



Volunteer Gabrielle Thiessen plays with Jack the dog (read Jack's story on the next page).

Here to help

by Andrea Danelak

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Part of the Winnipeg Humane Society team, three women are doing their part to protect Manitoban animals from suffering.

In 1894, only 21 years after Winnipeg was incorporated as a city, the Winnipeg Humane Society (WHS) was founded by a group of citizens concerned with the social welfare of the city. Initially formed as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Women, Children and Animals, the non-profit organization eventually turned its focus to animals as other agencies were founded to protect women and children.

Today, thousands of Manitobans turn to the WHS every year when they're looking for a companion or have lost their beloved pet. But in addition to its adoption and reunification services, the shelter also works on numerous initiatives in its quest to protect all animals from suffering, with three Winnipeg women helping it realize that vision.

In its early days, much of the WHS's work focused on inspecting slaughterhouses and trying to ensure the proper treatment of horses, then the most common form of transportation in the city. Many Winnipeggers are unaware the WHS still works tirelessly to eliminate practices which cause farm animals distress and suffering.

"I think we have this idea about farms where animals are roaming freely and are happy—and there are still farms like that—but in the major-

ity of cases, animals are in intensive confinement systems," says Gail Kreutzer, chair of the WHS's farm animal welfare committee.

Though she has always loved animals, Kreutzer first became involved with the WHS about ten years ago, after hearing former executive director Vicki Burns on a radio show about animal issues. "Many times, the show was about farm animals and I couldn't believe it, because I just wasn't aware of it," she recalls. "I got to the point where I would literally cry when I listened to the show, and so I thought, 'I can sit here and get myself all upset about this or I can do something.'"

She sent Burns an email asking how she could help and was invited to sit on the social action committee, which focused on wild and exotic animals, and is now going into her seventh year as a WHS board member.

"I think it would surprise people to learn how many people really do care about animals and farm animals," she says. "I don't think they realize that the WHS's vision is to promote the welfare of *all* animals."

Factory farms using the aforementioned confinement systems deny animals many of their

most basic behavioural and physical needs. Sows, female pigs used for breeding, for example, spend their lives in crates that are approximately two feet wide by seven feet long, providing only enough room for them to stand or lie down. "We think that most people would agree with the fact that animals should be able to turn around and move their limbs," says Kreutzer.

The most challenging part of Kreutzer's work on the board is when she encounters food producers reluctant to change their production methods. "When you have people who are adverse to change, they like to label you or call you 'those animal rights activists,' but I don't feel bad calling myself somebody that cares about animals—you get those kinds of labels when people can't defend the indefensible," she says.

With Kreutzer's passion at its helm, the farm animal welfare committee has spent countless hours educating consumers, even bringing a full-size sow stall to malls and events to provide a visual of the size of the stalls. It is also involved in teaching students about factory farming issues, adding to the WHS's already-long list of educational programming, which includes hundreds of presentations to schools

community

every year and programs like See Spot Read, where children struggling with reading skills visit the shelter to read to dogs.

Those are only a small fraction of the services the WHS offers Manitobans. Many of them are available thanks to the shelter's relocation to Hurst Way after its old facility on Kent Street, which was in operation for 39 years, began bursting at the seams. And when the new 40,000 sq-ft facility opened in October 2007, the building was equipped with a fully operational clinic that provides enough space and equipment to care for the nearly 10,000 animals that come through the shelter's doors annually.

Dr. Erika Anseeuw is the clinic's director of animal health, making her responsible for all of the animal health issues in the entire building. "In private practice, you have to do what the client wants, not necessarily what is best for the animal. Here, I like to say I work for the animals because we do our treatments based on what's best for the animal—sometimes that's euthanasia, but sometimes that has to be done," she says.

Every morning, Dr. Anseeuw, who has been with the WHS since 2000, and her team perform surgeries on adoptable pets, foster animals and animals in rehabilitation, and later tend to all of the animals in the building, checking for injuries and infections, prescribing treatments and performing individual exams. "I think there's an impression out there that we provide sub-standard care, but we try to provide the same level of care that the animals would get in a regular clinic," she says. "I think people are surprised about how much we do, not just spaying and neutering—we try to do everything we can for the animals."

Because of the number of animals housed in the building, disease outbreaks are a source of great concern to Dr. Anseeuw and her staff. "In a shelter, you not only have to think about the individual patient care but also the entire population," she says, citing one particular disease outbreak in which 30 puppies had to be euthanized over a few months. "I have to protect our healthy populations, and it can be very difficult to make those tough decisions. But I do what my conscience tells me to do.

"People often say, 'How can you work there? It must be so sad!' but it's not," she continues. "There are more successful outcomes and happy endings than there are tragic ones."

Another Winnipeg woman working towards those successful outcomes is Gabrielle Thiessen, one of the society's almost 800 volunteers. First volunteering as a dog walker, the retired parole officer supervisor noticed many of the dogs up for adoption had serious behavioural issues preventing them from finding their "forever" homes. After undergoing training with the other "canine communicators,"

Gabrielle Thiessen and Jack—a one-year-old Nova Scotia Duck Toller mix who was surrendered to The Winnipeg Humane Society in February. When he first arrived at the WHS, staff brought him into their behaviour room where he found an empty cardboard box and hid in it. He was so scared he could not be coaxed out. The staff had to wheel him, while inside the box, back to his dog run where he took his own time coming out. They have been working with him ever since and although he is still shy, he has made great improvements.



Thiessen now assists staff with behavioural assessments, visiting the shelter at least once a week to work with the pooches.

"I feel I learn so much in terms of how dogs are assessed for adoption and what the issues are, which ones can be dealt with and how they can be dealt with," she says. "I take the approach that whatever I can do for them is a good thing, even if it's just getting them outside in the exercise yards for half an hour or playing with them. If I can help change their behaviour in any way, that's a good thing."

Sometimes, Thiessen's work involves nothing more than sitting with a dog in its kennel when it is too fearful to go outside. "If I can't get a dog out one week, by the next week, it may be more inclined to come to me," she says. "It's hard some days when you see dogs that have been neglected...you just want to love them to death."

Though Kreutzer, Dr. Anseeuw and Thiessen all contribute to the WHS in different ways, they are realizing a common goal of giving animals a voice and bringing forward issues of importance to every Manitoban. "The most rewarding part is doing it for the animals," says Kreutzer. "The way I can thank them for their unconditional love and acceptance is by serving them."

For more information on the Winnipeg Humane Society and how you can help, visit www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca.

Gail Kreutzer stands in front of the life-size sow stall the WHS brings to malls and events to educate the public about confinement systems.

