



The Problem: Violence and the Lack of Appropriate Education and Alternatives

In our communities today, children and companion animals are exposed to the brutal violence of animal abuse and the abhorrent practice of dog fighting. As the animals suffer physically from these violent crimes, our children suffer psychologically and emotionally. Violence is perpetuated in our communities – on our streets, in the media, in our homes. “Respect” in this environment comes from blatant, even rebellious disregard of humanity and law and from “bonds” built on fear rather than from positive opportunities, accomplishment and nurturing relationships.

Dog Fighting, Animal Abuse and Children

In Chicago, as elsewhere, animal abusers are some of the most violent offenders in the criminal justice system. Animal abusers are more likely to commit child abuse, domestic violence and other violent acts against humans. Dog fighting (a felony offense not to be confused with fights instigated by dogs) and other forms of animal abuse are closely connected to a host of other crimes and problems in our communities, including illegal drugs, illegal weapons, gambling, gang-related activities and domestic violence.

The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Boston’s Northeastern University found that **those who attend dog fights and witness other forms of animal cruelty are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people.** A very high percentage of gang members, batterers, child abusers, school shooters, sexual predators and serial killers have abused or killed animals at a young age – engaging in violence against people over time. Exposing children to the brutal violence of dog fighting and other forms of animal abuse desensitizes them to violence and endorses inhumane treatment of animals and other dependent, powerless beings.

The public health and safety issues are serious. Many children (and adults) have not been taught how to interact appropriately with animals. This puts children in particular at risk of being bitten or attacked.

Dog Fighting, Animal Abuse, and Animals

Dog fighting is a serious criminal enterprise in both rural and urban communities. It occurs on our streets and behind closed doors. The brutality of this bloody activity is undeniable, with abuses so gruesome that even experienced investigators are shocked by what they discover at dog fighting raids. For the sake of human profit and power, dogs are trained to kill. To ensure their aggression, dogs are beaten, chained, fed gunpowder and illegal drugs, and starved to the point where they will kill live animals just to survive. Dogs that do not win or are not “aggressive enough” are killed or left to die horribly painful deaths or wander on our streets.

Dog fighting also promotes pet theft, where companion animals are stolen and used as “bait” or unwilling opponents for fighting dogs in training. These animals suffer the painful fate of being mauled to death or are left to wander on the streets as predators or victims when they are no longer useful as bait.

Dog fighting also motivates the “backyard breeding” of large numbers of dogs most suitable for fighting, with the goal of maintaining or capitalizing on aggressive traits. Not only does this backyard breeding add to pet overpopulation in Chicago, but also poor breeding practices result in large numbers of potentially unstable or dangerous dogs. Inevitably, these dogs become the wards of the City at the taxpayer’s expense.

The Campaign: Stop the Violence, Educate the Public, and Provide Activities and Alternatives

To stop the violence and to foster a safe, humane city, Chicago needs a grassroots movement to stop dog fighting and other forms of animal abuse in our communities and to provide education about responsible dog ownership and beneficial activities with animals that engender the respect our children and young adults seek. This can be achieved with an alliance among local government, animal advocates and humane organizations, and the faith-based community. The alliance would conduct animal education programs for both adults and children; develop youth intervention programs to stop these crimes before they are committed; and create open communication lines for community members to report these violent crimes to trusted allies that will assist law enforcement in stopping the violence. Ongoing, such a campaign would create safer, more humane neighborhoods in the City of Chicago.

The campaign consists of three main segments, each addressing a different segment of society and all based on ongoing education, training, positive opportunity and responsibility.

- **“Kids, Animals and Kindness”**, an educational and participatory program for children
- **“It’s All Connected”**, an educational and participatory program for adults
- **Direct Intervention** by government, community-based groups and community members, which will accommodate multiple approaches such as “Faith Leaders for a *Safe Humane Chicago*TM”

The key is the education of our children. Ongoing educational segments will instruct both children and adults about safety and the humane treatment of companion animals, with an emphasis on dogs. It will also empower community members to educate themselves and other community members. By partnering with the faith-based community, the campaign will target at-risk Chicago communities on the south and west sides. All materials will be geared to the ages of the target audiences.

Kids, Animals and Kindness: A Program to Build Safe, Humane Communities

This program will educate children on the humane treatment of animals, the importance of spay/neuter programs, proper techniques for handling and approaching animals, how to avoid a bite, and why dog fighting is bad. Children will be instructed to report animal

cruelty to a responsible adult, such as a participating minister in the *Safe Humane Chicago*[™] project.

The program will be structured with interactive educational presentations by humane educators as well as interaction between children and dogs facilitated by professional dog handlers. The curriculum will be offered in targeted communities and will include multiple sessions to reinforce learning.

It's All Connected: A Program to Educate Adults about Animal Abuse, Violence and Children

This program will instruct adults on why they should take dog fighting and other forms of animal abuse seriously in an effort to protect our children from violence and to provide beneficial activities and alternatives. The training will encourage the reporting of dog fighting and animal abuse to the Chicago Police Department. Further, the program will educate community members about the humane treatment of animals, the importance of spay/neuter programs and responsible animal ownership, and how to avoid animal bites.

The program will be structured with presentations in the community by humane educators as well as “train the trainer” sessions that train adult volunteers to take the program to their own communities.

Community Intervention: A Program to Stop the Violence Directly

This segment will accommodate multiple approaches, including the following:

Community Mentoring: Faith Leaders for a Safe Humane Chicago[™]

Leaders in the faith-based community will be enlisted as mentors for youth. An orientation program is part of the *Safe Humane Chicago*[™] curriculum. It is designed to engage leaders of faith-based organizations to act as mentors and to host *Safe Humane Chicago*[™] educational sessions for their congregations and affiliated organizations. These leaders will also partner with the Chicago Police Department to open communication channels between the police and the community in a continuing effort to reduce violent crime in targeted Chicago neighborhoods.

Chicago Police Department

Intervention will continue to take place through the Chicago Police Department's Animal Crimes Unit and patrol officers. To effectively implement the program, police officers will need training or a refresher course on animal fighting and cruelty laws and procedures. Training is already in progress, and the development of educational materials via streaming video already has funding support. Chicago police officers will also participate in training the community as part of the *Safe Humane Chicago*[™] curriculum.

CAPS and Court Advocacy

Through the CAPS network, City of Chicago agencies will be able to provide appropriate interventions in dog fighting and animal abuse incidents. In addition, the extensive Court Advocacy program managed by the Dog Advisory Work Group (D.A.W.G.) will be continued. This program began in December 2000 and has trained more than 700 people in the CAPS Court Advocacy program and in animal law, has followed hundreds of court cases involving animals and has developed numerous materials for understanding and intervening in animal abuse. D.A.W.G. Court Advocacy is a partnership of the non-profit

organization D.A.W.G. with the CAPS program, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Commission on Animal Care and Control, Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office and Circuit Court of Cook County.

Expectations

Never has there been such an aggressive plan to tackle these problems through a community-wide partnership between government, the faith-based community, humane organizations, and community and animal advocates. Only through vast participation and mobilization can we have an impact on stopping violence against children and animals in our communities.

Goals

The short-term goal of the *Safe Humane Chicago*TM project is a significant increase in public awareness and in arrests for dog fighting and other forms of animal abuse as well as for illegal gun possession, drug possession, gang-related activity and other violent crimes. Over time, we would expect a more educated public, more citizens involved in taking back their communities from exploiters, and continued reductions in violent crimes across the City of Chicago.

Our long-term goal is to create safer, more humane communities with less animal suffering and activities for our youth that build respect and create new opportunities for personal growth. Once established, this program is poised to become a model for cities across the nation.

Community Participation

*Safe Humane Chicago*TM invites as many groups and organizations to participate as possible. Participating organizations, non-profits and government agencies will become members of *Safe Humane Chicago*TM. Member organizations will be listed on a website to be developed and will be able to display the *Safe Humane Chicago*TM logo on their own organization’s website with a link to the *Safe Humane Chicago*TM home page. Members will also be able to advertise that they are a member of *Safe Humane Chicago*TM on their own marketing materials, provided the materials are approved by the *Safe Humane Chicago*TM Advisory Committee.

Funding to support the elements of this program is currently being sought.