

Difference Makers: Understanding and Improving the OSPCA's Animal Cruelty Investigation Work



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
A Brief Introduction to the OSPCA	2
The Study and This Report	2
Animal Cruelty Matters	3
Profile of the OSPCA	4
Structure	4
Workforce	5
Responsibilities	6
Financial Context	7
Key Findings	8
Recommendations	16
References	19
Acknowledgements	20

Executive Summary

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) is a nonprofit charity, but it is also the primary body responsible for enforcing provincial and federal animal cruelty legislation in the province of Ontario. OSPCA officers have the same legal authority as police for investigating and enforcing animal cruelty laws. The OSPCA now receives 18 000 complaints a year about suspected animal cruelty. In 2012, the Ontario government began providing \$5M in annual funding to the OSPCA for cruelty investigation, but this only covers one third of the animal protection budget. No other law enforcement body in Ontario is a charity dependent on donations for its operations.

This unusual situation, as well as the women and men responsible for animal cruelty investigations in Ontario, are not well understood. This report is designed to build understanding of the realities of cruelty investigation work and to identify ways to improve it. It is the result of policy and financial analysis, and the examination of data collected directly from OSPCA officers through a survey and focus groups.

Not only is the OSPCA's cruelty investigation branch atypical among law enforcement agencies due to its dependence on fundraising dollars, OSPCA officers are working under very difficult and, quite frankly, shocking conditions. Workers see animals – and people – in distress, and many different kinds of suffering, regularly. Yet most officers work in the field alone, and some are responsible for extremely large geographic regions which take hours to simply cross. They are not equipped with radios and some regularly enter into areas which do not even have cell phone service.

These working conditions, along with other challenges OSPCA officers must confront, place extreme physical, psychological, and emotional demands on them as workers and as people. All officers are affected, and women face additional risks. This is particularly noteworthy because, in contrast to all other law enforcement agencies in Ontario, a majority of OSPCA cruelty investigations officers are women.

Despite these multi-faceted difficulties, most officers are going to great lengths to find compassionate solutions which respect animals and people. Many daily acts of kindness go unnoticed by the public, but are a central part of how officers strive to create a more humane province. The OSPCA has also been able to strengthen and improve key elements of its cruelty investigations work due to the recent injection of public funding.

Yet the fact remains that the working conditions for cruelty investigations officers at the OSPCA need to be improved for their own safety and wellbeing, and for the sake of the vulnerable animals dependent on people for protection. This report concludes with specific recommendations for the Ontario government and other members of our province which would make a difference for the OSPCA difference makers, and for the animals with whom we share our communities.

A Brief Introduction to the OSPCA

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) was formed in 1873 by people concerned about the wellbeing of animals and children. The OSPCA has grown and changed in many ways since then, as have provincial legislation governing animal welfare and cruelty, and public perceptions about animals and their wellbeing.

Today the OSPCA is a nonprofit and registered charity responsible for domesticated and captive animal welfare in Ontario. The OSPCA undertakes many initiatives related to animals including sheltering and humane education. It is also the primary body responsible for enforcing provincial and federal animal cruelty legislation in the province of Ontario. The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act outlines the parameters for the OSPCA's work and establishes the OSPCA as the organization which is to investigate and enforce animal cruelty laws. In other words, the OSPCA is both a nonprofit charity, and a legally-empowered organization with specific responsibilities and powers. No other law enforcement body in Ontario is a charity dependent on donations for its operations.

The Study and This Report

The goals of this study are to:

- a) build understanding of the realities of animal cruelty investigation work and workers, and
- b) identify specific steps to improve the quality and effectiveness of animal cruelty investigations.

The study was not designed to assess the effectiveness of existing legislation, evaluate the definitions of animal cruelty, or to probe specific cases investigated by the OSPCA. This report does not address such matters, although they warrant greater attention.

This report stems from analysis of policy and financial data, as well as detailed specifics collected through an online survey of cruelty investigations staff at the OSPCA and focus groups with officers.

The online survey was completed by 64% of the cruelty investigations staff (58 officers), a high response rate by academic research standards. Respondents reflected the full range of the workforce in terms of job tenure, position, and geographic region. The sex of respondents accurately reflected the female-male ratio of the workforce as a whole (62% female).

Two focus groups were subsequently held at the OSPCA's Provincial Education and Animal Centre in Newmarket. Thirteen officers participated. One was mixed gender, and the other was all women. Participants represented the full diversity of the cruelty investigations officers as a whole in terms of job tenure, positions, and geographic region.

- 70% of the officers who participated in this research are over 30 years of age.
- 77% have completed some post-secondary education. Most have college diplomas and a number have university degrees.
- 32% of the officers have worked in cruelty investigations at the OSPCA for 3 years or less, 24% for 4-9 years, and 44% for 10 years or more. The longest serving workers had been at the OSPCA for 23, 25, and 31 years respectively.

This report details the patterns and key findings resulting from our analysis of the data collected using these two methods. Illustrative quotes and examples used throughout the report.

Animal Cruelty Matters

In Canadian law, animal cruelty includes both willful actions that cause distress or injury, and the failure to provide reasonable care. In other words, animal cruelty can be caused by direct and purposeful abuse or by neglect. Neglect can stem from a lack of knowledge or resources, or it may be intentional.

For example, kicking, stabbing, burning, or throwing a dog off a balcony is willful abuse. Depriving horses of food by not providing them with sufficient feed or failing to treat a rabbit's medical condition is neglect, and therefore also animal cruelty. Keeping too many animals and not allowing them sufficient food, water, and room to move (hoarding) also constitutes failure to provide reasonable care.

Current legislation at provincial and federal levels prohibits the causing of some forms of harm to certain types of animals. For instance, specific practices such as baiting and animal fighting are illegal. At the same time, however, people are legally permitted to use and kill animals, all of whom are, ultimately, legally considered property. Killing can be for humane reasons resulting from the recommendation of a veterinarian, or for the consumption of animals as food or clothing. Certain practices deemed cruel by some people, such as the intensive confinement of farmed animals in gestation crates, battery cages, or veal crates, and the transporting of live animals to slaughterhouses for long periods of time without water, are not illegal at this time. This report is focused on the prevention of, and enforcement of laws pertaining to, illegal harm of animals.

The elimination of cruelty to animals matters, first and foremost, because animals are sentient beings. This means they can think and feel, and have an awareness of self. Causing harm to others, regardless of their species, is ethically unacceptable.

At the same time, there is a significant and growing body of evidence establishing a clear link between violence against animals, and the eventual or simultaneous abuse of women, children, seniors, or other people. Those who are cruel to animals exhibit higher rates of anti-social and destructive behaviours.

Consequently, animal cruelty needs to be taken seriously. Legislation is crucial, but so too is the enforcement of laws. Over the past several years there have been calls for stronger animal cruelty laws from across the country, with some modest success. However, all laws are only as good as their enforcement. More specifically, the effectiveness of all laws results from the number of people responsible for their enforcement, as well as these workers' efficacy, skills, working conditions, and resources.

Profile of the OSPCA's Cruelty Investigations

STRUCTURE

The OSPCA is divided into four regions: north, central, east, and west. The OSPCA has its own branches, and local humane societies or welfare organizations also may be *affiliates*.

OSPCA Branches:

Barrie Animal Centre
Huron County Animal Centre*
Kent Count Animal Centre
Leeds & Grenville Animal Centre*
East Region Investigations Facility*
Midland & District Animal Centre*
Muskoka Animal Centre
Orangeville & District Animal Centre
Provincial Education and Animal Centre (Newmarket)
Renfrew County Animal Centre
Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Animal Centre
Sudbury & District Animal Centre*

Affiliate Societies:

Brant County SPCA
Cambridge & District Humane Society
Fort Erie SPCA
Guelph Humane Society
Hamilton/Burlington SPCA
Humane Society of Kawartha Lakes
Kitchener-Waterloo Humane Society
Lincoln County Humane Society
London Humane Society
Niagara Falls Humane Society
North Bay & District Humane Society
Northumberland Humane Society

Affiliate Societies, continued:

Oakville & Milton Humane Society
Peterborough Humane Society
Thunder Bay & District Humane Society
Timmins & District Humane Society
Welland & District SPCA
Windsor/Essex County Humane Society

Affiliate Societies that have the OSPCA provide animal cruelty enforcement:

Alliston & District Humane Society
Arnprior & District Humane Society*
Humane Society of Durham Region*
Etobicoke Humane Society
Gananoque & District Humane Society*
Georgian Triangle Humane Society
Kingston Humane Society*
Quinte Humane Society
Stratford-Perth Humane Society*

Note: * indicates a location that does not have office space for the cruelty investigations staff member. Officers in these areas work from home offices and/or vehicles. There are ten such areas in Ontario at this time.

WORKFORCE

There are paid positions at the OSPCA, its branches, and its affiliates, in areas such as animal care, humane education, fundraising, or office work. Here we focus on the cruelty investigations staff.

91 people work in cruelty investigations through the OSPCA at this time. Women comprise 62% of the OSPCA's cruelty investigation workforce.

- 1 Chief Inspector
- 1 Deputy Chief
- 4 Senior Investigators
- 2 Regional Investigators
- 19 Inspectors: 11 branch, 8 affiliate
- 64 Agents: 19 branch, 45 affiliate

Cruelty investigations staff are generally required to have completed post-secondary training in police foundations, law and security education, or animal enforcement. The OSPCA provides sixteen weeks of training for new hires related to all aspects of animal cruelty

investigation work and the multi-faceted demands of law enforcement. Shorter training and education sessions are also offered throughout the year to encourage continuous growth and learning among officers, and to ensure they keep abreast of the latest research and developments in the field.

Pay scales for OSPCA and branch officers:

- Agents are paid \$19 to \$21 per hour.
- Inspectors are paid \$22 to \$25 per hour.
- Regional Inspectors are paid \$24 to \$25 per hour.
- Senior Inspectors are paid \$30 to \$32 per hour.
- Deputy Chief Inspectors are paid \$32 to \$35 per hour.
- The Chief Inspector is salaried.

Since 2012, staff members employed directly by the OSPCA have received a cost-of-living pay increase. Cruelty investigations staff at branches are afforded eight paid sick days per year. Paid vacation begins at two weeks per year and then increases based on years served. Benefits packages are paid for by officers. There are no pensions.

The working conditions for officers employed at affiliates are different. 53 people, or 58% of the investigations staff work for affiliates. The conditions also differ across affiliates depending on the local society. In particular, the pay is usually lower. Officers at affiliates often do not have benefits packages, and are more likely to be responsible for additional, non-enforcement work (such as animal control). However, a few affiliates are unionized and certain aspects of officers' working conditions at these locations may be better, as a result.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Ontario relies primarily on a complaint-based reporting system for animal cruelty investigations. In other words, the OSPCA depends on people to report suspected cases of animal mistreatment, particularly in private homes but also in facilities where animals are kept for exhibition, entertainment, boarding, hire, or sale. The OSPCA now receives 18 000 complaints a year and over 30 000 calls.

OSPCA investigations officers have the same legal authority as police to enforce animal cruelty legislation in Ontario. OSPCA officers may observe a property, request permission to enter, can speak with people and examine animals, obtain warrants, issue orders to remedy problems, revisit to ensure compliance, seize animals, and lay charges. If prosecuted, those found guilty of animal cruelty can be fined, jailed, required to cover costs associated with the investigation and/or care of animals, and face restrictions on their use and ownership of animals. If charges are laid and cases brought to court, OSPCA officers are responsible for preparing and providing pertinent legal documentation themselves, and are regularly called to testify.

At any given time, OSPCA officers will receive new calls that need investigating, follow up on existing cases, complete paperwork and reports, speak and work with local or provincial police, children's aid societies, or other social service providers, and participate in legal proceedings. Senior Inspectors have added responsibilities including inspection of zoos and First Nations communities, and the preparation of reports to government.

In addition to multi-dimensional daily workloads, seven officers are on the Major Case Management team (and three are reserve members). All Major Case Management team members have other responsibilities as well, such as a separate daily call load and/or they are responsible for media, fleet management, livestock complaints, or special projects.

As noted, at the affiliate level, some officers are involved in animal cruelty investigations while also being responsible for animal control (picking up strays).

FINANCIAL CONTEXT

The OSPCA is not part of the Ontario government or the public sector; it is a charity and nonprofit. The OSPCA's largest stream of revenue is private donations from individuals or organizations. As a nonprofit, the OSPCA issues financial reports annually which are publicly available. Here we focus on financial matters related to cruelty investigations.

In 2004, \$119 000 was provided by the Ontario government to the OSPCA to support training of officers. This amount increased to \$500 000 in 2007. In 2012, the Ontario government began providing \$5M a year for cruelty investigations. The budget for the province of Ontario is currently just under \$134B, therefore the funding for cruelty investigations amounts to 0.004% of total expenditures. Like many nonprofits, the OSPCA also applies for and receives certain smaller public grants to support specific initiatives, such as summer students and spay/neuter centres. Animal control positions at affiliate humane societies are generally funded by the municipality for the service of picking up stray animals.

The \$5M in funding from the provincial government has been provided annually since 2012. However, this funding covers less than one third of the animal protection budget. In other words, animal cruelty investigation work in Ontario is still dependent on private donations. In contrast, local, provincial, and federal police, as well as conservation, fisheries, and food inspection officers, are funded through the public purse and are understood to be providing a public service.

Key Findings

A) Most OSPCA cruelty investigators are working in the field on their own, and a number are responsible for extremely large geographic regions.

The increase in public funding has allowed the OSPCA to expand its coverage province-wide for animal cruelty investigations. However, particularly in the north and east, officers are responsible for areas that can take four to five hours to cross. As a result, responding to a single call may take a full day. An officer may also drive for multiple hours only to find that no-one is present/home and therefore initial contact cannot be made and a full investigation cannot commence. The officer will have to make another drive to again attempt to make contact on another day. As noted, the OSPCA receives close to 18 000 complaints per year.

At any given time, OSPCA staff members are responsible for dozens of cases at different stages of the investigations and prosecution process. Multiple calls may be received on the same day and yet because some officers must travel such great distances, they cannot respond to them all promptly. Cruelty investigators must then try to prioritize the case(s) of most urgency based on what was reported, and what they are able to learn by speaking with the person who reported the issue.

OSPCA officers do not have partners. As a result, whether the journey is short or long, they are usually on their own. In certain circumstances, such as if a reported situation sounds particularly dangerous or if a complaint has been received about someone known to the OSPCA, a Senior Investigator may join a field Inspector or Agent. Field officers can also contact local or provincial police and request support. However, human-centered police forces are themselves busy and may not be able to accompany OSPCA officers. In general, OSPCA officers work in the field alone.

OSPCA officers encounter people with very different attitudes, temperaments, personalities, and mental states on a daily basis. Although some are not committing cruelty to animals, many are. As noted, this abuse can be purposeful or unintentional, and it may be isolated or part of a larger pattern of abuse and violent behaviour. OSPCA officers deal with a very wide variety of complainants, suspects, perpetrators, and types of victimization, not to mention a diversity of species of victims.

This combination places intense demands on the officers themselves. When coupled with the sheer volume of complaints, response times can be negatively affected. In short, vulnerable animals can be left in harmful situations for longer than is certainly desirable.

An experienced officer explained:

“I cover two counties and this year I’ve got seventy calls in, that’s not counting the ones left over from last year. So, just to give you a perspective, if I’m at the south end of my territory, and I have to go to the north end, it’s a five and a half hour drive. So, I’m eleven hours in and I haven’t got any work done, just going there and back. So, it’s very difficult, and I’m by myself, I cover all those territories by myself. I work by myself and I don’t have the capability. Actually sometimes I don’t lay charges when I should simply because I don’t have the time other than that I’d be leaving other stuff sitting on the side.”

In other words, due to the geographic distances and workload demands, certain officers have to make very difficult decisions about where to allocate their time and resources, and cannot be as thorough as they would like to be. The coverage officers are able to provide varies depending on the area of the province to which they are assigned. This constrained decision-making negatively impacts the animals involved, and takes an emotional toll on the officers.

Moreover, geography is not the only factor affecting investigators' time and workloads. Agents who work for OSPCA affiliates (rather than branches) may be simultaneously responsible for cruelty investigations and animal control work:

“I also work for a humane society, and we’re a little bit different: we also do animal control. So we have a large area that we do animal cruelty with, get a high volume of calls, and we also have to do animal control, stray dogs, dogs hit by car, dog bites, police assist, and we work twenty-four hours. So we are up in the middle of the night, two, three o’clock, sometimes we work an eight hour shift, but really you work sixteen hours because you are helping the police with a crime scene that someone shot themselves, and you’re picking up all the animals, and we work weekends too, and it’s only me and one part-time woman.”

B) OSPCA cruelty investigators must work with limited information, and, at times, without a means to communicate with co-workers, supervisors, or other law enforcement agencies at all.

The OSPCA officers cannot access data in CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, prior to beginning an investigation. When other law enforcement agencies respond to calls and complaints, they are able to ascertain certain information about the individuals they will be visiting such as if they have a criminal record or possess a registered firearm.

In contrast, the OSPCA is reliant primarily on information provided by the person who called in a concern. Most Ontarians who call the OSPCA’s cruelty investigations hotline or email the organization are well-intentioned and provide information that is as accurate as possible. The information provided by people who make complaints is essential, but it is only

part of the picture. They are relying on what they can see or hear, and may not be able to fully determine the seriousness of a situation, so can over or under-estimate, or simply be incorrect.

Animal cruelty investigations workers rarely know in advance if they are approaching individuals with weapons, an otherwise volatile or dangerous situation, someone with a serious mental health disorder, or people in crisis who might immediately need additional support and assistance.

Of this challenge, an officer said the following:

“I cover [name of area] for instance, and I have a good rapport with that police service. They will often provide me with that information if I go in ahead of time. Problem is when you get nine or ten calls a day you can’t do that with every single call. So, unless the complainant, the person calling it in, provides us with details that this person has previously been violent or flagged or something, we do go in cold. We have very little information.”

Along with large geographic regions and limited information, a number of officers must enter into and travel across areas without cell phone service on a regular or even daily basis. In other words, individual officers not only go alone to investigate suspected animal cruelty on a regular basis, they may be out of cell phone reach while on the road, and while on private properties conducting investigations.

OSPCA workers based in more remote or expansive regions all raised this as a serious concern. Officers from all over the province flagged this issue as posing a particular risk for workers in more isolated and/or northern areas. For officers in the north and rural regions, a lack of cell phone service is a daily occurrence. It is commonplace for them to be both conducting initial investigations without prior knowledge about who they are approaching, and doing so without an easy and reliable way to contact their supervisor or emergency services if necessary.

Unlike local and provincial police, OSPCA cruelty investigations staff also do not have radios which allow them to communicate directly with dispatch or other officers. They are reliant on BlackBerries and therefore on cell phone towers. A number of officers also explained that the BlackBerries used are very old, thus regularly go “cold” (automatically shut off certain functions, etc.), and have unreliable batteries, problems which make the devices difficult to use.

Branch officers’ vehicles are equipped with GPS, so it would be possible to find the recent location of an officer if she/he went missing, though perhaps after much time had passed. The OSPCA workers try to keep in contact with each other, and Senior and Regional Investigators take proactive steps to monitor the whereabouts of the field staff in their areas. However, if there is no cell phone service, the only option available is to identify the location of the parked vehicle.

The length of time investigations calls/visits take varies substantially. Someone on a property conducting an investigation out of cell phone range for an hour may be engaged in useful dialogue with those in possession of animals, or may be in danger: there is no way for someone on the outside to know. A majority of workers who participated in the focus groups explained that they feel it is only a matter of time before an OSPCA officer is killed. Clearly, this is very alarming.

C) All officers are working under trying conditions, and the challenges are even more significant for women.

OSPCA officers see animals in distress, regularly. They see violence, neglect, and very difficult situations such as people coping with dire poverty or illness, or the abuse of children and women alongside animals. The work of animal cruelty investigations is physically, psychologically, and emotionally trying. Workers must be part police officer, part nurse, and part social worker. The challenges are compounded by the fact that OSPCA officers must approach investigations with minimal information, can lose the ability to communicate with others, mostly work alone in the field, and may need to travel, by themselves, for many hours.

The impacts can be difficult to deal with:

“When you go to a horrible situation and you don’t get to show your emotions, you have to be in your zone, and then you get back in that car and your heart is breaking because you have to leave that dog behind because you don’t have enough [evidence] to do the order. And you’re driving, and you don’t have anyone to talk to.”

“I’ve had to pull over because I am crying too hard to drive. I’ve had to stop if I can’t cope, I can’t see, I’ve had to stop until I calm down.”

All officers identified the extreme and wearing demands of their work. They worry about their physical safety and that of other officers, particularly women and newer hires. They speak frankly about themselves or their co-workers experiencing compassion fatigue - also called secondary stress disorder - which can lead to depression, burnout, and other mental health challenges. This is a serious and established problem for people in social services, first responders, and others who must confront harm and trauma on a regular basis. Workers who witness horrors and empathize with victims are negatively affected, even though they have not experienced the violence first hand. The OSPCA has programs in place to assist officers, but the realities of their work, and the current working conditions, mean secondary stress disorder is likely.

Officers spoke about feeling unable to shut off, literally or figuratively, working well beyond their shift, foregoing vacation, and feeling guilty while on vacation worrying about animals who might not be getting the protection they need.

One officer articulated the problem as follows:

“I find it’s stressful for me to not to respond quickly because I feel like I’m adding to the animal’s distress. So we talked about doing it tomorrow or shut your phone off, but for me, it creates a distress on me because I am thinking there is an animal that needs me and I need to respond. We don’t have enough resources and by not having the resources then I feel that, I feel you have to work longer and harder to make up for that because animals are counting on us to get down to it.”

The stress is exacerbated by mixed responses among the general public. The officers are viewed in many ways by members of the public: some appreciate their work, while others loathe the OSPCA staff, either because they are viewed as “dog catchers” or people who will seize your animals, or because they are seen as not doing enough to help animals. A lack of understanding about cruelty investigators’ responsibilities and powers, and hostility from some members of the public contribute to normalized disrespect. Officers experience threats, as well as verbal and physical abuse. Certain officers spoke about a reluctance to talk about where they work in basic social settings when not in uniform due to their concerns about potential tensions or even verbal abuse. Verbal abuse is a regular part of their job while in uniform.

Such workplace negativity is damaging to all officers, but women face additional harassment, sexism, and belittlement. OSPCA workers flagged the additional challenges faced by female officers due to the high prevalence of animal abusers being men, as well as larger, discriminatory ideas about men’s roles in society. Female officers working on their own, in isolated areas, without the ability to communicate with their supervisors and co-workers are particularly vulnerable. Devaluation combined with difficult working conditions that do not provide sufficient protections mean extra hardships for female officers.

D) OSPCA animal cruelty officers are making a positive difference in the lives of animals and people, despite the difficulties and limitations of their work. Beneficial changes have also been implemented in recent years, particularly as a result of the small amount of public funding. But current conditions are not acceptable and more improvements are needed.

Close to 100% of the officers identified a desire to help animals as the reason they began their work and why they continue, despite such multi-faceted challenges. No-one is working in animal cruelty investigations for the money; the pay is substantially lower than human-focused law enforcement, as well as less than for conservation, wildlife,

and fisheries officers. Most OSPCA officers also do not have the benefits or protections of union membership unlike most other law enforcers, although a small number of local humane societies are unionized and cruelty investigators may be included in the union. As Chief Inspector Connie Mallory put it, “The inspectorate within the Ontario SPCA are primarily hardworking, dedicated individuals that love the work that they are doing for less remuneration than other enforcement agencies receive.” The long amount of time most officers have worked for the OSPCA is noteworthy and demonstrates great commitment.

Similarly, no-one works in cruelty investigations because they want to see animals euthanized or left in harmful situations. The opposite is true; OSPCA officers are motivated first and foremost by a desire to help animals. This is unequivocally clear. They are affected by the size of their workloads, the amount of time investigations take, and the regions they must cover. Officers are also bound by existing legislation, by a duty to protect communities and people as well as animals, by the relative willingness of the Crown in the jurisdiction to pursue animal cruelty charges, and by the recommendations of veterinarians or other professionals enlisted to assess animals and specific situations. Put simply, most OSPCA officers are striving to do the best they can and working to find the most positive solutions given the constraints of their jobs and existing legislation.

Many highlight the importance of the support they receive from co-workers, supervisors, and the OSPCA's cruelty investigations wing more broadly, particularly in the last few years.

“It’s always a team approach. It’s never, you’re going to do this whether you like it or not. You are heard, your opinion is valued, and your work is valued, and you are respected, and you know that no matter what happens, they’ve got your back. And so there is that loyalty and you know that it sounds corny, but these are people that know what you are going through, they are like an extended family.”

Officers are also doing a substantial amount of work given the limitations of their jobs. Much of it is not known to the broader public, and what many officers will do to protect animals, assist marginalized and vulnerable people, and find compassionate solutions largely goes unrecognized. They work intensely with veterinarians, animal care staff, landlords, other law enforcement agencies, and social service providers to try and gain supports for people and their animals. Officers revealed compelling stories about trying to minimize harm to both people and animals.

For example, an officer shared this moving story, which had happened just the morning before our focus group.

“This man is a sweetheart, he has a severe mental disorder, he has been diagnosed with severe depression. He gets \$660 from the government to live on, \$330 of that goes to his subsidized rent, leaving him with \$300. X amount goes to his phone, and x amount goes to his cable, and it leaves him with \$66 at the end of the month, after he has bought food and litter for his two cats. \$66 to feed himself for the whole month. This man loves his cats, he’s got two. He saved his money - from his \$66 - for seven months, to get enough money to put his female cat through our spay and neuter clinic. Seven months!

[But] his one cat has a tape worm, so what am I supposed to do? Go over there and write him an order that I know he can't comply with? And then go and take his cat away so he falls further into depression? For what? He is a good owner, he puts food for the cats before himself and thankfully we came up with a viable solution - he was crying on the phone. So, we picked a vet, his normal vet. The cats are going there, and we are going to pay for it under investigations, and I was just talking to one of our officers, and we are going to go load up with a bunch of food and litter [to help him]."

Another female officer shared this experience:

"We see the worst first... They will call because the dog is crying and making noise and they think the dog is being abused, but it is the wife getting the shit kicked out of her, and the dog is reacting to that. It is that. Or we get called and oh the apartment is dirty, well the woman was in so much back pain she couldn't move, the apartment was cluttered... and [the landlord is saying] 'you're going to take that cat, you're going to take the cat.' And I said no. I said 'where is her next of kin?' [But] she doesn't have any. So I argued with the landlord to get her help. 'If you want your unit cleaned, you are going to have to get her help, she can't walk, her pain meds are not working.' The landlord reported her because of the cat, but we are not taking her only friend if we can help it."

These are simply examples of the many things OSPCA officers do on a regular basis away from the limelight to try and create a more humane province. Compassionate acts are at the heart of much cruelty investigation work.

Cruelty investigation in Ontario has changed substantially since a single police officer was assigned responsibility for animal protection in 1887, after extensive lobbying by the OSPCA. Longer-serving officers spoke of earlier times in their careers when they had to use their own vehicles to transport animals, and had no uniforms. Officers also spoke of using donated vehicles baring the logo of the company that had provided the car or van, which not only contributed to a lack of public respect for them as law enforcers, but caused confusion for all sorts of people.

In recent years, the introduction of uniforms and other changes at the OSPCA have increased the professionalism and standards, particularly at branches. The conditions at affiliates vary a great deal, and there is still no equity or consistency across the province. As noted, there are ten local regions in Ontario where the cruelty investigations staff person has no office space and works from home and/or a vehicle (which may be their own private vehicle).

The \$5M in public funding is widely recognized as directly benefiting the quality of cruelty investigations which can be conducted, and as allowing the OSPCA to grow in key ways:

- better provincial coverage due to the hiring of five additional staff members
- the ability to be both proactive and reactive in First Nations and other isolated northern communities
- an expansion of spay neuter clinics in remote places that do not have a local veterinarian
- the launch of a 24 hour call centre staffed by trained staff who, as Chief Inspector Connie Mallory, explains “understand how this information must be gathered or secured for the integrity of an investigation.”

Training has also been improved and extended. This has meant officers are better prepared and equipped for the field and for their work-lives as front-line animal cruelty investigation officers, and are able to be safer and more effective. There has been a marked decrease in turnover, as illustrated by the fact that 10 new recruits were trained this year, which is a significant decline from 50 half a decade ago. This is noteworthy because of the investment the OSPCA makes in officers, and it is far preferable if new hires remain and commit.

The Major Case Management team has also been introduced. Chief Inspector Mallory elaborated on its significance:

“The major case management team was only a dream of mine and now is a reality due to the government funding. It allows the society [the OSPCA] to have a team of highly skilled almost elite individuals that have the ability to focus on high profile and in-depth investigations that require a certain level of expertise in forensic evidence collection, search warrants, photography, animal hoarding, puppy mills, bestiality, dog fighting cases, etc. Other law enforcement agencies now recognize us as the experts in animal cruelty cases and will call us for assistance or advice.”

These initiatives are heralded by the officers, but, of course, mean additional work and responsibilities. For example, complaints and call volume have increased which means more suspected cruelty is being identified, so more investigations need to be conducted and therefore workloads increase further.

The fact remains that despite these important improvements, OSPCA officers are working under difficult conditions which directly affect their ability to investigate animal cruelty, and place unnecessary hardships on them as workers and people. More needs to be done to protect the officers, improve their ability to do their jobs as thoroughly as they would like, and increase the likelihood of more effectively identifying, combating, and, ideally, preventing harm to animals.

Recommendations

1. The Ontario government should provide the funding for two-way radios or spot trackers for all OSPCA field officers.

It is unacceptable to be legally mandating that an organization carry out work without ensuring that basic safety measures are in place to protect the people who do that work. The fact that a number of field officers are out of cell phone range on a regular or even daily basis is very troubling and must be corrected. The status quo is not sustainable and endangers officers, particularly the women who comprise the majority of the OSPCA officers. The risks posed by not having a fast way to communicate with other officers or emergency services do not simply affect those in remote regions either. All officers must enter into volatile and potentially dangerous spaces and interactions as a normal part of carrying out their duties. In high-risk situations, the time needed to take out a cell phone and contact co-workers or even to make an emergency call if service is available could make a crucial difference for the safety of an officer or member of the public.

Two-way radios are used by other law enforcement agencies to immediately reach the right people and would afford OSPCA officers the same level of access to professional assistance. Alternatively, new technologies such as spot trackers allow front-line law enforcement workers the ability to immediately and easily dispatch an emergency message, a more specific help request, or a simple confirmation that she/he and the situation are stable. This one-time initial cost is an investment in the safety of the officers that is well worth making. Once provided, the technology should be monitored on a periodic basis, with updates provided as needed to ensure continued security.

2. BlackBerry Limited ought to donate new BlackBerrys to the OSPCA to ensure that officers can have efficient and reliable non-emergency communications, and commit to supplying new devices as needed.

Along with immediate emergency notification tools, OSPCA officers should be able to quickly and easily communicate with their co-workers, supervisors, and other law enforcement agencies. The BlackBerrys used by many of the officers are outdated and erratic, and cause unnecessary and unhelpful delays for OSPCA staff seeking to maintain basic communications. Given the already large workloads and multi-faceted demands placed on officers, such delays are not only frustrating, they are inefficient, and mean more time is spent waiting for phones to turn back on or fully engage—time which could be spent on animal protection.

As a Canadian company and one with a stated commitment to corporate social responsibility, BlackBerry Limited would do well to ensure that OSPCA officers have fully-

functioning current technology by providing up-to-date devices today and in the coming years.

3. The OSPCA inspectorate should be able to access CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, like other law enforcement bodies.

CPIC exists to provide law enforcement agencies and officers with specific and pertinent information about people they are investigating, such as if they have a criminal record or possess a registered firearm. OSPCA officers are carrying out their legal duty to enforce animal cruelty legislation and must physically meet unknown people continuously. OSPCA officers have the same powers as police to enforce animal cruelty laws, so they should have, at minimum, access to the same basic information.

We understand that issues of confidentiality might be a concern in granting the OSPCA access to CPIC, but would point out that the OSPCA is already dealing with highly sensitive information in a responsible and professional manner. Although granting access to each individual officer would be preferable for the sake of speed and efficiency, if that is deemed unfeasible, access could be granted to a few designated officials within the organization who could provide information to individual officers on a need-to-know basis.

4. The \$5M in public funding provided by the Ontario government for cruelty investigations is a good start, but is insufficient.

The OSPCA cruelty investigators are providing a public service, one which they are required to do by law. Donations and fundraisers such as bake sales are an unacceptable and highly improper way to finance law enforcement.

The \$5M in public funding which is now provided annually by the Ontario government is a promising first step which has allowed the OSPCA to hire a handful of new officers, as well as improve and extend its work in meaningful ways. Yet this amount, which is a mere drop in the provincial budget bucket, only covers one third of the current animal protection costs.

The OSPCA officers are doing a remarkable job of enforcing cruelty legislation and protecting vulnerable animals given the constraints of their jobs and the limited resources. Given what the OSPCA has been able to do with such a small amount of funding, there is significant potential for the reach and quality of cruelty investigations to improve in meaningful ways with additional resources. New officers could be hired to decrease workloads and/or allow for partnering, the working conditions of officers could be improved, the detail and depth of investigations could be strengthened, and more cases could be investigated, therefore more animals helped. At the same time, crucial preventative work could be expanded to stop problems before they start.

Animals directly benefit from cruelty investigation. Animals are part of our families and communities, and they are sentient beings who deserve lives without harm and distress. At the same time, because violence against animals is often directly connected to the abuse of women and children, there are even more compelling reasons why animal cruelty prevention and prosecution is worth supporting and expanding. Up-front investment would yield social and financial benefits measured in the saving of money, and most importantly, lives, down the road.

5. Larger and more conversations are needed about the OSPCA, animal cruelty investigations in Ontario, and how we can build a more humane province.

The other recommendations are clear, specific steps which should be implemented promptly to address the safety and wellbeing of animals, the public, and OSPCA officers. What is also clear is that the future of animal cruelty investigations in Ontario warrants greater attention in the medium term.

This study, and the daily operations of the OSPCA, raise key questions such as whether the current tapestry of branches and affiliates provides the most consistent and ideal service or working conditions across the province, whether the OSPCA's law enforcement work should be separate from its sheltering services and charitable functions, and whether animal cruelty investigations should become part of the fully public law enforcement umbrella. The answers to these important questions are beyond the scope of this report, and will require the thoughtful engagement of many stakeholders from the OSPCA and its affiliates, law enforcement, government, and the broader animal advocacy community. Further research, particularly on best practices in other jurisdictions, would help to inform these discussions in important ways.

As people learn more about diverse animals' minds, emotions, and social lives, it also becomes clear that there is a serious need to revisit and re-conceptualize what constitutes animal cruelty, animal wellbeing, and which animals warrant protections. There is an encouraging growth and diversification of animal advocacy in workplace, political, and legal arenas, and more and more people are learning about the many relationships we can or do have with animals, how our choices and actions affect nonhumans, and how we can make more positive choices that demonstrate compassion for others, as individuals and as a province.

Ontario is home to many species, all of whom matter. There is a lot to learn from the harm people inflict, as well as the good we do. We have a responsibility to support those who work every day alongside and on behalf of those in need, and to think about the many ways we can build a more humane Ontario.

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