shown entering his guilty plea in 2007, said he regretted his actions and ended up advocating for stronger animal cruelty laws. (Carol Guzy/The Washington Post)

Vick, who paid nearly \$1 million restitution for care of the dogs, says he regrets it all and didn’t have the strength to stop what he realized was wrong about a year before he was caught. Vick, 39, retired in 2017 and is an NFL analyst with Fox Sports. He has advocated for stronger animal cruelty laws and works to educate children.

“I think people have moved on,” Vick said in a telephone interview. “I think they’ve moved past it. It’s been 12-plus years since it all happened, so I don’t get any questions about it anymore. People don’t talk about it. They don’t ask me about it. Life is kind of normal. But I still have a responsibility, and that will never change.”

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Dogs treated as individuals

Mel's life was not normal. Mel trembled whenever strangers entered Richard Hunter's suburban Las Vegas home, the emotional scars from his time at Bad Newz Kennels still evident 12 years on. But Hunter always emphasized the progress Mel had made, though he let the dog's continued struggles serve as a reminder of what Vick did.

Every night, Hunter walked Mel and his two other dogs. It would take Mel a minute to get going. He'd pause in the short driveway, look in each direction, take slow steps, assess the situation and only then decide he was ready to walk. The stories of all these dogs, Hunter said, shouldn't be reduced to a Disney-style tale.

"Everybody is great in a lot of ways now," Hunter said in July, shortly before Mel's death following a brief and unexpected illness. "But you better believe the ghosts of what Vick did to him and did to those other dogs stays with them to this day and always will."

When Mel and the other 21 Best Friends dogs arrived at the Utah sanctuary, they surprised the staff with their shyness. While some of Dogtown's newest residents, dubbed the Victory dogs, were overconfident and aggressive, many seemed under-socialized and afraid. For at least six months, the dogs had 24-hour care. Garcia slept on the concrete floor of the building that housed the dogs for a month straight.

Progress was gradual. The issues varied. Georgia, a former dogfighting champion, reacted to other dogs a football field away. Others loved canine companions, and socializing with dogs helped them get closer to people. Many had never walked on a leash. They hadn't lived in a home environment. They needed to learn how to play. "It was clear," Weaver said, "that their world was pretty small before."

Once in homes, the dogs still had their own quirks, which in many ways exemplify the legacy these dogs will leave — that all animals, even from a fighting background, should be treated as individuals. Layla, who died in June, needed her collar removed when she ate. The clanging of her tag hitting the stainless steel food bowl frightened her. Shadow, one of the 11 still alive, remains terrified of ladders, making his family wonder if he saw dogs being hanged. His adopters don't think Shadow fought, but the fights took place on the second level of a shed, accessible by a ladder.



Adopter Richard Hunter said Mel still showed signs of emotional damage 12 years after his rescue. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

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Public Facebook pages have chronicled the dogs' post-adoption adventures for thousands of followers. (Handsome Dan's page has 546,000 likes.) Adopters shared successes and the dogs' lives in a world that slowly became more comfortable.

"I almost forget where he came from because he's such a typical dog now," said Melissa Fiaccone, who adopted Cherry. The dog's confidence has surged through the years. Cherry spent a week this summer in a cabin with more than a dozen people, including many children. The family posted a photo of Cherry on a dock with his eyes squinting and his massive tongue flopping happily. He frequently attends public events and loves greeting everyone. Fiaccone's husband, Paul, says Cherry "took on the rock star persona."



Melissa Crampton leads Dakota from a building that was part of Vick's dogfighting compound in southeastern Virginia. Dogs Deserve Better turned Bad Newz Kennels into the Good Newz Rehab Center. (Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post)

They were game-changers

About a year after the Vick dogs were dispersed around the country, a North Carolina man pleaded guilty to dogfighting. All 127 dogs seized, and the puppies born during the legal proceedings, were euthanized. Leaders from across animal welfare met to confront the issue, and it prompted the Humane Society to adjust its stance on dogs seized from fight busts. The experience with the Vick dogs, Battista said, was pivotal in that policy change.

PETA's stance "remains firmly the same as it was in 2007," Senior Vice President Daphna Nachminovitch said in a statement, adding that dogs from these situations can be "unpredictable" and a danger to other animals and humans.

Dogfighting continues to be a problem in the United States, but Janette Reeve, a senior specialist for Humane Society International's global anti-dogfighting program, said she believes it's declining. Dogfighting is an underground enterprise, however, so there's not comprehensive data to prove that.

Since 2008, dogfighting has been a felony in all 50 states, and Reeve said law enforcement has realized animal cruelty is often joined by other illegal activities, providing an additional incentive for police to look into reports of fighting rings.

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Uba, a Vick dog who lives with Letti de Little in northern Virginia, has a housemate named Jamie, a dog from a 2013 multistate fight bust in which 367 dogs were seized. The Missouri 500, a 2009 seizure of more than 400 dogs, is still the largest fight bust in U.S. history, and “thank God it happened after the Vick case,” said Ledy VanKavage, a senior legislative attorney for Best Friends whose dog, Karma, was among those rescued.

“She would be dead but for the Vick dogs,” VanKavage said. “I have no doubt. They were game-changers.”

Across from a small church in rural Virginia, Vick’s property has been purchased by Dogs Deserve Better, an organization that focuses on rescuing chained and penned dogs. On a summer day, dogs run in the fenced yard and the mood feels cheerful.

Then there are the four sheds, where Vick kept and fought his dogs. All are painted black, even the windows, to make them less visible at night. The group decided to preserve these relics of the dogfighting operation for educational purposes. The kennels inside one of the buildings still show claw marks on the walls. But there’s hope and remembrance, too, through memorial candles and trees dedicated to each dog planted in a grassy field out back.

“They’ve gone through so much, and they’ve changed so much,” Garcia said. “They’ll never be forgotten.” Garcia now works as the safety and security manager at Best Friends. Sometimes during night shifts, he wanders up to the sanctuary’s cemeteries, where hundreds of wind chimes ring at different pitches in the breeze and intensify into a song when a strong wind arrives. It’s peaceful and quiet.

A number of the Vicktory dogs rest there, with small memorial stones towering into mountains on top of their graves. One has a toy golf cart, representing how the dog loved riding around with caregivers, along with an old tennis ball. A couple of the adopters brought their dogs’ ashes back to Best Friends, the place that gave them a chance. That’s what felt right, and it helps preserve their legacy, as the dogs fade further from the public eye. But far from this canyon and across the country, other dogs live because of these 47. So as time eventually defeats them all, the message on a slab of stone in the cemetery carries hope and truth.



“Do not stand by my grave and cry,” the poem reminds those who enter through the ornate gates. “I am not there. I did not die.”

BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION

What's Wrong with Breed-Specific Laws?

BSL carries a host of negative and wholly unintended consequences; here are but a few of those consequences:

1. Dogs go into hiding

Rather than give up their beloved pets, owners of highly regulated or banned breeds often attempt to avoid detection of their "outlaw" dogs by restricting outdoor exercise and socialization and forgoing licensing, microchipping, and proper veterinary care, including spay/neuter surgery and essential vaccinations. Such actions have implications both for public safety and the health of these dogs.

2. Good owners and dogs are punished

BSL also causes hardship to responsible owners of entirely friendly, properly supervised, and well-socialized dogs who happen to fall within the regulated breed. Although these dog owners have done nothing to endanger the public, they are required to comply with local breed bans and regulations unless they are able to mount successful (and often costly) legal challenges.

3. They impart a false sense of security

Breed-specific laws have a tendency to compromise rather than enhance public safety. When limited animal control resources are used to regulate or ban a certain breed of dog, without regard to behavior, the focus is shifted away from routine, effective enforcement of laws that have the best chance of making our communities safer:

- Dog license laws
- Leash laws
- Animal fighting laws
- Anti-tethering laws
- Laws facilitating spaying and neutering
- Laws that require all owners to control their dogs, regardless of breed

4. They may actually encourage ownership by irresponsible people

If you outlaw a breed, then outlaws are attracted to that breed. Unfortunately some people take advantage of the "outlaw" status of their breed of choice to bolster their own self image as living outside of the rules of mainstream society. Ironically, the rise of pit bull ownership among gang members and others in the late 1980's coincided with the first round of breed-specific legislation.

AVMA: Why Breed-specific Legislation Is not the Answer

Breed-specific legislation (BSL) targets specific breeds of dogs that are wrongly thought to all be dangerous – most frequently "pit bull types" – and places stricter regulations on these dogs or even makes ownership of them illegal. Several cities, towns and states across the United States and Canada have adopted breed-specific measures in an attempt to prevent dog bites in their communities. **However, while BSL may look good on the surface, it is not a reliable or effective solution for dog bite prevention.**

The AVMA is opposed to breed-specific legislation.

Any dog can bite.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more than 4.5 million people in the United States are bitten by dogs each year, and more than 800,000 receive medical attention for dog bites, with at least half of them being children. It is no exaggeration to say that dog bites pose a significant health risk to our communities and society.

The issue of dangerous dogs, dog bites and public safety is a complex one. **Any dog can bite, regardless of its breed.** It is the dog's individual history, behavior, general size, number of dogs involved, and the vulnerability of the person bitten that determines the likelihood of biting and whether a dog will cause a serious bite injury. **Breed-specific bans are a simplistic answer to a far more complex social problem, and they have the potential to divert attention and resources from more effective approaches.**

The problem with breed-specific legislation

AVMA's Policy on Dangerous Animal Legislation states: "The AVMA supports dangerous animal legislation by state, county, or municipal governments provided that legislation does not refer to specific breeds or classes of animals. This legislation should be directed at fostering safety and protection of the general public from animals classified as dangerous."

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There are several reasons why breed-specific bans and restrictions are not a responsible approach to dog bite prevention:

Breed-specific laws can be difficult to enforce, especially when a dog's breed can't easily be determined or if it is of mixed breed.

Frequently, breed-specific legislation focuses on dogs with a certain appearance or physical characteristics, instead of an actual breed. "Pit bulls" are the most frequent targets of breed-specific legislation despite being a general type rather than a breed; other breeds also are sometimes banned, including Rottweilers, Dobermans and boxers. However, it is extremely difficult to determine a dog's breed or breed mix simply by looking at it. A study conducted by Maddie's Fund, a national shelter initiative, showed that even people very familiar with dog breeds cannot reliably determine the primary breed of a mutt, and dogs often are incorrectly classified as "pit bulls". Because identification of a dog's breed with certainty is prohibitively difficult, breed-specific laws are inherently vague and very difficult to enforce.

Breed-specific legislation is discriminatory against responsible owners and their dogs.

By generalizing the behaviors of dogs that look a certain way, innocent dogs and pet owners suffer. BSL can lead to the euthanasia of innocent dogs that fit a certain "look," and to responsible pet owners being forced to move or give up dogs that have never bitten or threatened to bite. Furthermore, dogs that are considered to be of a "dangerous breed" may already be serving the community in positions such as police work, military operations, rescue purposes, and as service animals. Contrary to being a liability, these animals are assets to society; however they, too, suffer due to misinformation and breed-based stereotypes.

Breed bans do not address the social issue of irresponsible pet ownership.

Dogs are more likely to become aggressive when they are unsupervised, unneutered, and not socially conditioned to live closely with people or other dogs. Banning a specific breed can give a community a false sense of security, and deemphasize to owners of other breeds the importance of appropriate socialization and training, which is a critical part of responsible pet ownership. In enacting breed-specific legislation, cities and states will spend money trying to enforce ineffective bans and restrictions rather than implementing proven solutions, such as licensing and leash laws, and responding proactively to owners of any dog that poses a risk to the community.

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It is not possible to calculate a bite rate for a breed or to compare rates between breeds because the data reported is often unreliable.

This is because:

1. The breed of a biting dog is often not known or is reported inaccurately.
2. The actual number of bites that occur in a community is not known, especially if they don't result in serious injury.
3. The number of dogs of a particular breed or combination of breeds in a community is not known because it is rare for all dogs in a community to be licensed.
4. Statistics often do not consider multiple incidents caused by a single animal.
5. Breed popularity changes over time, making comparison of breed-specific bite rates unreliable. However a review of the research that attempts to quantify the relation between breed and bite risk finds the connection to be weak or absent, while responsible ownership variables such as socialization, neutering and proper containment of dogs are much more strongly indicated as important risk factors.

A better solution to dog bite prevention!

Animal control and legislative approaches to protecting a community from dangerous dogs should not be based on breed, but instead on promoting responsible pet ownership and developing methods to rapidly identify and respond to owners whose dogs present an actual risk.

The AVMA recommends the following strategies for dog bite prevention:

1. Enforcement of generic, non-breed-specific dangerous dog laws, with an emphasis on chronically irresponsible owners
2. Enforcement of animal control ordinances such as leash laws, by trained animal care and control officers
3. Prohibition of dog fighting
4. Encouraging neutering for dogs not intended for breeding
5. School-based and adult education programs that teach pet selection strategies, pet care and responsibility, and bite prevention.

Breed Specific Legislation Position Statements

The following USA based expert organizations agree that breed-specific legislation (BSL) and similar policies that restrict dogs based on appearance do not reduce dog bites in communities or enhance public safety.

1. American Bar Association

“...the American Bar Association urges all state, territorial, and local legislative bodies and governmental agencies to adopt comprehensive breed-neutral dangerous dog/reckless owner laws that ensure due process protections for owners, encourage responsible pet ownership and focus on the behavior of both dog owners and dogs, and to repeal any breed discriminatory or breed specific provisions.”

2. American Kennel Club

“The AKC strongly opposes any legislation that determines a dog to be “dangerous” based on specific breeds or phenotypic classes of dogs.”

“Regulations that target specific breeds force law enforcement officials to focus their valuable time on breed identification. This task requires expert knowledge of the individual breeds and can be compounded when the law includes mixed breeds. It is very difficult for public officials to enforce such provisions in a fair and effective manner.”

3. American Veterinary Medical Association

“Dog bite statistics are not really statistics, and they do not give an accurate picture of dogs that bite. Invariably the numbers will show that dogs from popular large breeds are a problem. This should be expected, because big dogs can physically do more damage if they do bite, and any popular breed has more individuals that could bite. Dogs from small breeds also bite and are capable of causing severe injury. There are several reasons why it is not possible to calculate a bite rate for a breed or to compare rates between breeds.”

“Statistics on fatalities and injuries caused by dogs cannot be responsibly used to document the ‘dangerousness’ of a particular breed, relative to other breeds, for several reasons.”

4. American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior

“Any dog may bite, regardless of the dog’s size or sex, or reported breed or mix of breeds. The AVSAB’s position is that such legislation—often called breed-specific legislation (BSL)—is ineffective, and can lead to a false sense of community safety as well as welfare concerns for dogs identified (often incorrectly) as belonging to specific breeds.”

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5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC recommends against using breed as a factor in dog-bite prevention policy and states: “Any dog of any breed has the potential to bite.”

6. National Animal Control Association

“...breed specific legislation may create an undue burden to owners who otherwise have demonstrated proper pet management and responsibility... Agencies should encourage enactment and stringent enforcement of dangerous/vicious dog laws.”

7. National Canine Research Council

“The trend in prevention of dog bites continues to shift in favor of multifactorial approaches focusing on improved ownership and husbandry practices, better understanding of dog behavior, education of parents and children regarding safety around dogs, and consistent enforcement of dangerous dog/reckless owner ordinances in communities. Effective laws hold all dog owners responsible for the humane care, custody, and control of all dogs regardless of breed or type.”

8. Obama Administration

“We don’t support breed-specific legislation—research shows that bans on certain types of dogs are largely ineffective and often a waste of public resources.”

9. State Farm Insurance

“We do not ask nor do we care what breed of dog is owned by a person. So when we are writing home owner’s insurance, rental insurance, or renewing policies, it is nowhere in our questions what breed of dog is owned.” — Heather Paul, Public Affairs Specialist

10. The U.S. Department of Justice

Similarly, the DOJ requires that places of public accommodation grant service dogs access to the premises regardless of breed: "Municipalities that prohibit specific breeds of dogs must make an exception for a service animal of a prohibited breed, unless the dog poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Under the "direct threat" provisions of the ADA, local jurisdictions need to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a particular service animal can be excluded based on that particular animal’s actual behavior or history, but they may not exclude a service animal because of fears or generalizations about how an animal or breed might behave."

What Does Science say about Breed-Specific Legislation?

The following is a small sampling, and non-exhaustive list of peer reviewed, scientific studies that conclude that BSL is ineffective and will not serve it's purpose to protect the general public from dog bites.

1. ***Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified?*** Published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*. Stephen Collier, PhD

Conclusion: “The APBT is well down the lists of absolute number of attacks by breed, and the case that it is an especially dangerous dog is not established. It is questionable whether laws to extirpate a breed can be justified. Breed-specific laws singling out this dog cannot produce significant reductions of dog attacks when, by worse case data, 90% of its individuals are not recorded to attack a person or animal over their life span.”

2. ***Co-occurrence of potentially preventable factors in 256 dog bite-related fatalities in the United States (2000-2009)*** Published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Association* GJ Patronek, JJ Sacks, KM Delise, AR Marder

Conclusions: “Most Dog Bite Related Fatalities were characterized by coincident, preventable factors; breed was not one of these. Study results supported previous recommendations for multifactorial approaches, instead of single-factor solutions such as breed-specific legislation, for dog bite prevention”.

3. ***Inconsistent identification of pit-bull type dogs by shelter staff:*** Published in *The Veterinary Journal*. K.R. Olson, J.K. Levy, B. Norby, M.M. Crandall, J.E. Broadhurst, S. Jacks, R. Barton, M.S. Zimmerman

Conclusion: The marked lack of agreement observed among shelter staff members in categorizing the breeds of shelter dogs illustrates that reliable inclusion or exclusion of dogs as “pit bulls” is not possible, even by experts. This has special significance to the topic of restrictive breed regulations, since such regulations are based on the faulty assumptions that (1) certain breeds or phenotypes are inherently dangerous, and (2) that those breeds and their mixes can be identified by observation. Since injuries from dogs have not decreased following bans on particular breeds, public safety is better served by focusing on recognition and mitigation of risk factors for dog bites.

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4. Is there a difference? Comparison of golden retrievers and dogs affected by breed-specific legislation regarding aggressive behavior: Published by the Journal of Veterinary Behavior Stefanie A. DVM, Ester Schalke, DVM, Amelie M. von Gaertner, DVM. Hanjoachim Hackbarth, DVM, PhD.

Conclusion: In this research project, no significant differences in the occurrence of aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations were found when comparing golden retrievers (70) and 6 dog breeds affected by legislation. Therefore, assuming that certain dog breeds are especially dangerous and imposing controls on them cannot be ethnologically justified. Legislation in Lower Saxony was changed, and breed lists were withdrawn.

NOTE: Coincidentally, the American Temperament Test Society also show the Golden Retriever and the American Pit Bull Terrier tie in overall temperament testing.

5. Italian breed-specific legislation on potentially dangerous dogs: Assessment of its effects in the city of Florence (Italy) Florence Italy. Published by ResearchGate; A European commercial social networking site for scientists and researchers. Chiara Mariti, Carlo Ciceroni, Claudio Signieri

Conclusions: This study represents an example of how the issue of dog bites can be tackled and scientifically analyzed, avoiding the perception of risk due to single resounding episodes. Although the study is based on limited and local samples, findings suggest that Italian breed-specific legislation on dangerous dogs did not lead to remarkable changes in the trend of dog bites nor in the canine breeds involved.

6. The effect of breed-specific dog legislation on hospital treated dog bites in Odense, Denmark. Published by POLS|One A fully peer reviewed journal with a rigorous multi-stage editorial screening and assessment process. Finn Nilson (teaches Master's programs. Main area is public safety and risk management) John Damsager M.Soc.Sc., Jens Lauritsen MD, Carl Bonander PhD

Conclusions: According to the results in this study, no effect of the legislation can be seen on the total number of dog bites, therefore supporting previous studies in other countries that have also shown a lack of evidence for breed-specific legislation. Importantly, compared to other studies, this study can show a lack of evidence using more robust methods, therefore further highlighting that future legislation in this area should be prioritized on non-breed-specific legislation in order to reduce the number and risk of dog bites.

7. "Dog bite injuries to humans and the use of breed-specific legislation: A comparison of bites from legislated and non-legislated dog breeds".

Conclusion: Results did not observe evidence of any differences between legislated and non-legislated for both the medical treatment to victims required following the bite, and the type of bite inflicted. The significant differences in bites being reported to authorities, perceived triggers for biting, and biting locations suggest differing perceptions relating to risk between legislated and non-legislated dog breeds.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- a) 44 professional groups were selected to testify at the public hearings held in Ontario.
- b) 43 of the professional groups, that were allowed to testify at the hearings, were against the ban.
- c) * Reverse onus is law in Ontario. You are now automatically guilty until you prove innocence; a clear violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- d) * Dog owners are now subject to warrantless entry and illegal search and seizure.
- e) * It is very difficult, if not impossible, even for professionals to determine a dog's breed by their appearance.
- f) * BSL targets a multitude of innocent mutts.
- g) * BSL does NOT take into consideration responsible dog ownership nor how well socialized, well behaved or well-trained Ontario citizens family pets may be.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- a) Visit www.SupportHersheysBill.com Learn the difference between fact and fiction. Read actual studies not tabloids.
- b) Let your MPP know you are against BSL, demand change from current unjust laws.
- c) Educate yourself and educate others.
- d) Realize not everything you hears in the media has been fact checked or true.
- e) Participate in the rallies /protests. Bring your family, friends and co-workers.
- f) Remember you can make a difference and save innocent dog's lives!

STOP THE MYTHS!

A FEW OF THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERT ORGANIZATIONS AGAINST BSL

1. Algoma Dog Fanciers
2. American Dog Owners Association
3. American Veterinary Medical Association
4. Animal Farm Foundation
5. Animal Aide Association of St. Thomas-Elgin
6. Animal Alliance of Canada
7. Animal Hospital of Kitchener-Waterloo
8. A.S.P.C.A
9. Association of Animal Shelter Administrators of Ontario
10. Association of Pet Dog Trainers
11. Banned Aid Coalition
12. Barrie Kennel & Obedience Club
13. Beaver Creek Animal Hospital
14. Best Behaved Dog Academy
15. Best Friends Animal Society
16. Bracebridge Animal Hospital
17. Brantford & District Kennel & Obedience Club
18. Canadian Association of Professional Pet Dog Trainers
19. Canadian Dog Judges Association
20. Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
21. Canadian Kennel Club (CKC)
22. Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
23. Cat & Jack K9 Safety
24. Dog Legislation Council of Canada
25. Dogwatch.Net
26. Georgina Kennel and Obedience Club
27. Golden Horseshoe American Pit Bull Terrier Club
28. Grey-Bruce Veterinary Association
29. Happy Dog Communications
30. Human-Animal Bond Association of Canada
31. Humane Society of Canada
32. K-9 Concepts Inc
33. National Capital Coalition for People & Dogs
34. National Companion Animal Coalition
35. North American Flyball Association
36. Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA)
37. Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
38. Ottawa Kennel Club
39. Paws-Itively Obedient
40. Project Jessie (Animal Protection Institute)
41. Rescue Ink
42. Responsible Dog Owners of Canada
43. Rottweiler Club Of Canada
44. Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
45. Staffordshire Arms
46. SBTCC Staffordshire Bull Terrier Club of Canada
47. The "Pit Bull" Co-op
48. Toronto Humane Society
49. Windsor Humane Society
50. City of Ottawa

And lets not forget these notable, professional organizations, celebrities and other who are against BSL, just to name a few:

1. New York Bully Crew
2. Throw Away Dogs Project
3. Merrimutt Pet Resort
4. Sir Darius Brown
5. K9 Jasper – State of Indiana Narcotic K9 police dog.
6. Nate the Dog Man
7. Pit Sisters
8. Furr-Bulous
9. Bullies in Need
10. Detroit Animal Welfare Group
11. Redemption Dogs
12. Good Wolf Training
13. Almost Home Animal Rescue
14. K9 Kommittee
15. Dog Aid
16. End BSL Manitoba
17. Hershey Anti BSL Group
18. United Paws
19. Ottawa Citizens Against Breed Specific Legislation
20. Miss Dixies Foundation
21. Ontario Coalition Against BSL
22. K9 Turbo Training
23. Teachers Pet Michigan
24. Dontae Strickland (#34 for the AZ Cardinals)
25. K9 Companion Detroit
26. Project Freedom Ride
27. Don Cherry
28. K9 Breakthru
29. Bissel Pets
30. Detroit Dog Rescue
31. Pawsitive Change Program
32. Justin Theroux
33. Justice for Bullies
34. Paris Hilton
35. Jon Bernthal
36. Rebecca Corry
37. Kaley Cuoco
38. Sir Patrick Stewart
39. Jon Stewart
40. Ellen Degeneres

Toronto's pit bulls are almost gone. So why are there more dog bites than ever?

Patrick Cain, GLOBAL NEWS

Posted February 20, 2016 7:00 am

Updated February 20, 2016 8:03 pm

Almost a dog's lifetime later, it's still controversial.

In 2005, in the wake of disturbing dog attacks, Ontario passed a law designed to permanently remove pit bulls — and dogs that looked like them — from the province.

The law stopped short of a total ban, at least in the short term, but went some distance in that direction. Under the law, four breeds (pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, Staffordshire bull terriers and American pit bull terriers) had to be kept muzzled or leashed in public and sterilized within two months of the bill's passage. It also became illegal to import them into the province. The four breeds are often referred to together as 'pit bulls'.

"Over time, it will mean fewer pit bull attacks and, overall, fewer attacks by dangerous dogs," then-attorney general Michael Bryant told the Ontario legislature in 2005.

Bryant did not respond to an interview request.

The law certainly succeeded in cutting bites by the four affected breeds — Toronto recorded only 19 in 2014, down from 112 in 2005. It's not surprising, since there are far fewer of them around to bite anyone — there were only 338 registered in Toronto in 2014, down from 1,411 in 2005. Also, since the dogs were supposed to be unable to breed starting in 2005, the remaining ones are becoming elderly. Gradually, they are dying off without being replaced. They should cease to exist in the city by 2020 or so, at least in theory.

That isn't airtight — the Toronto Humane Society still sees the occasional pit bull puppy come in to its shelter, says spokesperson Tegan Buckingham. What it hasn't succeeded in doing is reducing the total number of dog bites (though it looked that way for a time). Toronto's reported dog bites have been rising since 2012, and in 2013 and 2014 reached their highest levels this century, even as pit bulls and similar dogs neared local extinction.

When Ontario's ban was being debated in 2004, opinions split between those who saw pit bulls as uniquely dangerous, and those who argued that any big dog could be very dangerous, if mistreated or trained to be violent.

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“I’m not surprised at all by those statistics,” says Parkdale-High Park MPP Cheri DiNovo, an opponent of breed-specific bans. “I would think they were inevitable.” DiNovo favours a system more like Calgary’s, where officials avoided breed-based bans while promoting education of dog owners and children, combined with enforcement. Bites in Calgary have dropped dramatically since the mid-1980s. “The current law isn’t working, and thankfully we’re getting the stats to back that up. Anybody who’s been on this issue for a long time knows that it’s a predictable failure.”

Toronto’s dog bite statistics are based on reports that doctors who treat bites are required to file, says Mary Lou Leiher, a program manager at the city’s animal services department.

Bites from German shepherds (Toronto’s #4 dog, after Labradors, Shih Tzus and golden retrievers) were most common in 2004 and 2014. Bites from pit bulls and Staffordshires were less common in 2014 than ten years earlier, but bites from American bulldogs and boxers were more common.

“People are afraid that they are going to get a disease from being bitten by an animal, so it doesn’t have to be severe at all for them to go to the doctor,” Leiher explains. The breed of the offending dog in the city bite data is based on what the owner, or a city investigator, says it is. There has been no procedural change in recent years that would cause there to be more bite reports out of proportion to actual bites, she said.

“We would love to see the pit bull ban lifted,” Buckingham says. “Of the ones that come into the shelter, the majority are the sweetest dogs.” In the meantime, they are shipped to shelters in Quebec.

By 2012, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association estimated that the law had led to over 1,000 dogs and puppies in Ontario having been needlessly put down.

Toronto: Top 10 breeds for bites

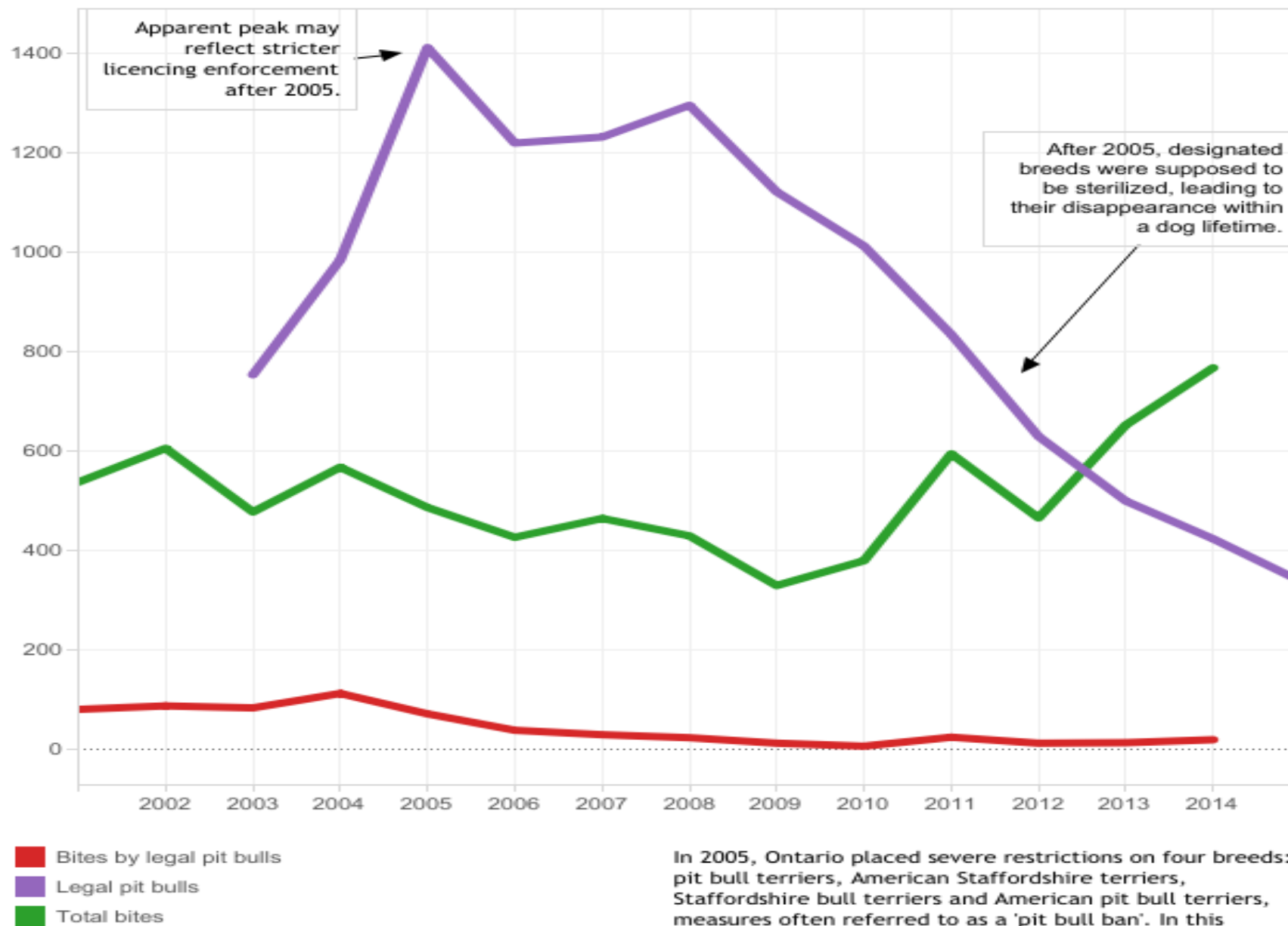
2004

Breed*	Bites
German shepherd	112
Pit bull	86
Parson (Jack) Russell terrier	35
Labrador retriever	34
Rottweiler	23
Border collie	19
Staffordshire	17
Bichon Frise	15
Chow Chow	14
Lhasa Apso	12

2014

Breed	Bites
German shepherd	92
Labrador retriever	41
Parson (Jack) Russell terrier	25
Rottweiler	25
Boxer	23
American bulldog	22
Golden retriever	20
Shih Tzu	17
Siberian husky	16
Maltese	14

* Excludes 'unknown'



How Calgary reduced dog attacks without banning pit bulls

"We have to get to the root of the problem, and that is that people must maintain control of their animals"

RENÉ BRUEMMER, MONTREAL GAZETTE Updated: September 1, 2016

While Montreal has decided to tackle the issue of savage dog attacks by banning pit bull type dogs, Calgary is standing by its long-held decision to put the responsibility on the other end of the leash. “I don’t support breed bans because they don’t work,” said Bill Bruce, the former director of animal services for the city of Calgary, whose animal-control program is considered among the most effective in North America. “We have to get to the root of the problem, and that is that people must maintain control of their animals.”

Forcing responsibility onto owners, educating the public on the importance of quickly dealing with problem dogs and ensuring pets are licensed led to a precipitous drop in the number of aggressive incidents. It’s not a quick process, officials say, but it works in the long run and avoids wrenching and expensive acrimony. The system is supported by Montreal animal shelters.

“When you misidentify the issue as breed specific, when you say all of a particular breed are bad dogs, you have now polarized your community,” said Bruce, who retired as director in 2012, after 12 years in the post. “So everybody who has a dog like that and knows it is a good dog, is your mortal enemy, as well as everyone who knows that dog and knows it’s a good dog, and you’re going to spend a fortune in court as a municipality.

“The thing that disturbs me the most,” Bruce said over the phone from Calgary, “is that in every city I’ve looked at (that has introduced a breed ban), they have not reduced the overall number of bites in the community.”

The city of Montreal announced last week it would be banning the future acquisition of pit-bull type dogs, mixed breeds with pit-bulls in their lineage and dogs that resemble them, in the hopes of warding off the type of attacks that led to the death of 55-year-old Pointe-aux-Trembles resident Christine Vadnais in June. Under Montreal’s proposed new animal control bylaws, current owners can keep their pit-bull type dogs under strict regulations. Montreal is joining numerous municipalities as well as the province of Ontario, which instituted a pit-bull ban in 2005, who argue that pit-bull type dogs must be gradually removed from society because they are responsible for an inordinate number of serious attacks.

Calgary has been testing the theory since 2000, at a time when Labrador retrievers were the breed most likely to inflict bites. The city of 1.2 million people decided to shift from the standard “animal control” model to a “responsible pet owner” model.

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Bruce, the son of a police officer who grew up with German shepherds in his house, was the new director of animal services at the time. On visits to the city's shelters, he found most often animals were abandoned because of a failure in the relationship with their human owners, often linked to a behavioural issue, be it too much barking or allergies or nipping at strangers. Bruce would see the owners sitting in their car in the shelter parking lot, "crying for half an hour."

The solution to reducing aggressive canine behaviour, city officials decided, was to approach owners while issues were still relatively minor and give them the tools to fix the problem.

Problem dogs are aggressive for one of two reasons, Bruce said. Some owners choose intimidating breeds because the dog gives them a sense of increasing their own power. Those are not good dog owners, he said, and often must be separated from their pets, and fined strictly if the dogs are aggressive. Ban a breed and that type of owner will gravitate to the newest trend in intimidating or demonized dogs — in the 1960s, it was German shepherds, in the '70s it was Dobermans, followed by Rottweilers and then pit bulls. The latest move is toward larger breeds like bullmastiffs and Cane Corsos.

In most cases, however, well-meaning owners didn't see the warning signs of growing aggression — dashing to the fence to bark at strangers, running away repeatedly, nipping —and didn't know how to correct them before they escalated. All dogs bite, Bruce noted. The key is to train them away from that behaviour.

Bruce is also listed as an advisor to the National Canine Research Council (NCRC), a private U.S. research group that is funded by the Animal Farm Foundation, a New-York based organization advocating for "equal treatment and opportunity for pit bull dogs." The NCRC asks for his opinion on animal control as a professional in the field, and has never asked him to alter his opinion to suit a particular agenda, Bruce said.

After lengthy public consultations with all the stakeholders — dog owners, bite victims, animal shelters and veterinarian associations — along with detailed data collection on types of aggression and breeds responsible, the city embarked on a widespread public education campaign. Dogs must be licensed, they explained, because it's the easiest way to return them if they're lost. (Most dog owners lose their dog at one time or another, Bruce said.) Reward programs — offering discounts to those who register their pets with local retailers ranging from pet food stores to IKEA that offset the price of the \$37 annual license — also helped.

"We told owners that if you do four things: license your dogs, provide permanent identification through tags or microchips, sterilize them and provide training so they do not become a nuisance or threat, you can have as many pets as you want, any type of pet you want, and the government won't be on your doorstep," Bruce said.

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If not, Calgary has some of the strictest animal regulations in North America. Fines for not having a license for an animal are \$250, several times the cost of a license. Owners of dogs involved in an attack can be fined up to \$10,000 and the dogs may be euthanized.

The main complaints against dog owners are lack of proper care, excessive noise and smells. Calgary has 24 animal control officers who patrol the city, investigate complaints and pick up stray or lost animals. For dogs involved in an aggressive incident, be it as simple as a dog who chased someone in a threatening manner, the officers investigate the complaint, perform mediation and figure out a solution, which sometimes requires the animal receive training from an expert. In 98 per cent of cases, the nuisance order on a dog is lifted after owners fix the problem, Bruce said.

In 1985, Calgary recorded just over 2,000 aggressive dog incidents. In 2014, the city had 641 confirmed reports of aggression incidents, with 252 dog bites, despite a large upsurge over that period in the city's human and pet population. The numbers of bites saw a marked rise starting in 2012, but officials say it's due to a recent campaign asking residents to report all forms of bites. In 2014, pit bulls were responsible for 16 per cent of bites, retrievers for 9 per cent and shepherds for 10 per cent.

In Calgary, 90 per cent of dogs are licensed. In 2011, 87 per cent of lost dogs were returned to their owners, eight per cent were adopted, and 5 per cent had to be euthanized. The city shelter, which holds 84 dogs, is usually half empty, Bruce said.

Calgary's animal services budget of roughly \$5 million, which includes visits to hundreds of schools as part of its education campaign, is entirely financed by its licensing fees.

In Montreal, which has made a concerted effort to improve awareness in the last few years, it's estimated only 14 per cent of the city's 150,000 dogs are licensed, said Anie Samson, city executive committee member responsible for public security. Fines have increased to \$250 for non-compliance.

"It takes some time. It's kind of like community building," Bruce said. "It takes time to write new local laws, to provide education."

The system is constantly evolving. In 2010, Calgary introduced a subsidized spay and neuter program so low-income families can afford to sterilize their dogs.

"It's all about consequences," Bruce said. "Human behaviour does not change without consequences. But if you change the human behaviours, then the animal behaviours will be resolved."

Recommendations on How to Help Ensure Public Safety is Achieved

1. Pre-school level canine interaction education program
2. Interactive elementary school canine interaction education program
3. Public canine interaction education campaign
4. Strict guidelines for breeding
5. Prohibit the sale of animals on unregulated websites
6. Stop the sale of animals other than shelter animals in pet shops
7. Permanent identification of animals at adoption
8. Animal abusers database
9. Animal abandoners database
10. Force negligent owners to take a class on responsible pet ownership
11. Elevate penalties for owners who knew their dog was a risk to the public
12. Prohibit the ownership of animals for those convicted of animal cruelty
13. Allow veterinarians to maintain professional confidentiality in order to help clients with problem dogs
14. Establish a national bite registry, including a bite severity scale
15. Enforce dangerous dog legislation on a breed neutral basis
16. Force municipalities to spend a percentage of budget on animal control
17. Force municipalities to employ educated animal control personnel
18. Force municipalities to provide dog parks
19. Hold municipalities liable, financially and civilly
20. Initiate the Calgary model

WILL YOUR DOG BE NEXT?

Contact your MPP today
and save a life!

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

www.endtheban.ca

www.supporthersheysbill.com

Social media groups for the Ontario Coalition Against BSL:

FACEBOOK:

Ottawa Citizens Against Breed Specific Legislation/BSL

Hershey Anti BSL Group

Miss Dixies Foundation

INSTAGRAM:

United Paws to End BSL

Save Ontario's Pitbulls