

Centre for Service and Working Dog Health, Massey University: An update

by Professor Boyd Jones, Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences

The role of working dogs in society was highlighted recently by the contribution search dogs played in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake. The ability of specially trained dogs to seek people trapped beneath the rubble of damaged buildings was essential for the rescue effort.

There are many other examples where dogs have a special role in society: police tracking and armed offender dogs, guide dogs, working farm dogs and New Zealand Customs and biosecurity dogs are well known for what they do. However, there are other service dogs, such as assistance and mobility dogs, that have been trained to perform special tasks for people or they have special roles with their owners, for example, as a companion for an autistic child. The recent publicity about trained dogs and their ability to scent-detect people with specific neoplasms (bladder carcinoma, breast cancer) or to identify a diabetic child who is about to have a hypoglycaemic episode after the administration of insulin highlights further potential roles for assistance dogs.

The importance of service and working dogs was the catalyst for the establishment of the **Centre for Service and Working Dog**

Health at Massey University in 2008, with the mission of becoming “a world leader in advancing service and working dog health and welfare”. The centre has since been

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contributing in many different ways to meet this declared mission. Veterinarians attached to the centre have been undertaking and publishing research, attending meetings of veterinarians, presenting research findings and assisting service and working dog groups.

One of the main roles of the centre is to provide veterinary support for the New Zealand Police Dog Training Centre and the many regional police dog sections. Andrew Worth and Vicki Erceg are the centre veterinarians who provide support including general advice and veterinary care of police dogs and advice for the police dog breeding unit. Liaison, where appropriate with the primary care veterinarian, is emphasised.

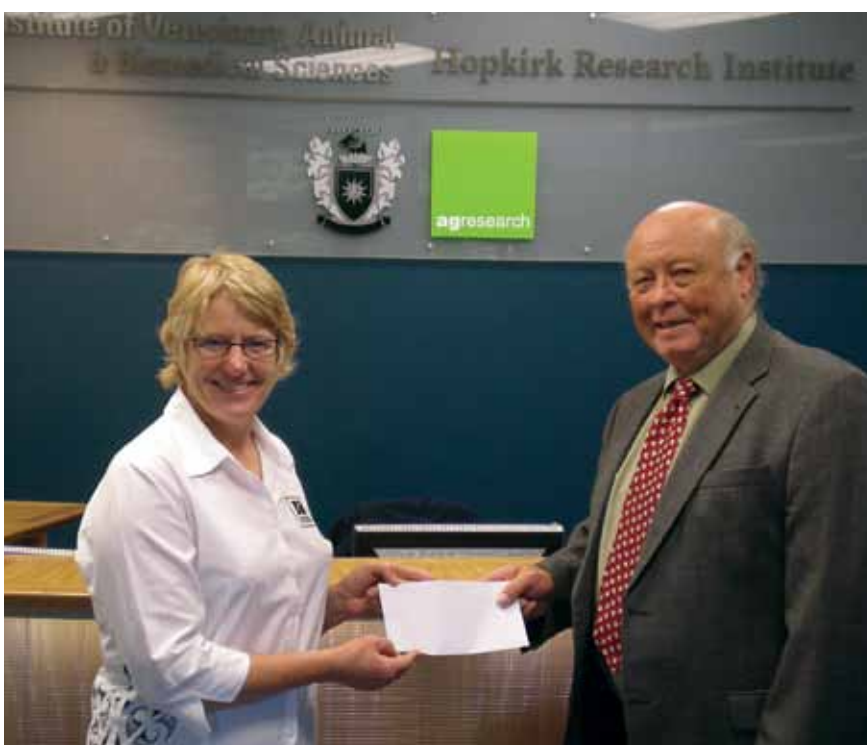
Funding of clinical research is an important role of the centre. It is hoped that research projects related to farm working dogs and working police dogs will improve the health and welfare of these two important groups.

Projects supported by the centre include: leptospirosis in farm working dogs, epidemiological studies in farm working dogs, gastric dilation and volvulus in farm working dogs, biochemical and haematological parameters in farm working dogs, survey of farm dog welfare, nutritional studies in farm dogs, lymphocytic thyroiditis in huntaway dogs, lumbosacral stenosis in police dogs and factors affecting loss from work in police dogs.

All of these studies are in progress, and the results will be published and/or presented at veterinary meetings. The number of projects being supported is encouraging and strengthens the importance of the centre in focusing research on working dogs.

In the past year, the centre recruited two major sponsors for the next three years: **Landcorp** and **Hill's Pet Nutrition**. Their financial support will help the centre to meet

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Helen Beban, Hill's Pet Nutrition, presents Professor Boyd Jones, Chair of the Centre for Service and Working Dog Health, with Hill's first contribution to the centre's activities.



its objectives and provide more support for extension work. The NZVA Sheep and Beef Cattle Society and the Wairarapa Veterinary Association have also made major donations to the centre. The centre relies on external support – there is no ongoing financial contribution from the Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences other than salaries for personnel who are employed by Massey.

You can support the centre's activities in several ways: by financial donation (tax deductible – Massey University is a registered charitable trust); by giving us your advice or concerns regarding working dog issues; or by becoming a supporter of the centre. Roy Farman, a board member, coordinates a focus group to discuss farm working dogs, and the centre produces a bi-annual newsletter (contact details for newsletter below).

The centre is calling for applications for studies targeted at health and welfare issues of service and working dogs. Applications are encouraged from veterinarians in practice or from anyone with an interest in service and working dog health and welfare. Because the resources for distribution are limited, only the most suitable projects can be funded.

Application forms and details can be obtained from Gayle McKenna or from the centre website (details below). Applications close on 31 July. ■

i <http://workingdogs.massey.ac.nz>

For the newsletter or research funding application contact Gayle McKenna:
g.a.mckenna@massey.ac.nz