



# The RSPCA's Generation Kind: creating the next generation of animal lovers

*TOGETHER WE CAN... IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE*

## Key facts...

- ★ Generation Kind is the RSPCA's new prevention campaign, the biggest campaign of this sort we have undertaken in our 194 year history.
- ★ Generation Kind aims to create a future that is truly kind to animals by nurturing and encouraging the values of kindness and compassion towards all animals within children and young people today.
- ★ Generation Kind focuses on three key areas: young people in schools, disadvantaged and excluded young people and young offenders.
- ★ Our research shows that young children are being exposed to horrific incidents of animal suffering online, in ways previous generations have simply not experienced.
- ★ Education is a key part of Generation Kind. We would like to see animal welfare taught as part of children's formal education in all schools.

## Introduction

Alongside our work to enforce the law on animal welfare, the RSPCA has been promoting the prevention of animal cruelty for 194 years. Our broad range of work and long experience give us a unique insight into animal offending behaviour and how to prevent it, including amongst young people. Our first education programmes for young people were set up in 1882 and were effective and innovative in their day. With the way young people obtain information and communicate changing all the time, and especially in the last decade, we now need to respond to this challenge. Generation Kind is the first step of that response.

Over the past decade, the number of animal cruelty complaints the RSPCA investigates and the number of advice and improvement notices our inspectors issue has remained fairly stable. In 98% of cases where our inspectors have issued an advice or improvement notice no further action has been necessary to improve the animal's welfare, showing the potential power of the preventative approach. But by definition these notices can only be issued once some kind of concern has arisen. If we can intervene earlier and engender a respect for animals in young people, we can reduce the likelihood of even this sort of action being necessary in the future.

## Young people and animal cruelty

The RSPCA has been conducting studies into young people's role in and relationship with animal cruelty for over a decade. Our first, in 2007<sup>1</sup>, identified a substantial minority of 13-17 year olds who frequently abused animals (with offending peaking at around 15 years old). The study also showed that, whilst animal offences were less common than other types of violence, there were many crossover characteristics between individuals involved in animal cruelty and other types of violent crime.

The key change in the past decade has been in the way young people communicate and share information. Crucially, RSPCA prosecutions have seen a significant shift towards the sharing of images of animal cruelty on social media and particularly, in the past three years, on Snapchat. In 2015, we investigated 27 cruelty complaints that involved images or video shared on Snapchat. By 2016, this figure was at 69 complaints, and by 2017 it was up to 167: a fivefold increase in just two years.

<sup>1</sup> McVie, S (2007) *Animal Abuse Amongst Young People Aged 13-17: Trends, Trajectories and Links with Other Offending* (report for the RSPCA)

It's not surprising that the number of young people reporting being exposed to images of animal cruelty is also high. A recent survey for the RSPCA showed that 48% of young people have witnessed animal cruelty. Only 3% of this figure had witnessed it directly, however, whilst 23% had witnessed it on social media<sup>2</sup>.

### The importance of empathy

Empathy is an important aspect of a child's development and includes both their cognitive and emotional responses to other people. Interventions that enhance a child's empathy towards animals will have an impact on children's ability to care for them and potentially on the longer-term development of positive attitudes and behaviour towards animals in general. Contact with animals can also be used as a way of promoting the development of empathy as animal-directed empathy may be generalised and fall into human-directed empathy too. It is for these reasons that developing empathy is a key aim of Generation Kind.

### Generation Kind

Generation Kind is the RSPCA's first step in addressing the challenges outlined above and creating the next generation of animal lovers. It consists of three main strands:

- **Working with young people in schools:** including our Compassionate Class classroom-based project to provide schools with the resources to integrate animal welfare into their lesson plans (and to which 2,000 schools are currently signed up - double the initial target) and The Great Debate, our schools debating competition;
- **Working with disadvantaged and excluded young people:** including projects at our wildlife centres, such as Hastings Wild Things at our Mallydams Wood centre, to build confidence and practical skills, our work with young people in foster care, in which we work with foster agencies and Local Authorities to offer opportunities to young people that help them develop their understanding of animal needs and how to be safer around dogs, and Paws 4 Change, a project that allows young people carefully controlled interaction with dogs in our care which is of benefit to both young person and animal;
- **Working with young offenders:** including our work with Youth Offending Teams and our Breaking the Chain online toolkit to help young people who have been convicted of animal offences to change their behaviour.

More detail about all of these schemes and projects, including the full Generation Kind report, can be found on our website: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/education>

Generation Kind is only the start of our work in this area and over the next few years we are aiming to progress and expand all of the projects mentioned above, develop more and better resources for all practitioners who come into contact with young people, as well as improving our research base in this area. Politically, we will be working with the Government to make sure animal welfare is taught in all schools and, ideally, included in the National Curriculum. We will also be working with social media providers, especially Snapchat, to develop new ways of ensuring that animal cruelty content is not shared on their platforms, and to put in educational content.

#### **GET INVOLVED:**

**Show your support for Generation Kind by writing to the Secretary of State for Education to ask him to ensure that animal welfare is taught in all schools.**

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<sup>2</sup> Beautiful Insights survey commissioned by the RSPCA, carried out between 23rd and 30th January 2018 (sample size: 1,500 10-18 year olds)