



Presentation

Animal Club, encouraging compassion

By Katy Wood

“... At our Animal Club meeting this week we spoke about free range vs cage eggs and watched the documentary "Farm Animals and Us". It led to some interesting points of view being raised by our Club members. We also carried out an activity, pretending we were caged chickens with an A4 space of ground to live on for the rest of our lives. That certainly made an impression. We think we will continue the discussion next week with more contributions and ideas from the Animal Club members as a follow on”. (The Emanuel School, NSW - September 2007)

“... Our ‘Heads and Tails’ Animal club is run weekly at lunch time with the help of 3 integration aides and the Principal! We have more than 60 members and new members are signing up every week! We have been involved in lots of activities already and because there are so many of us, there are lots of important issues we can focus on. We run 4 focus groups to help us achieve our goals.

- One team does research into important issues with the intention of circulating petitions to help the plight of their chosen animals.
- Another team are designing posters to encourage people to donate items for animal shelters, such as shredded paper and unwanted blankets.
- Team 3 use their artistic skills to encourage the local community to think about the way they treat animals, as well as raising awareness of different issues around the world.
- And my team has assorted duties to work on, such as raising litter awareness and the danger it poses to animals and the environment, letters to government and animal poetry. Some of my group members have even performed a fabulous play at assembly to encourage people to treat animals better.

We work in our focus groups fortnightly, because, on alternate fortnights we share warm and fuzzy stories about animal rescues and heart warming tales from around the world. We’ve also had lots of visits from pets in our school community to help us learn how to care for animals.

Heads and Tails have organised a visit from the people who run the Responsible Pet Education program for the whole school next month and before the end of the year, we aim to raise money for the Diamond Creek Donkey shelter and we will have a visit from

one of their lovely donkeys for the whole school to share". (Donvale Primary School, VIC – October 2006)

“ ... At our weekly meeting our Animal Club leader, Mrs. Ritchie read to us “All Pigs are Beautiful” by: Dick King-Smith. This book was a reward our club was given by Voiceless for our Animal Club activities. It was really good and it told us a lot of stuff about pigs that we didn't know. After the story Mrs. Ritchie showed us a piggy hat and told us that all of the Animal club members at Clifton Hills would be making piggy hats to show how we felt about pigs and some of the problems they face.

Then we all brainstormed phrases and short sentences that we could put on our pig hats. Here are the ideas we had: *Give the pigs freedom *Stop pig cruelty it's not fair *Don't kill the piglets *No pork on the fork *Pigs are clean and cute *Give pigs a chance *Save the pigs *Knock down walls and stalls *Pigs are like people, they need their space *Pigs are Kool! *If we have life, why can't pigs? *Let pigs roam free *Even pigs need hugs *Don't destroy pig's dreams *Keep pigs off the concrete *Real homes for pigs *Be kind to pigs they have memories". (Clifton Hills Primary School, WA - June 2007)

These are just 3 examples of humane education in practice through Voiceless's Animal Club. Simple activities such as those I have just described to you really help to encourage compassion and respect within the context of the school environment. They are indicative of the ways in which young people can be encouraged to think about issues they wouldn't normally come across.

Every time we receive an Animal Club activity update (which is a very regular occurrence) we are reassured that teaching the younger generation to think about animals and to be gentle and caring towards them is an important and worthwhile undertaking. It will come as no surprise to you that receiving these updates keeps us inspired from day to day.

My name is Katy Wood, and I'm here today as a representative of Voiceless, the fund for animals, the organisation that founded Animal Club, to share with you some of the experiences and insights we've gained over the last year and half since Animal Club was established.

But first, let me tell you briefly about the wonderful organisation that is Voiceless.

Voiceless was established in 2004 by father daughter team, Brian and Ondine Sherman because they felt passionately about animals and wanted to take action to help them.

Voiceless's goals are: to promote respect and compassion for animals, to take action to alleviate their suffering and to raise awareness of the conditions in which they live.

Our work is undertaken through our 3 arms:

- 1) Grants Program, we provide funding to organisations that share our vision (such as Griffith University and Compassion In World Farming who were awarded a \$20,000 grant last year to make this symposium possible);
- 2) Education arm we work to educate Australians and in particular young Australians about animal issues – in schools through Animal Club and now also through our university campus network, Voiceless Animal Advocates (VAA) which was launched in August;
- 3) Legal arm, we work to modify or create legislation and policies to protect animals.

J.M. Coetzee (Nobel Prize for Literature Winner 2003 and author of 'Lives of Animals' and 'Elizabeth Costello') is one of our patrons and Australian actor Hugo Weaving is the Voiceless Ambassador while Abbie Cornish is Ambassador for Animal Club. Abbie has appeared in the films Candy, with Heath Ledger, and A Good Year with Russell Crowe.

Voiceless's work focuses primarily on lifting the veil of secrecy on factory farming industries as we believe this to be an issue of the highest priority in animal protection in Australia.

Now let us turn our attention to Animal Club. I am very excited to have the opportunity to show you our brand new Animal Club video. This is the very first public screening of the video which has been produced over the course of this year. I hope that it will provide you with a clear picture of what Animal Club is all about.

[Voiceless's Animal Club promotional DVD is shown at this point]

While the overall purpose of Animal Club is to foster the feeling of empathy and kinship that children naturally have for animals, it is also a good way of educating young people about the ways in which animals are mistreated in Australia.

Each year, Voiceless awards a 'Humane School Prize' of \$5,000 to the Animal Club that has done the most to help animals. This year, so as to broaden the range of Animal Club activities from focusing primarily on companion animals, and to encourage club members to learn about farm animals too, we have selected the Chinese Year of the Pig as a sub-theme for the competition.

Each Club is therefore required to undertake at least one pig related activity in order to remain eligible for the 2007 Humane School Prize. It is rewarding to note how many clubs have already risen to the challenge with considerable creativity and innovation.

We now have over 1000 school students involved in Animal Club activities. In addition to these Animal Club members, we are also in contact with many other students and teachers who simply use our website as a reference tool to access humane education materials and ideas.

We have learned a great deal in the 18 months since Animal Club came to life, and we are continually at work trying to improve the Club processes so as to make it a better experience for both students and Club leaders alike.

Most recently, we surveyed all of our Club Leaders to ask them specific questions about how we could improve Animal Club. One of the issues we touched on, and which we are constantly dealing with, is the availability of humane education resources for Animal Club activities at school. Almost universally our Club Leaders indicated a need for good lesson plans, activity sheets, and connections to existing curriculum materials.

This is where the Animal Club website comes in – www.animalclub.org.au It is a comprehensive resource for teachers containing fact sheets, recommended activities, curriculum links and humane education resources. It is also a work in progress, constantly being updated and expanded.

The website's capacity as a resource benefits hugely from the input we receive from other educators and concerned individuals who make contact with us and, at times, offer their materials for distribution through the site.

All of the materials made available on the Animal Club website must of course be thoroughly vetted, not just to ensure accuracy but also to check that they have been prepared sensitively and with great consideration for the young minds they will help to shape.

With this in mind, the Animal Club website as a whole has been created with sensitivity and the utmost awareness of the confronting nature of the issues being addressed. All of the materials have been well-researched and thoroughly referenced with the intention of raising awareness and promoting critical thinking in a way we believe is suitable for children. The website has also been designed to present a range of issues so that Club Leaders can select an agenda they consider age appropriate for their own Animal Club members.

It can be said that one of the aims of Humane Education is the creation of a culture of empathy and caring. This is also one of the fundamental goals of Animal Club. The incorporation of humane education programs (such as Animal Club and other initiatives like it) in schools is an incredibly important means of sowing the seeds to make for a compassionate and caring new generation of Australian citizens.

On behalf of Voiceless, I am honoured to have been given the opportunity of taking part in this landmark event, the first Australian Humane Education Symposium. In our capacity as the facilitators of the Animal Club network, the Voiceless team is incredibly glad to form part of a growing network of Australian humane educators.

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Katy Wood

Having said that, we usually only ever meet our humane education friends and associates in cyberspace. It makes for a delightful change to be physically present here today at such an important gathering of teachers and practitioners, all working at the cutting edge of humane education in Australia.

There is no doubt that this symposium will play a significant role in assisting the Australian humane education community to thrive and grow. We believe your own development as humane educators will result in the increased availability of higher quality humane education resources which can only serve to enhance programs such as Animal Club.

We have great faith that the humane education movement in Australia has a bright future. Thank you for being a part of it and for helping us to contribute in our own way, through Animal Club, as well.

Q – Delegate:

Katie, what response have you had to Animal Club from rural Australia?

Katie:

Well, as Senator Bartlett mentioned, it did cause a little bit of controversy when it first started, which was a bit of a surprise. But after those initial teething problems, it settled down really well and I think it's been quite broadly accepted. I think it was probably just a matter of understanding what Animal Club is about and we've actually had a lot of really positive responses from people in the rural community. We do have some clubs in the rural community and we even had farmers and other members of the rural community writing in when Animal Club was established, saying what a great idea they thought it was. So, there you go!

Q – Delegate:

I'm a psychologist who's very interested in animal welfare. Do you have anything planned for the secondary students? There seems to be something for the littlies and something for the biggies, but how about the people in between?

Katie:

Animal Club, as it is, is actually open to all school students. So it is potentially there for kindergarten to Year 12. At the moment, most of the Clubs are operating within primary schools, but we do actually have some secondary schools signed up as Animal Clubs.

Obviously, the materials used by and the activities that high schools need to be involved in are going to be at a different level, so we do try and accommodate that and provide all of the materials we can on the website, so that if a high school did want to join, there will be the right sort of resources and ideas there for them. But there's always, I suppose, room to kind of broaden, potentially, down the track. And, I guess, divide it all up. But at this point, we do sort of try and keep it out there for all school students.

Q – Delegate:

Katie, you've said you provide resources. How do you ensure there's a balanced point of view with those resources? Do you provide information from industry or is it purely from an animal welfare perspective?

Broadly speaking, probably most of the references in our Reports are from industry, as industry has all of the facts and statistics. And so, yes, we do try and provide a balanced approach. Obviously then, within the actual Animal Club website and the Voiceless website, the focus is on promoting compassion and respect, so most of the links of activity ideas and activity sheets are going to be with a focus on promoting compassion.

That said, we do aim to have all the right facts and in terms of promoting critical thinking, it is really important for everything to be accurate. So, as I said, all of the materials on the website are thoroughly vetted and checked, to make sure that no-one's being misled and that all of the students and anyone who may use the website is getting access to really well-referenced and well-researched materials.
