

## **BARK: An Intervention Program for Animal Maltreatment Offenders™**

[BARK](#) (Behavior, Accountability, Responsibility, and Knowledge: An Intervention Program for Animal Maltreatment Offenders)™ is the Animals & Society Institute's (ASI) newest resource designed to make communities safer for animals and people alike. **The 16-week program focuses on accountability and factors that motivated animal abuse or neglect**, including attitudes, beliefs, and other risk factors.

The response to this new program has been striking, reflecting growing awareness of the importance of taking animal maltreatment seriously and providing a range of interventions. **BARK was piloted with 14 animal maltreatment offenders in Syracuse, NY in late 2017 and early 2018, receiving widespread [media attention](#).** Nicole Heath with the Central New York Animal Cruelty Task Force explained why bringing BARK to Syracuse was so important, "If [animal maltreatment offenders] went to jail or were on probation, they aren't getting any education or intervention. Hopefully this program will solve that problem and help them see there is a different way."

The program received great reviews from participants and organizers alike and is being run again this fall in Syracuse. **Rochester, NY will begin implementing BARK in 2019.** Other jurisdictions interested in participating in the pilot program include New York, NY; Spokane, WA; and Adelaide, Australia.

Here's what one of the organizer's shared following the program in Syracuse:

***I'm a member of the Animal Cruelty Task Force and I work at the animal hospital where the worst of the worst of cruelty cases are treated.***

*My role is often to photograph and provide case documentation to law enforcement, so I am intimately familiar with the suffering of victims of roughly 50% of the attendees in the class. From that perspective, I reluctantly attended the sessions with the (not so subconscious) hope of observing a significant level of discomfort on the part of the attendees. I hoped the curriculum would be delivered in an almost punitive way from the presenters.*

*Initially, I was angry and disillusioned when I observed the facilitators offer the information in a non-judgmental, compassionate and supportive way to the animal abusers. This infuriated me. **However, as we moved through the course, I started to get to know some of the participants and understand the role that ignorance,***

***poverty, mental illness and learned helplessness plays in animal abuse and neglect.***

*Despite my deep-seated disdain for these people, I found I also developed an unexpected level of compassion for them. **I also was thrilled to watch the progress they made each week as they learned things about animal intelligence, animal care, and the human-animal connection.** I was also impressed at how much they appreciated the process and applied what they learned about themselves, about communications, managing stress and emotional reactions.*

*To the person, attendees reported they got so much from the class and were sad to see it end. One person's probation ended 3 weeks prior to the end of class, and yet, he continued to attend. During the course of this program, attendees reported 3 separate instances of neglect or abuse of animals in their community enabling us to facilitate intervention for these animals. **I am cautiously optimistic that we may have made a difference in the lives of these attendees and hopefully, for the generations that follow them.***

Here's what Syracuse participants had to say:

*"I NOW have the correct tools to use when caring for an animal and different resources to use if I was to get evicted again."*

***"I learned to be more in tune and aware of being empathetic to animals. We are their voice!"***

*"I learned that animals can talk to you if you just take the time out to listen."*

*"One thing I learned about myself from this class is that I made choices and could have done better and made better choices and it would have been ok to ask for help."*

**Looking Ahead:** We will continue to refine the program based on these pilot results before working to implement this much-needed program nationwide.

