

***In April of 1998, eight year old Courtney Trempe was killed by a neighbour's 5 year old male bullmastiff in Stouffville, Ontario. During that inquest, a panel of jurors made 36 recommendations they felt would prevent or significantly reduce the number of dog bites/attacks. Here are their recommendations.***

## **EDUCATION**

Inasmuch as there has been consistent testimony throughout the inquest as to the benefits of the education of children, parents, dog owners and the public in general about appropriate behaviour toward dogs and responsible ownership of dogs, which would serve to reduce the number of dog bite incidents, We the Jury, have a number of recommendations in this regard.

We the Jury,

1. Recommend, that the Ministry of Education require all Ontario Boards of Education to implement a student education program in elementary schools for the prevention of dog bites and the better understanding of animal behaviour. It is our suggestion that the Department of Public Health be responsible for implementing this program by making regular visits to the individual schools.
2. Recommend that the media (children's television programming) include programs teaching young children recommended behaviour towards the treatment of dogs
3. Recommend that the media with each article about a vicious dog attack, print a small informative TIP from a recognized agency relative to the incident (i.e.: if approached by a strange dog, stand still, talk, back away).
4. Recommend that all municipalities provide resources for an Education Officer to work in the community educating both children and adults about responsible pet ownership and the prevention of dog bites.
5. Recommend that inasmuch as infants and young children are a high risk category with regard to serious dog bite injury, that the Ontario College of Family Physicians undertake to educate their members in this matter. Their responsibility would include the education of parents regarding the safeguarding of their children from dog bites and recognizing the danger of leaving children alone with any dog.
6. Recommend that because veterinarians are well placed to educate dog owners in responsible ownership, we recommend that the Veterinarians' Association advise their members to educate dog owners about dog bite prevention, dog behaviour and the benefits of neutering and spaying.
7. Recommend that in order to educate dog owners, the Provincial Government consider the preparation of information regarding selection, training and responsible dog ownership. This information along with the distribution of the Dog Owner's Liability Act should be distributed by the veterinarians and animal shelters to their clients.
8. Recommend that a website be designed as a tool for better understanding and education for all dog owners (responsible ownership, government regulations, how to choose your pet, listing of breeders, agencies and associations and teaching children safe behaviour around dogs).
9. Recommend that information about responsible dog ownership be provided with the purchase of dogs from breeders and pet store owners.
10. Recommend that all dog owners be required to post a provincial standard sign indicating that a dog lives on the premises.
11. Recommend that the Provincial Government and other interested agencies and municipalities promote ideas that foster public education like the proposed Dog Bite Prevention Week and that pamphlets be offered on one's rights and responsibilities when it comes to pets.
12. Recommend that all dog acquirers be required to take a course in pet ownership and responsibility.
13. Recommend that veterinarians be trained with courses in animal behaviour and regularly update themselves in this area with recognized institutions in veterinary medicine and that a recognized questionnaire be developed by the Canadian Association to aid vets in identifying potential problems with dogs or their owners.

## LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

Testimony during this inquest has revealed that the present system of reliance on municipal bylaws of itself, is inadequate to safeguard the public in the matter of dog bites. There are problems regarding the enforcement of restraint orders from one municipality to another. There are also problems regarding the process of implementation of restraint orders and lack of uniform terminology. In order to discourage irresponsible dog ownership and to provide thorough and equal protection of the public across the province as a whole from a dog who has bitten or attacked, We the Jury

1. Recommend that the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be amended to allow for ex parte hearings in which the court may order that an owner of a dog take steps for more effective control of a dog or may order that a dog be destroyed.
2. Recommend that the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be amended to allow a judge to order that a dog be confined or restrained by leash or muzzle when on the owner's property or in public pending the determination of whether a dog is dangerous or pending any appeal of such a determination.
3. Recommend that the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be amended to specifically identify, for the benefit of judges, methods by which dogs may be restrained. These methods may include leashing, muzzling or providing for a dog enclosure of a specified size.
4. Recommend that the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be amended to provide for an automatic restraint order for dogs that are ordered by a judge to be destroyed.
5. Recommend that fines under the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be substantially increased, since an economic impact can be an effective deterrence to irresponsible dog ownership.
6. Recommend that persons who are found liable under the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be prohibited from owning another dog for a period of time designated by the court.
7. Recommend that the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* be amended to prohibit the training of guard dogs and attack dogs other than for the purpose of ownership by police or a registered security agency and that they only be housed in totally secured areas or taken out in the hands of an authorized and certified person.
8. Recommend that in redrafting the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* consideration be given to information contained in EXHIBIT #21 of the Inquest, as appended to this verdict.

## REPORTING, RECORDING AND RESEARCH

We the Jury, find that information in many instances is incomplete, not standardized and difficult to access.

We the Jury,

1. Recommend that there be an analysis of current reporting procedures and that there be implemented a centralized database by the provincial government. This should include a standardized format and compulsory requirement for the reporting of dog bites. This might be done through the Ministry of Health because of the health risk and cost.
2. Recommend that there be in place a province-wide system of record keeping that follows dog owners as they change addresses and as they move beyond the boundaries of a municipality.
3. Recommend that municipalities keep active records relating to by-law enforcement, and particularly animal control for a period of time to be determined.
4. Recommend that a toll-free number be accessible for all dog owners as a "help line" for information to assist the community with inquiries regarding concerns/incidents involving canines.
5. Recommend that the system of licensing and registration of dogs provide a provincial wide tracking of any dog.
6. Recommend that the tagging and licensing of dogs be incorporated with rabies injections produce a single dog tag, thus ensuring a more accurate, consistent and comprehensive licensing system.

7. Recommend that the Provincial government develop a protocol which requires that a dog involved in a serious biting incident be given behavioural and physical testing by qualified individuals, prior to being euthanized in order to improve our knowledge of why such incidents take place.

## **BREEDERS, TRAINERS AND ANIMAL SHELTERS**

We the Jury,

1. Recommend that the Provincial government consider a certification process for breeders, trainers and behaviourists as a requirement for obtaining a business license. This will allow the public a level of confidence when choosing a breeder, trainer or therapist and provide for consistency of standards and techniques.
2. Recommend that the province examine ways to regulate the selling of dogs in pet stores in order to limit the sale of improperly bred dogs (i.e.: puppy mills).
3. Recommend that the Canadian Kennel Club require a behaviour component in all confirmation classes to encourage positive traits in any given breed.
4. Recommend that all animal shelters neuter or spay the dogs they release to the public for adoption.

## **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

We the Jury,

1. Recommend that the Province recognize the importance of dog bite prevention by providing adequate funding and other resources to address this problem in areas of education, enforcement, research and development.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

We the Jury,

1. Recommend that Health Canada create an agency to collect and analyse Provincial information relating to dog bites and attacks.
2. Recommend that this agency work with other countries to obtain as full an understanding as possible about who, when and why dogs bite and how to prevent these bites.

## **FOLLOW UP**

We the Jury, recommend that the Chief Coroner for Ontario publish a report on the status on these recommendations in one years' time.