

# Vets snip for free in remote centre

Remote communities in northern Saskatchewan could soon receive veterinary services to curb the numbers of unwanted dogs and cats roaming the streets.

The new initiative, Saskatchewan Remote Area Veterinary Services, was born out of Lt. Gov. Lynda Haverstock's concern over the spread of animal-borne disease and attacks by wild dogs, which she has seen during her visits to the North over the last few years. Many pet owners can not afford to take their animals to La Ronge, which itself only receives veterinary services on a rotating basis from a Saskatoon-based veterinarian.

"It becomes abundantly clear that it is really impossible for people to access

*Lt. Gov. Lynda Haverstock helped create a remote area spay/neuter program, that will hopefully reduce unwanted animals in northern communities.*

care for their animals. They care about their animals, but what do you do?" Haverstock said. "You end up with dozens and dozens of animals... and they become a menace."

With that in mind, Haverstock approached Dr. Lesley Sheppard, a veterinarian in Regina, and proposed a solution: a remote area spay and neuter program, complemented by community education and animal vaccinations.

Sheppard quickly committed to the

project, and formed a team of volunteers, including her professional colleagues, Drs. Greg and Karen Harasen and veterinary technician Michelle Scherr, and two professors from the College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon, Drs. Tanya Duke and Kathy Linn.

The team gleaned ideas from a similar program in the United States, where groups of veterinarians, technicians, veterinary students and volunteers travel to different reserves or remote areas. Dogs,

cats and horses are examined, treated for parasites, vaccinated and then spayed or neutered if they are healthy enough. This program has grown into an international effort running year round.

After discussions with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, the team travelled to Stanley Mission on Sept. 7 to test the plan. A one-day event was arranged at the local health clinic, with several rooms set aside in the back for admitting and recovery, while surgeries were performed in the nurses' office. Drugs, rubber gloves, kennels and surgical equipment were all donated.

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# Veterinarians visit Stanley Mission for test project on pet care

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Drs. Duke and Linn brought along three students from the vet college to assist with receiving and admitting the furry patients, counselling their owners, anesthetizing the animals who were to be spayed or neutered, and assisting the animals in the recovery period. Clinic staff, such as health director Wilfred McKenzie and nurse Doris Staflund, helped out behind the scenes.

In addition, the team recruited 20 young volunteers, students from Rhoda Hardlotte Memorial Keethanow High School, to serve as surgical assistants. They unwrapped and handed instruments to the surgeons, and helped shave the animals and insert catheters. Dr. Sheppard also spent time at the high school educating students about animal care.

The free event was advertised throughout the community, and as a result, the team spent a marathon day (8 a.m. to 7 p.m.) vaccinating and/or operating on 47 dogs and one cat. While the vet students were getting hands-on experience working in less-than-ideal conditions with small animals, and gaining confidence and efficiency as they worked, the local youth were putting their brains and hands to work as well.

As Haverstock pointed out, many of the youth from Stanley Mission have worked on their parents' traplines, developing the dexterity and quick thinking that is needed in working with animals. "If they can do that (work a trapline), they can spay and neuter," she said. "They were the perfect kids to do this."

Dr. Linn, who was one of two vets performing the surgeries, was also deeply impressed with the students, notably a Gr. 8 student named Kieffer Roberts. "He was just a joy," Linn said. "He would have done sur-

gery if I'd let him have a scalpel.... He was an amazing surgical assistant."

Linn discovered her passion for animal care by getting a similar hands-on experience at a vet clinic in junior high, and she knows how much such an experience can shape career decisions. She and Dr. Sheppard both spoke highly of the decision to involve the local students, as a way for the students to explore career options and spark an interest in science. It obviously worked for Kieffer Roberts, who said he would like to be a research scientist, but veterinary medicine would be a good choice, too.

"It was pretty exciting for me because I got to help out the community," said Roberts, who is troubled that so many dogs are shot as a means of controlling Stanley Mission's animal population. "I'd like to see the veterinarians come back, because not

all of them (local residents) brought their animals."

Over the next few months, Dr. Sheppard will be raising money for new permanent equipment for the program, and contacting other communities about the possibility of ongoing vet care in the North.

Another clinic in Stanley Mission is already under discussion. "It's been extremely satisfying... and it's been a big team effort" to get this program going, Dr. Sheppard said.

In addition to all the educational benefits, "it's valuable in terms of the health of the animals," Sheppard said. "For some of these pets, it's a hard life," with a shortage of food, no control over pregnancy, and the scrapping and fighting common amongst wild animals. "By starting a program like this, we can help prevent a lot of unwanted animals."

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— Kieffer Roberts,  
Gr. 8 student**



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