

A Conversation on Pets and Aged Care: Finding Better Solutions for People and Animals

Thursday 17 May 2012

Reception Room, ACT Legislative Assembly, Civic Square

Chair: Mary Porter AM MLA

Program

0900 - 0910 *"Introduction to the Conversation"* - Mary Porter AM MLA

0910 - 0915 *"Why this Conversation is important"* - Di Johnstone, senior pet owner

0915 - 0930 *"A view from pet owners and examples of recent/current experience"* - Lynn Fitzpatrick, Real Animals Pets and People

0930 - 1000 *"Initial Conversation"* - Break out into groups

1000 - 1030 *"Report"* - by groups

1030 - 1050 Tea/coffee

1050 - 1115 *"Why pets are important to older people; and integrating pets into aged care: A psychologist's view"* - Dr Bronwyn Massavelli, Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, University of Queensland

1115 - 1140 Questions

1140 - 1145 Leg stretch

1145 - 1210 *"Options to address the issues"* - Panel (5 mins each)

Welcome to the panel: Mary Porter AM MLA

Specialist support in the community: Lynn Fitzpatrick, Real Animals Pets and People

Managing the issue in retirement villages: Deborah Booth, General Manager, Calvary Retirement Village

Transforming aged care: Sally Hopkins, Business Development Manager and Eden trainer, Eden in Oz & NZ

Ensuring pet welfare: Michael Linke, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA ACT

(Dr Bronwyn Massavelli will sit on the panel for the discussion

session) 1210 - 1245 Discussion and recommendations

1245 - 1300 *"What would be the perfect future?"* - Summing up by Mary Porter AM MLA

1300 Close

Information on key speakers

Dr Bronwyn Massavelli

Dr Bronwyn Massavelli completed her undergraduate studies and postgraduate clinical training in Psychology at the University of Queensland, and is currently an active member of staff in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland. She completed her PhD in 2010 and has recently started working in private practice as a Psychologist.

Bronwyn holds a key interest in ageing, mental health and pets, and in particular, the importance of attachment to pets from a psychological perspective – pet therapy and the impact that pets can have on various factors that are important for ageing such as social support, mental health, health and general wellbeing. Her current research interests therefore include the human-animal bond and the impact of this for older people, as well as age differences in emotion and mental health, and dementia. She also holds a key interest in mental health and psychopathology across the age span.

Bronwyn has been active in various professional organizations relating to psychology and ageing, and at every opportunity, aims to promote the importance of animals, and the impact that they can have on our lives, particularly in older age. Bronwyn has presented at various international and national Ageing conferences, and recently presented at the Gerontological Society of America's 63rd annual scientific meeting in New Orleans regarding the impact of pets on social support, where the research received international interest and a collaboration request. She is currently working with Dr Michael Meehan and Professor Nancy Pachana to publish and validate a new Pet Attachment Scale. Outside of research and clinical work, Bronwyn is keen to contribute to the profession through sharing her knowledge and experiences with impressionable undergraduate students through teaching in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland.

Bronwyn has dedicated her involvement in this forum to 'Buffy' (1998-2011), a beloved family pet who passed away suddenly in January 2011.

Lynn Fitzpatrick

Lynn Fitzpatrick is a former coordinator of Petlinks, the first government (Home and Community Care) funded companion animal support program in Australia. This was established in 1996 and is still going strong. She is a Convenor of the Australian Pets and People Network (established in 2003), an industry forum for professionals and volunteers working in the aged and disability sector with the combination of people and companion animals. The Network advocates for the inclusion of companion animal support programs in this sector as a normal lifestyle option (similar to Meals on Wheels or Planned Activity/Recreation Groups) on the basis that to assist the pet is to assist the person.

Since 2008, Lynn has been a Brotherhood of St Laurence volunteer visitor (with two scrubby terriers) to the elderly residents of Sumner House Hostel in Fitzroy, Victoria. She is the founder of "Stand By Your Dog Moreland" (2000) – a local group of people with dogs advocating for equitable access to off-lead exercise areas in public open space in the Municipality of Moreland (Victoria).

Lynn Fitzpatrick is also a consultant to Real Animals Pets and People which provides community development advice and development services in companion animal support to organizations in the aged and disability sector. Lynn collaborated with the National Ageing Research Institute to produce a 2008 Report on "*Identifying the Need for Companion Animal Support for the Home And Community Care Target Population*".

Summary of the Conversation on Pets and Aged Care

The event marked the beginning of a community conversation about the role of animals in the lives of older Canberrans. The event was well attended, with a number of speakers from interstate as well as representatives of animal welfare organisations, retirement village operators, retirement village residents, aged care service providers and others.

The general consensus was that pets provided significant social and health benefits for older Australians. This view was held by the vast majority of parties that were represented at the event.

However, there were also a number of significant barriers identified and these would need to be overcome to increase the role of pets in the lives of older Canberrans. These concerns are in relation to:

- the design of retirement villages and nursing homes, as most are currently unsuitable for this arrangement, and ways to offer more choice to residents;
- additional work for staff who may have to assist the pet owner and the pet;
- some residents of retirement villages and aged care residences being uncomfortable with animals; and
- the importance of ensuring that interests of the person and the pets are balanced.

The key suggestion made at the forum was that a steering group be formed to carry forward the conversation in the community. Among other things, the group will pursue:

- making information readily available to seniors about where to obtain assistance to care for pets as they age;
- the identification of organisations to provide assistance to older pet owners;
- the provision of guide and web-based information on retirement villages and aged accommodation to identify aged accommodation where seniors can take their pets;
- the suggestion that vets could regularly visit retirement villages and aged accommodation to prevent older people having the stress of transporting their animal to the vet;
- the encouragement of designers and architects of retirement villages and nursing homes to consider providing adequate facilities for pet ownership;
- the establishment of a 'seniors for seniors' program; and
- the encouragement of further research into the benefits pets can provide to us as we age and related care options.

If you would like any further information about the event or the formation of a steering committee, please do not hesitate to contact my office on 6205 0100.