

Mental Health of Pets

My mother grew up with dogs at home and is therefore very passionate about companion animals. When I asked for a dog, she hesitated to get me one. At the age of 11, I began repeatedly pleading for one, which became a topic of debate in our household. My mother believed that I was not prepared to handle the duties of pet ownership. To prove myself, I offered to take complete care of our neighbour's dog, Ben without any compensation. Over the next few months, I would walk Ben, feed him, play with him, and clean up after him. Once my parents saw my dedication, they decided that I was ready to have my pet. As I was too young to handle rescue pets with special emotional and care needs, we got a puppy from a responsible breeder. I named my Maltese puppy Benny after my neighbour's dog. Benny and I are now best friends, siblings, and partners in crime.



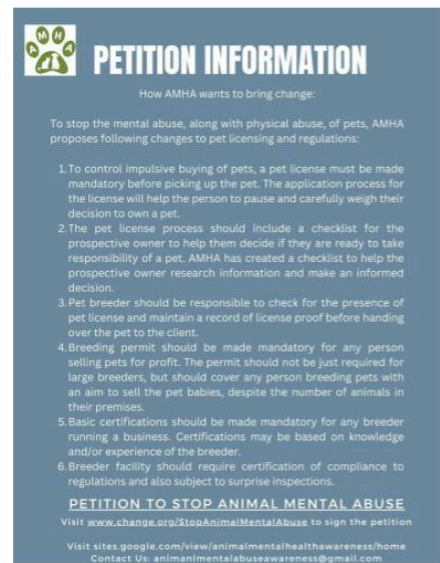
COVID-19 brought to light the importance of human mental health. It enabled the creation of several resources to assist people with basic mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Yet everywhere you would see one solution to solve all these problems: buying a pet. This sparked a surge in pet business sales, with people buying pets impulsively to improve their mental health. But what was unknown was that pets also require mental health care.

After a while when people realised that addressing their pet's demands was a lot of effort and they couldn't give that level of care, they had to let go of them. Shelters rapidly filled up

while some people simply abandoned their pets. On June 1st, 2023, a man reportedly abandoned two dogs in a travel cage outside the Calgary Humane Society in a temperature of 30 degrees Celsius.

This is why I started Animal Mental Health Awareness (AMHA). My mission is to spread awareness about animal mental health and take preventative measures to help reduce pet mental abuse. My vision is a world that understands and respects the emotional needs of animals. There are six main points I have proposed to bring change in pet purchase policy:

- To control the impulsive buying of pets, a pet licence must be made mandatory before picking up the pet.
- The pet licence process should include a checklist for the prospective owner to help them decide if they are ready to take responsibility for a pet.
- Pet breeders should be responsible for checking for the presence of a pet licence and maintaining a record of licence proof before handing over the pet to the client.
- Breeding permits should be made mandatory for any person selling pets for profit.
- Basic certifications should be made mandatory for any breeder running a business.



- Breeder facilities should require certification of compliance with regulations and also be subject to surprise inspections.

I began my journey by launching a petition on change.org and distributing posters that I designed and printed at home. I went door to door in my community and spread the word at my volunteer places to gather signatures for my petition. I currently have more than 290 signatures on my petition.

I submitted an email outlining my concerns to the office of Bonnie Crombie, Mississauga's Mayor at the time. My biggest challenge was to ensure my email was taken seriously. I researched the losses faced by the city of Mississauga due to a less strict licence policy which led to a lot of non-registered pets and unpaid licences in the area. By providing information about how the city can also reduce their losses if they implement my suggestions, I was able to draw the attention of Jay Smith, the head of Mississauga Animal Services. We scheduled a Zoom meeting to discuss my initiative and the changes that I proposed. He was quite grateful and encouraging. We had a lengthy discussion on the steps necessary to implement these adjustments. I left the meeting feeling like my issues had been acknowledged and that someone was eager to discuss them and make the necessary changes.

In Dec 2023, the Province made a change by introducing the PUPS Act. Its purpose is to “crackdown on puppy mills” by introducing the following changes:

Set out a new prohibition on operating a puppy mill in Ontario with associated offences and new minimum fines, if convicted.

Enable Ontario to make regulations in the future setting out conditions for the sale or transfer of dogs and governing record-keeping concerning dogs.

Make a clarifying amendment to authorise the use of enhanced debt collection tools by AWS to collect unpaid debts to the province.

These are a great start to lessen the number and/or effect of puppy mills, but making changes to the license itself ensures that puppy mills cannot profit.

Currently, I am actively encouraging my school students and teachers to participate in the initiative. I presented my plan to the school's environmental club and encouraged students to help collect additional signatures for the petitions. So far, the petition has received 30 more signatures thanks to the efforts of my peers. During one of these sessions, I met a law teacher at our school. She suggested bringing it to her class as a brainstorming session on a real-world problem. I've created a presentation tailored to her class, as well as a list of questions for the students on AMHA's effort, feedback, and suggestions. Students will not only learn about animal health issues and my effort through this activity, but they will also be able to provide me with feedback and offer their ideas on enhancing my cause.

My campaign is still alive, and I will continue to work until I make concrete improvements to ensure that pets' mental health is not neglected. I am working towards integrating my initiative with the school Environmental Club so that I can recruit more students every year to spread the word and gather momentum in collecting signatures for my petition.

Works Cited

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