



As the founder of KURI, I wanted to add my thoughts to the latest publicity around dog bites. We all know dog bites are an emotive topic, and that a dog's actions are misunderstood by most people. This is one of the many reasons KURI was founded. Anyone coming into our Centre will know we never lay blame on the owners and we never blame the dogs. Why? Dogs simply behave like dogs. Dogs don't behave badly; they behave in a way we should expect them to behave, if we understand them. In the last decade, scientists have made outstanding discoveries to ensure we do understand them.

The facts are enlightening. For example, the average intelligence of a dog is equivalent to a 2-year-old child, and dogs have the same emotions as humans. New Zealand has recognized the latter and changed its laws. Dogs are now classified as sentinel beings. We need to understand that all dogs are thinking, feeling beings. And, like humans, they are all capable of biting.

Dogs bite for numerous reasons, none of which are because they can; it is always a reaction to something that occurs. At KURI we teach people those reasons so that owners understand how to avoid being bitten and how to stop their dogs from biting. If owners do not know those reasons, then how are they supposed to intervene or stop their dogs from doing so? We believe that education is essential!

Imagine being a dog for a moment; or being a 2-year-old child and not being able to communicate with your family or tell them how you feel. You may be scared, or startled, in pain, or unwell. Any of these would cause a human to become hostile; any of these could cause a dog to bite. Welcome to a dog's world.

That said, things around the globe are changing. Countries and states are repealing dangerous dogs' legislation, as they are well aware that it has failed to stop dog bites.

In August 2013, the White House, citing the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, published a statement with the headline, "Breed-specific legislation is a bad idea." BSL is also opposed by major national organizations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, the National Animal Control Association, the Humane Society of the United States, and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Best Friends Animal Society.



In December, 2013 The Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA) published the most comprehensive multifactorial study of dog bite-related fatalities (DBRFs) to be completed since the subject was first studied in the 1970s. It is based on investigative techniques not previously employed in dog bite or DBRF studies and identified a significant co-occurrence of multiple potentially preventable factors. Following this study, The House of Delegates of the American Bar Association passed a resolution urging all state, territorial and local legislative bodies and governmental agencies to repeal any *breed discriminatory or breed specific provisions based on that research*.

The trend in prevention of dog bites continues to shift in favour of multifactorial approaches focusing on improved ownership and husbandry practices, better understanding of dog behavior, education of parents and children regarding safety around dogs, and consistent enforcement of dangerous dog/reckless owner ordinances in communities. They further concluded that multifactorial public and private strategies are the best ways to address these issues.

Other countries and cities have managed to reduce dog bites significantly by creating community-wide support for the most basic responsible dog owner behaviors, including; humane care (providing proper diet, veterinary care, socialization and training), humane custody licensing and permanent ID, and humane control (following leash laws and not allowing dogs to become threats or nuisances to the community).

One example is Calgary, Canada. Between 1985-2008 its population increased, however, reported dog bites decreased from 621 to approximately 200. Complaints about dogs chasing and biting people or damaging property also decreased significantly. This was accomplished with a multi agency approach that clearly specified acceptable behavior on the part of the dog, provided services to facilitate owner compliance (which included education and training), and reserved enforcement for those who failed or refused to comply. Calgary's bylaws and service policies are completely breed-neutral.

If you do not know why a dog bites then how are you supposed to prevent it? If you are handling a dog how are you supposed to control it? How are you supposed to protect them, to be a humane dog owner? The evidence demonstrates that education and community sponsored initiatives are essential. What is also evident is that the current attempts to reduce dog bites in New Zealand are having no effect on reducing dog bites.

Geoff Bowers, Founder of KURI Ltd.