



### Aaron Gilson

Dog Trainer

### Troy Ellis

Team Leader

Animal Welfare League of South Australia



Aaron Gilson is an extremely talented Behavioral trainer, he holds a certificate IV in Companion Animals- Behavior through the Delta Society and runs his own dog training business when not working with the many animals that come into the care of the AWL on a daily basis. Aaron has been part of the AWL team for 12 years and is also currently studying under a scholarship with The Jean Donaldson Academy for Dog Trainers in San Francisco in the US.

Troy Ellis is a long standing Team Leader with over 20 years' experience in the animal welfare industry. He is both a dog and cat specialist and is a great problem solver. Troy enjoys teaching team members new skills and has been enjoying dabbling in the world of doggy playgroups when he is not managing the AWL's Edinburgh North Shelter.

## Abstract

### How Far have we come at the AWL of SA?

This presentation will share the progress of the AWLSA over the last couple of years. We will discuss places we have visited (UK, other states etc.) and people we have hosted (Dr Cynthia Karsten and Trish McMillan Loehr) that have inspired and educated us to work towards improvements and the impact that the 2015 G2Z Summit had on those of us whom attended.

It will talk about some of the smart sheltering strategies i.e. managed intake, capacity to care etc. that we have been working towards.

This presentation will share the struggles we have had with introducing change, although positive and maintaining enthusiasm within the shelter environment. How we engaged the staff and volunteers and the outcomes.

We will share how we got started, how we prioritized, some of our successes and some of our challenges. There will be lots of examples, pictures and anecdotes that we hope will inspire people to get started and encourage people to continue and just keep going!



## Full Paper

We thought this was a good opportunity to report back to you about what the AWL SA has taken on board and implemented since the last summit in September 2015.

Our Animal Welfare & Services Manager (Leanne Page) was fortunate enough to head over to the UK in April 2015 to attend the ADCH (Association of Dogs and Cats Homes) conference to gain an idea about where we sit within the animal industry in comparison to other parts of the world.

She also visited a few animal shelters and rescue organizations over there and found that really we are not alone as we know other countries face similar issues in this industry and they were also dabbling in some of the US driven smart sheltering strategies.

Leanne then returned and presented to the staff about what she had seen and learnt whilst over there.

This was received by our staff with the usual cursory enthusiasm and occasional disapproval, however overall it seemed we had picked up a couple of good ideas. Leanne soon found that it was difficult to maintain the enthusiasm and even harder to dissolve the disapproval. It was tricky to get people on board and implement any of these positive changes just by herself.

In September 2015, several AWL staff attended the 6th National G2Z Conference. Some of you would have been at this conference yourself and heard from the wonderful speakers from NZ and the US who are clearly leading the way in these smart sheltering strategies.

We realized pretty quickly that we couldn't tackle all of these topics all at once so the big 3 for us were the playgroups, the managed intake strategies (offering people/owners options other than surrender) and the overall improvements in the adoption process, for example having conversations rather than a Spanish inquisition and judgmental questions!

A few of us worked together on a presentation for staff and volunteers and we held a couple of sessions over dinner time so of course we fed and watered everyone and this naturally helped with attendance!

We got very involved in the playgroup training, and sourced all of the equipment needed and then started involving the staff and volunteers at the AWL's Edinburgh North Shelter. We created 'champion' roles to help spread the word and assist in training other staff and volunteers. Time and staffing availability is often challenging but we do try to get as many of our adoption dogs and some even waiting for processing out for a playdate or two! The benefits are seen within the dogs themselves but this is also a great tool for gathering personality information about the dogs to give to potential adopters.

We have also been able to transfer our skills from playgroup sessions to introducing resident dogs to possible new additions to the family. This often makes families feel more confident in introducing their new dog to the resident dog once they arrive home as they have also then picked up some skills and techniques on safe introductions, body language and behavior.

We also started talking and talking and talking about what Capacity 4 Care means, how we need to calculate it, what we need to improve and what managed intake actually is, but it was clear we initially needed to get better at collecting and recording the data to be able to accurately assess our C4C. We then created a few more 'champion' roles to assist us to achieve this.

In order to improve the adoption experience and the managed intake strategies we developed a couple of champions in this area too to spread this message and try out a few new ideas. One example was to not sound like a robot when reciting the adoption paperwork but rather having a CONVERSATION with potential adopters rather than facilitating an interrogation session!



We have had many successful outcomes using these strategies;

- We helped a man get over 12 cats desexed that he and his wife had been “taking care of” for the last 12-18 months at his workshop rather than surrendering them and risking euthanasia due to the fact that they were not handle able. They are now maintaining their group, no further litters and they are living their own lives. We have done this on quite a few occasions now, where we believe their welfare is good, someone is caring for them but they are not necessarily pets.
- We have had many people be able to keep their pets (even if just long enough to come up with another option) rather than surrender them because we have assessed that they just needed a hand with some food or sometimes emergency boarding for a week or two.
- We have also performed a couple of surgeries on pets of people that had come in to surrender them because they couldn’t afford the veterinary treatment they were quoted. Generally if we have assessed that this animal is best with its owner and indeed this person needs to keep their pet, we have helped them out.

We really just started thinking differently son rather than a mindset of “another animal coming in”, it is now more like “how can we keep this pet with their owner”

We started to work with quite a few Rescue Groups in SA but the pit falls of this is the constant changing of their people, structures and then also philosophies which can then be challenging for us to keep up with in terms of appropriateness of the transfer.

We also launched our first offsite Adoption Centre at Port Adelaide in July 2016 where we started rehoming cats and kittens. We rehomed over 300 cats/kittens in 12 months and it was particularly successful with the more difficult to rehome adult cats that would have deteriorated in a shelter environment. While we were pleased with the number of adoptions and we have had many successful adoptions from here with positive feedback, the foot traffic wasn’t as high as initially expected. The rent and the staffing costs are high and it was surprisingly difficult to keep volunteers in this environment. We would love to talk to you guys about your experience with recruiting and retaining volunteers in all environments!

Early this year PETstock owners and managers visited our Port Adelaide Adoption Centre and were very impressed with the concept and the set up. In May this year we entered into a partnership with PETstock where they adopt out AWL shelter animals on our behalf. At this stage we are offering this at two of the PETstock stores but there are plans to increase this over the coming months.

AWL provided their staff with comprehensive training and have regular catch-ups to work through any issues that arise. This has been really successful so far as we have rehomed over 80 cats/kittens through these stores to date.

We were also very aware that our shelter facilities also needed updating and we needed additional facilities to further enhance what we do and to continue with some of these improved rehoming strategies, the keeping pets in their homes and offering options so we needed more space, different rooms, better enclosures etc.

We were extremely lucky to have such a great CEO and Board who really wanted to help us to achieve these outcomes. So we set about the mammoth task of master planning the whole site at Wingfield but with some shorter term plans particularly for our cattery.

We revamped our cattery and clinic areas to now include a purpose designed and built isolations ward, a cat assessment room, a cat holding/chill out room and a separate species specific euthanasia room for cats when all other alternatives and/or treatment options have been exhausted. We have been using these new areas now for over 12 months and of course there are lots of mistakes that we have made, ones that you only know about when you have moved in and started using the spaces. Examples of this would be the design of the holding/chill out room could have been better and the nursery really should have been wider to accommodate the cat condos on both sides of the room, but we will learn from this and take these experiences to the next stage.



# Getting them Keeping them **HOME**

7TH NATIONAL  
G2Z SUMMIT

Most exciting is the fact we are commencing the next second stage which is whole site redevelopment.

The highlights of this redevelopment are:

- Modern design with state of the art facilities
- A more open site allowing for more green space for animal exercise and enrichment activities.
- A central customer hub to facilitate a more transparent and welcoming adoption experience
- Two story design – our cattery will be amongst the tree tops!
- An environmentally and ergonomically sustainable design for animals and people.

As an overall example of the impact these strategies have made the following numbers speak for themselves:

Comparison's from the 15/16 FY and the 16/17 FY

- We have had 240 less animals come in to the shelters
- We have euthanased 1,370 less animals
- We have rehomed 984 more animals

All of these numbers are going in the right direction!

Was all of this easy...absolutely NOT!

Do we have lots more to do...absolutely YES!

Will we keep improving and learning...without a doubt.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME