**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.