

C2 CITY PEOPLE

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2006

5

first person

Pauline Taylor, former executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is the head of a new animal hospital chain, Pets Central. She explains how the "Hollywood effect" is adding to Hong Kong's stray dog headache

“ The biggest nightmare at the moment is the popularity of husky dogs. There was a wonderful movie *Eight Below* a while ago that got everyone interested in the breed – and now a few months later, they're ending up on the streets.

When a film like that comes out, they bring out fluffy toys, the dogs are in all the magazines, they put them in the shop windows and people fall for them. It's the Hollywood effect.

After *101 Dalmatians*, a year or so later we were seeing lots of Dalmatians being abandoned. Two or three years later and all the mongrel dogs going around had spots. It comes down to whatever is the in-breed at the time.

When they see the puppy in the window, a lot of people go in and buy it for HK\$8,000 or HK\$9,000 and then spend another HK\$4,000 getting its injections and treatments, and really they shouldn't have bought it in the first place.

Huskies are hyperactive dogs, and they are very difficult dogs to train unless you've got tonnes of time for them. A friend asked me a couple of weeks ago whether she should take on a husky who had been bought as a puppy eight months ago and now needed a new home. I told her: 'With your lifestyle, you simply don't have the time.'

Another woman in Sai Kung told me she picked up a husky that someone had dropped on a doorstep. She took it in with her three other dogs and they were going crazy with the husky because it is so hyper.

I do think there should be more government restrictions on pet shops. We have the 'no kill' movement in Hong Kong and the



“After [the movie] *101 Dalmatians*, two or three years later and all the mongrel dogs going around had spots”

Legislative Council is being presented with new animal welfare legislation, which I totally support. I think our legislation needs revamping and it is overdue. I don't think we are doing enough, but I think we are taking steps in the right direction.

There is nothing worse than seeing a puppy going round and round and round in a pet shop window. I would be very happy to work with other pet shops and give them advice. We don't want to preach to them. We want to work with them to upgrade the standard of pet shops in Hong Kong.

The government has introduced changes so that all puppies over a certain age coming into Hong Kong must be microchipped, and pet shops selling them have to make sure they have a microchip. That is a huge step in the right direction towards responsible pet ownership.

It would be nice if pet shops talked more with people buying pets rather than let anyone take on a pet that may be abandoned. That depends on the pet shop and the staff in the shop whether they want a quick buck or whether they want to educate and work with the

customers who are effectively getting a new family member.

We want to work with pet shops to get people to choose dogs to match their lifestyle. At least we could avoid some of these once-cute puppies ending up on the streets a year later.

We don't want people to stop buying pets. It is nice for children to grow up with an animal. People just need to look very closely at their situation. If all you've got time for is a hamster, it's a wonderful pet for children. It doesn't take an awful lot of maintenance and it teaches children a great deal about responsibility.

The step up to a dog is a big one. If you get a little shih-tzu or a Pekinese, they are not so high maintenance and space-conscious.

There have been a lot of changes for the better in the 12 years I have been in Hong Kong. I think a lot of the pet shops know now it is worth their while to work with people buying dogs, rather than just selling anything to any one. But there is still a long way to go.

As told to Simon Parry