Systemic Approach to Responding to Animal Cruelty

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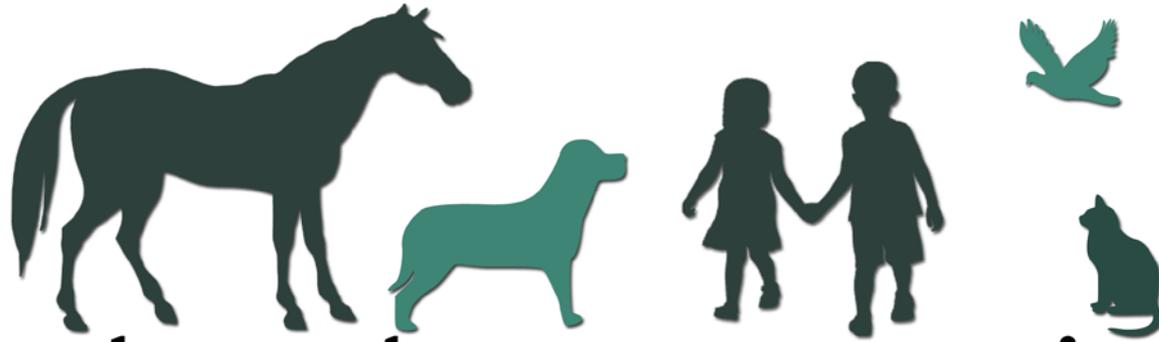
The Institute for Human-Animal Connection

Mission

IHAC intentionally elevates the value of the living world and the interrelationship and health of people, other animals and the environment. We accomplish this through natural and social science-informed education, applied knowledge, research and advocacy, with an ethical regard for all species.
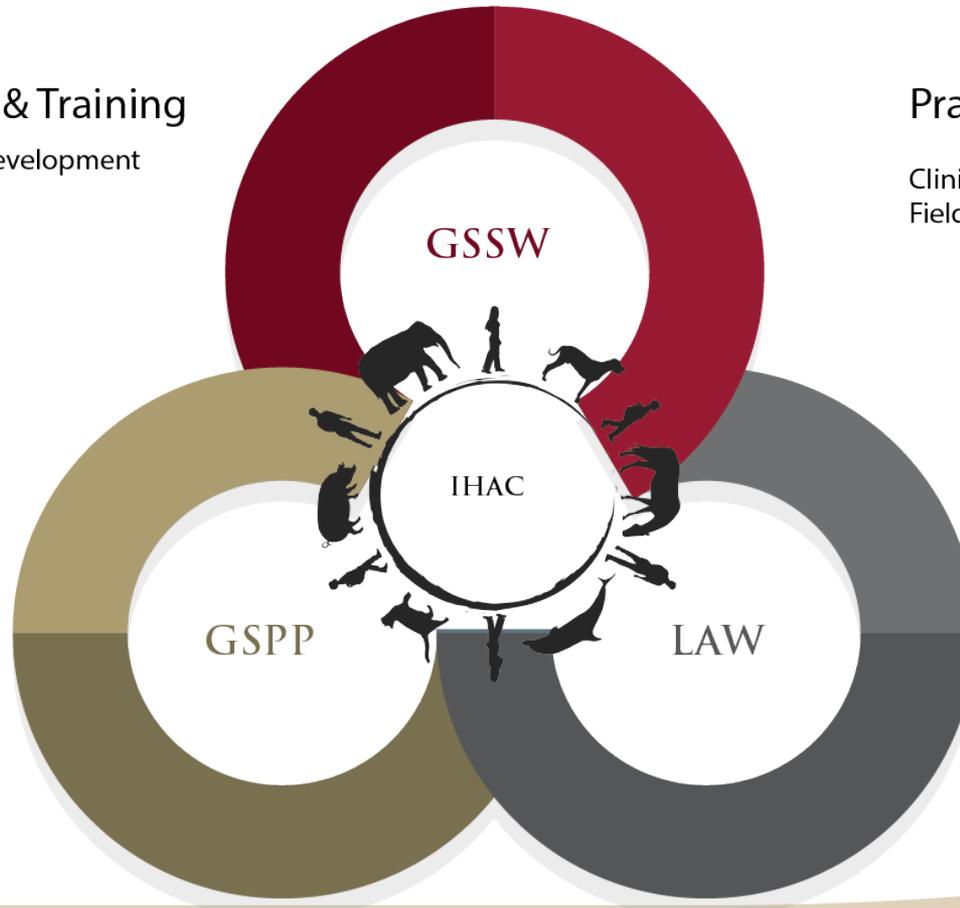
Philip Tedeschi Forensic Social Work and Animal Cases → Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluations at the Denver FIRST Clinic 2014

Wide range of underlying, root causes of Animal Cruelty Behaviors →Individualized Assessment to inform treatment and supervision needs

Community Needs

Advice about how to handle animal cruelty cases, especial how to identify high risk cases

Barriers to Implementation

Lack of evaluators and treatment providers

Multidisciplinary Grant Opportunity

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- Development of clinical competencies for treatment of persons engaging in animal cruelty behaviors, convicted of animal cruelty
- Working toward the development of a validated risk assessment instrumentation: Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool (AARAT)
- Training for professionals on the FAME and AARAT
  - Criminal Justice System (e.g., judges, lawyers, probation)
  - Evaluators and treatment providers
  - Research on animal cruelty cases in Colorado to inform training

- (II) In addition to any other sentence imposed for a violation of this section, the court may order an offender to complete an anger management treatment program, a mental health treatment program, or any other appropriate treatment program designed to address the underlying causative factors for the violation.

- (III) The court shall order an evaluation to be conducted prior to sentencing to assist the court in determining an appropriate sentence. If the violation is a felony offense in violation of subsection (1.5) of this section, a felony offense in violation of subsection (2)(b)(II) of this section, or any other violation of this section demonstrating knowing torture or torment of an animal that needlessly injured, mutilated, or killed the animal, the court shall require a comprehensive evaluation to help determine the causative factors.

Why?

- Elevate animals to the level of victims
  - Animals deserve to be viewed as victims
  - Public health and safety implications
- Humane communities framework
  - Incarceration is too often conflated with clinical assessment and treatment
- Evidence informed practice
  - Grounded in best practices for forensic evaluation and current research
  - Incorporate needs and feedback of our community partners in Colorado
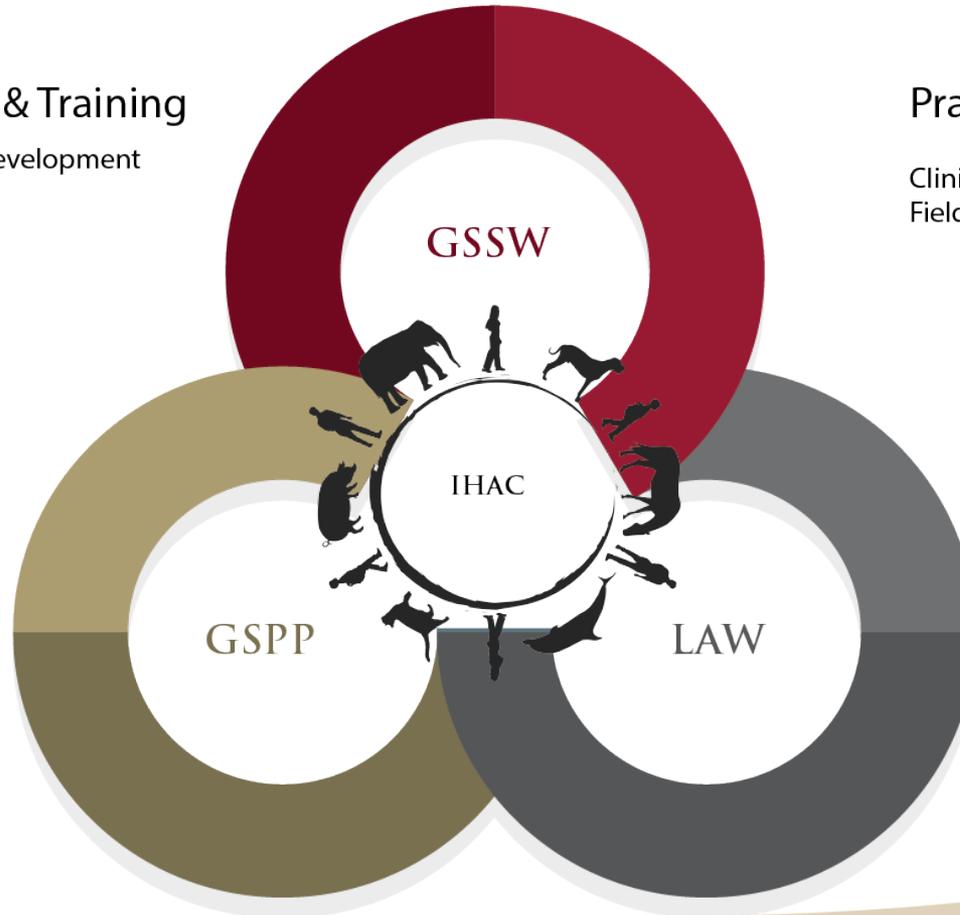
Need for a Validated Risk Assessment Tool

- The need for a psychometrically valid risk assessment tool is evident given the Colorado mandate for evaluation prior to sentencing (Colorado Cruelty to Animals Statutes, 18-9-201).
- Goal of risk assessment is not dichotomous (person will or will not reoffend) but estimation of "the relative likelihood of future re-offending" (Levitt & Grisso, 2016, p. 300).
- Empirically valid risk assessment measures can provide quantitative, objective data about the individual's actions; these data can inform legal and intervention decisions.
- Such a measure would be particularly valuable in situations where an individual may under- or over-report experiences or symptoms.
- No validated risk assessment tool for animal abuse at present.

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Development of the AARAT

- The Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool (AARAT), created by Professor Philip Tedeschi (2000) at the University of Denver's (DU) Graduate School of Social Work, was designed to assess static and dynamic variables of risk.

- Fifty-seven items represent specific risk criteria identified by Dr. Randall Lockwood of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

- The original version of the AARAT has been used to evaluate approximately 20 animal maltreatment offenders at the DU's Professional Psychology Clinic and Denver Forensic Institute for Research, Service, and Training (FIRST) clinic.

- The AARAT features items that address static (unchanging) and dynamic (fluid, potentially responsive to intervention) risk factors.

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First AARAT Revision: First Phase

- Students from the Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP) at the University of Denver(DU) reviewed the AARAT and submitted comments regarding items they perceived as problematic.
  - Two items were double-barreled.
  - Other items required operationalizing of terms; were deemed confusing; or lacked clarity in the response options.
  - Overlap of items was noted, as well as gaps in AARAT content.
- Summaries were written for each problematic item.
- Each AARAT item was entered into an Excel file and matched with items from the Checklist of Factors in the adult AniCare guide (Shapiro & Henderson, 2016). Overlap of items was noted, as well as gaps in AARAT content.

First AARAT Revision: Second Phase

- Three GSPP students wrote vignettes and accompanying interviews based on the following abuse scenarios: hoarding, dog fighting, and neglect.
- Three other GSPP students acted out the roles of interviewee and interviewer for the three scenarios. These interviews were filmed.
- Seven GSPP students viewed the filmed interviews and completed the updated version of the AARAT for each one.
- The students' responses on the completed measures were entered into a statistical software program database (SPSS v. 23, IBM Corp., 2016). Data for each scenario were analyzed separately.

Results of First Revision

- The students' responses diverged on many of the open-ended and multiple choice items, suggesting ambiguity in item wording and the need for further refinement.
- The range of responses indicated that the interview questions and answers could be interpreted in multiple ways.
- Some items were rewritten for clarity.
- The category "Emotional Experience of the Perpetrator" was renamed "Motivation and Culpability;" "Family Characteristics" was renamed "Client's Personal and Family History;" and a new category called "Client's Criminal History" was added.
- Eight new items based on risk factors identified in the animal abuse literature were added for a total of 64.

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Statistical Analysis of AARAT Items

- Descriptive statistics were calculated for open-ended and multiple-choice items. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), a measure of internal consistency reliability, was conducted on the items with dichotomous (Yes/No) response options.

- Results of the KR-20 analysis for internal consistency were ambiguous due to restricted observation variance (response options were limited to Yes or No) and issues with the ratio of cases to variables and therefore yielded no useful information.

- The alternative strategy was to calculate subscale scores for each scenario; only the dichotomous (Yes/No) items were included in this analysis.

- The range of subscale scores for the dichotomous items only was small in most cases (differences of only one or two points) and across scenarios, providing some evidence for reliable interpretations of the interview content.

Second AARAT Revision

- Second revision is funded by an internal grant from DU.
- An experienced psychometrician was hired to assist in this phase of the measure's development.
- Working definition of animal abuse: "*Any socially unacceptable act or failure to act, whether intentional or nonintentional, that causes pain, suffering, distress, physical injury, or death to a non-human animal.*"
- Our definition draws heavily from Ascione and Shapiro's 2009 definition.
- Content validation: GSPP students asked content experts to provide feedback on the second version of the AARAT. Nine experts responded with comments on item wording, content areas needed, and item coding.

Using the HCR-20 as a Model

- The Historical Clinical Risk-20 Scale (Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997) was developed for evaluating risk of violence in adults with a history of violence.
- Intended for use with the structured professional judgment approach, which involves clinical decision-making based on ratings of an individual's validated risk factors, i.e., no algorithm for estimate of risk (Howe, Rosenfeld, Foellmi, Stern, & Rotter, 2015).
- Robust body of evidence for the measure's reliability and validity
- Items are rated on Presence (present, possibly or partially present, and not present) and Relevance (low, medium, and high)
- Three subscales
  - Historical (static risk factors)
  - Clinical (dynamic risk factors)
  - Risk Management (circumstances that may increase risk)

Current Status of the AARAT

- Team members individually categorized items as relevant to History, Clinical, or Risk Management.
- Working toward consensus on item categorization, e.g., may move four items from History to Clinical because they all have to do with culpability, which is dynamic.
- Developing additional Risk Management items.
- Psychometrician is rewording items so they can be coded as present, possibly or partially present, or not present.
- Reviewing literature to ensure that all animal abuse content areas are included.

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Next Steps

- When consensus is reached on the items, the new version of the AARAT will need to be administered to a large sample (n = 300, conservatively) from the target population of animal abuse offenders.

- Tests of reliability (internal consistency and interrater) will need to be conducted, while validity (construct, content, and convergent) will need to be assessed via the collection of judgmental and empirical evidence.

- Interrater reliability will be assessed via Fleiss's Kappa.

- Factor analyses will be used to determine whether the subscale items are significantly correlated, which would support the psychometric value of the scales.
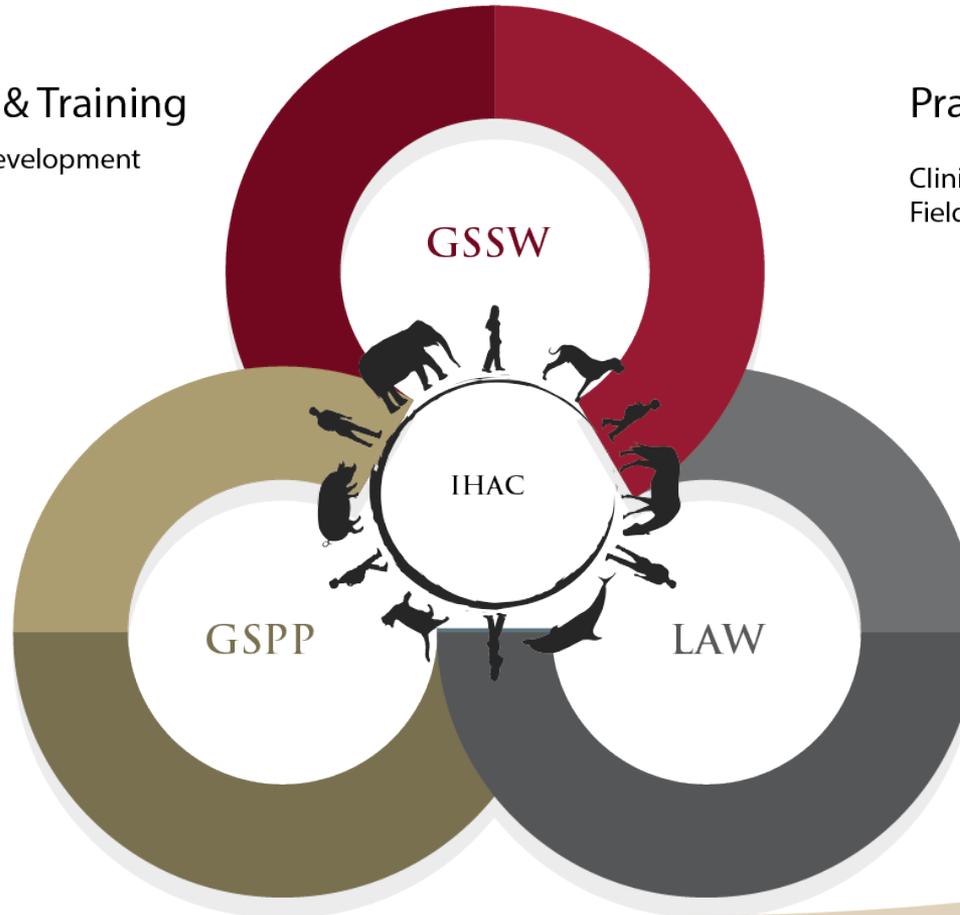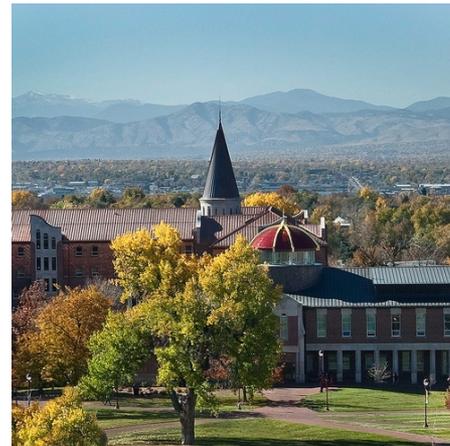
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FAME at Denver FIRST

- Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluations
- Denver FIRST (Forensic Institute for Research, Service, and Training)
- Partnering with CO probation, District Attorney's, and the Institute for Human-Animal Connection (IHAC)
- Advanced level graduate students & post-doctoral fellows; supervised by licensed psychologist

Referral Questions

- Type of abuse:
  - Abuse
  - Neglect
  - Animal hoarding
    - Some likely overlap with object hoarding (Frost, et al., 2014)

- Purpose of evaluation:
  - Treatment readiness (clinical issues)
  - Forensic evaluations (culpability, risk for abuse)
  - Fitness to care for animals/level of supervision

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Challenges

- No standard protocol
  - University of Denver protocol
    - Only known formal protocol
  - Levitt, Grisso and Patronek
    - (*Animal Maltreatment: Forensic Mental Health Issues and Evaluations, 2016*)

- Limited research
  - Rely on correlated areas of forensic evaluation
    - Domestic violence, risk for recidivism, psychopathy, behavioral control disorders, neuropsychology

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DU Assessment Protocol: Overview

- File review of index offense, including veterinary findings and history
- Standard clinical interview; MSE
- AARAT (Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool)
- Assessment of Dangerousness in Perpetrators of Animal Cruelty
- Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences
- Diagnostic Checklist of Typologies
- LS/RNR
- MMPI-2
- Intelligence testing, as needed

- **Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool** (Tedeschi, 2013)
  - Animal Victim Characteristics
  - Animal Abuse Specifics
  - Logistics of Crime
  - Perpetrator Characteristics
  - Emotional Experience of the Perpetrator
  - Family Characteristics

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- **Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences** (Boat,1994)
  - Ownership – how many in family of origin and now
  - Support – use of animal for emotional support
  - Loss – loss of pet and reaction to loss
  - Killing / Cruelty – heard or seen and age
  - Coercion / Control – seen or heard and age
  - Sexual Interactions – seen of heard; who; and age
  - Fears – frightened by animal; age; movies, roadkill

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- **Assessment of Dangerousness in Perpetrators of Animal Cruelty** (Lockwood, 2013)
  - 33-item checklist looking at risk factors for violence against an animal
  - Includes victim vulnerability, # victims, severity of injury, etc
  - Score of 5 or higher indicates high risk

- **Level of Service Inventory: Risk, Need, Responsivity** (Andrews & Bonta, 2008)
  - Categorizes risk for recidivism
  - Central 8 criminogenic factors

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- **Other assessments / factors**
  - MMPI-2
  - Victim empathy
  - Protective factors
  - Specialized assessments as needed
    - Childhood Trust Survey on Animal-Related Experiences (Boat, 1994)
    - Neuropsychological measures

Report Example

- Identifying information/reason for referral
- Procedures and dates of service – including review of information
- Mandatory disclosure/release of Information
- Index Offense
- Additional criminal, delinquent, or antisocial behaviors
- Background History
  - Social/developmental hx; medical hx; substance use/abuse hx; mental health hx

Results of Psychological Testing
- Current mental status/behavioral observations; MMPI-2; Cognitive testing

Risk Assessment
- AARAT
- Factors in the Assessment of Dangerousness in Perpetrators of Animal Cruelty
- LS/RNR

Typology Assessment

Victim Empathy

Protective Factors

Diagnostic Impressions

Recommendations

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- Trends
  - Most MMPI-2 profiles show high social desirability
  - Many show:
    - Discomfort with emotion and conflict
    - Somatic complaints
    - Rigidity, isolation

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- **Hoarders**
  - Low risk
  - Low scores on all instruments
  - Traumagenic, psychogenic typologies (related to trauma or mental health/developmental issues)
  - Dx: OCD, Depression

Examples of Hoarders

- Several cats in home as well as beer cans and personal belongings on floor; overwhelming odor of ammonia; several inches of tissue paper on the floor; total of 50 cats found in the home.

- Two white adult female sheep, one white adult female goat, and two black and white adult female pigs were presented on emergency for examination concerning animal welfare; one dead sheep was in the pen with the live animals; several other dead carcasses were partially buried on the outside of the pens.

- Report received concerning two dead horses and two live, but emaciated horses; a turkey, duck, rabbit, and thin black Lab were also observed. None had food or water and in the pen were several dead ducks.

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- **Abusers**
  - High risk
  - Higher scores on all instruments
  - Criminogenic typology (aggression, substance abuse, animosity, manipulation)
  - Dx: Behavioral, Antisocial PD

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Examples of Abusers

- Argument between sister, mother and boyfriend over a dog who was found unresponsive; dog had sustained head trauma, lots of bruising, and his eye was protruding out of its socket; pelvis and leg were also broken; whole ball and joint socket needed to be replaced because it was completely stripped.

- Defendant had become agitated after being bitten by the family dog, after which he brandished a gun, pointing it at his sister and threatening to kill her. The same report described defendant as having a history of threatening and aggressive behavior in the past, noting he has made threats to family members previously.

- The veterinarian reported to the officer that the injuries to Ziggy were not the result of a fall and appeared to be the result of trauma. The veterinarian also noted that the injuries had caused internal bleeding and would have been fatal to Ziggy had he not been taken to the animal hospital immediately. The veterinarian also reported x-rays taken of Ziggy showed that no food was in his stomach and no stool was in his intestine, indicating he had not been fed for quite some time. The reporting officer documented injuries to Ziggy, including a red swollen left eye, a laceration to the back of his head, and bruising to his underbelly and gums. Ziggy was the defendant's partner's dog.

Cultural Concerns

- Attitudes toward animals vary depending on cultural context

- Rural vs urban setting – consideration of livestock

- Be aware of your own cultural and personal beliefs regarding animals

Self-care

Thank You and Questions

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