



Anthony, a Saskatoon Animal Control Agency officer, reunites Buddy with his happy owner. (SUPPLIED)

# All in a **DAY'S** work:

## Lost or injured pets a priority for SACA team members

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

No two days are alike for the team members of the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA). “Every day is different,” says SACA president Eva Alexandrovici.

The Saskatoon Animal Control Agency is contracted by the City of Saskatoon to enforce the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw, as well as to provide animal control services. Pound services are provided by the Saskatoon SPCA. These services are supported through revenues collected through the issuing of dog and cat licenses by the City of Saskatoon.

For SACA officers, the day starts with a check of their vehicle, to ensure they're ready to respond quickly to calls that come into the agency's phone lines. Officers then complete any necessary paperwork awaiting their attention. “There are all kinds of follow-up complaints that we have waiting in the office before the officer heads out for the shift. These include reviewing witness statements we've received regarding animals being at large, barking complaints and feces accumulation

complaints,” says Alexandrovici.

SACA's phone lines open at 7 a.m., with after-hour calls forwarded to a cell phone that is regularly checked by a designated animal control officer. “Most of the calls we receive are either about dogs that are running at large, or confined cats that are waiting to be picked up. We deal with a lot of confined cats. The numbers are just increasing every year and it's becoming a major issue,” says Alexandrovici.

The SACA dispatcher answers the calls and determines the priority of the call. “If a call comes in that needs to be attended to right away, the dispatcher notifies the officer on duty. The officers work on a priority basis: A dog that is running loose is a priority over a cat that is contained. The highest priority type of call is a dangerous animal call, if the animal, usually a dog, is attacking a person or another animal,” says Alexandrovici.

The officers have to be flexible and ready to pivot at a moment's notice to answer a priority call. “You could have an officer

heading to a confined cat call when a call comes in about a dog attack, an animal that just got hit by a vehicle and is injured, or a dog that's running at large. Sometimes we get calls from the off-leash dog parks that there is somebody with a dog that is out of control. The dispatchers and officers know how to prioritize those calls.”

The most common calls that SACA officers respond to are from city residents who have caught and confined cats that have strayed onto their property. “We get calls about at-large cats all the time. We ask the callers to confine them in some way — either in a cat carrier, a cat trap or in their homes. Last year, we picked up 1,599 confined cats, and 1,473 of those cats went to the SPCA. Only 126 cats were returned to their owners,” says Alexandrovici.

In comparison, last year SACA officers took in 680 dogs with 394 impounded at the SPCA because they were not licensed and did not have any identification. Alexandrovici says that 286 dogs were returned to their owners.



“There’s a big difference in attitude over dogs and cats,” she notes sadly. “It’s unfortunate that some people don’t care as much about cats as they do about dogs. Many of these cats

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*Eva Alexandrovici, president, Saskatoon Animal Control Agency.*

no longer have homes; they’ve gotten lost or their owners moved and left them behind. The cats who have not been spayed end up having kittens and then you have the baby cats to worry about. There are lots of cats out there roaming the streets. It’s something we definitely struggle with.”

By far, the favourite part of a SACA officer’s day is the opportunity to reunite a lost dog or cat with their owner.

In 2021, SACA officers returned 412 dogs and cats to their owners (286 dogs and 126 cats). “We were able to return the animals because they had been licensed by the City of Saskatoon, or microchipped, or had some type of identification of them. If the owner calls in a lost report, that can also help,” says Alexandrovici.

When a dog or a cat is caught running at large, the SACA officer has to issue a \$100 fine to the owner. If the animal is not licensed, a \$250 ticket for noncompliance to license must also be issued.

Responsible pet owners who license their pets can take advantage of the City of Saskatoon’s Pet-At-Large (PAL) Perk.

The PAL Perk can be applied once during the lifetime of the animal, to waive the \$100 fine for running at large. The SACA officer can return the animal to its owner at no cost.

If the animal’s owner can’t be contacted immediately, the dog or cat may be impounded

at the Saskatoon SPCA. The PAL Perk also means that pound fees would be waived.

In between priority calls, SACA officers follow up on the many complaints the agency receives. “These follow-ups include barking complaints, feces complaints, at large complaints where the officer has to obtain a witness statement, animal bites that we’re investigating — and sometimes we even have to go and investigate complaints about prohibited animals, like chickens, farm animals or prohibited exotic animals,” says Alexandrovici.

“We have different procedures for different types of situations,” says Alexandrovici. “If a dog has bitten a person, we will go out and speak with the dog owner regardless of whether we have a witness statement or not, because we have to report on the animal’s rabies vaccine status to Public Health.

“With any other dangerous animal type complaints, we need a statement before we can actually follow up on the complaint. A lot of people don’t realize that if the officer didn’t witness the incident, we don’t have the authority to follow up with the owner without a statement. So it’s essential that people submit their statements to us.”

If complainants want to pursue a dangerous animal charge and sign a complaint form, after investigation, the SACA officer then submits the file to the City Solicitor’s office. “The prosecutor’s office would summon the pet owner to court, and if needed, would subpoena all of the witnesses,” says Alexandrovici.

The Dangerous Animal Bylaw provides for a number of different outcomes that the dog’s owner may be instructed to comply with by the court. These can include having the dog spayed or neutered, muzzling the dog, posting dangerous animals signs on the property and keeping the animal in a secure enclosure.

“It’s the SACA officer’s job to make sure that the pet owner is complying with the court’s requirements. We work with the owners and the animals to help them along. If they are not, then we have to report back to the City to let them know and the owner may be charged



Thanks to a valid pet license, SACA officer Jasmine was able to give Obsidian a safe return home. (SUPPLIED)

with failing to comply with a court order,” says Alexandrovici.

If the animal’s owner continues to refuse to comply with the court orders, a warrant may be issued to seize the animal. “That’s part of our job as well,” says Alexandrovici. “Our priority is public safety. If we think there’s a risk to public safety, we have to step in and take action.”

SACA officers are also called upon to educate pet owners and mediate complaints between pet owners and their neighbours.

“For example, when we receive a complaint about a barking dog, we try to provide some recommendations to the pet owner to help improve the situation. We have some really wonderful education pamphlets that we hand out. We try to educate as well as provide enforcement when necessary,” she says.

What motivates Alexandrovici and her team to fulfill these vital roles in our community? “We are always concerned about animals and their well-being. We all have pets and love animals; we want to see them being treated well and do everything we can to promote responsible pet ownership,” she replies.

To learn more about the Animal Control Bylaw and Dangerous Animal Bylaw, visit the City of Saskatoon’s Animal Services website at [Saskatoon.ca](http://Saskatoon.ca). You can also call the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency at (306) 385-7387.

## IT’S YOUR DOODY!

Dog feces do not fertilize the ground and have negative effects on grass and plants. Be a good neighbour and clean up after your pet.

