



Pushing THROUGH

Ignoring the knockers and naysayers, Hayley Squance has fashioned an impressive 20-year career in the veterinary world that includes playing a key role in the development of New Zealand's veterinary disaster capability. The Western Australia-raised animal welfare and emergency management consultant tells **Jacqui Gibson** about growing up dyslexic, never taking no for an answer, and how we can do better at protecting our animals when disaster strikes.

ANIMAL WELFARE AND emergency management consultant Hayley Squance has heard it all in her 20-year career. Growing up in Western Australia, she was told dyslexia made her too dumb to go to university.

Plans for an academic career were met with, "It's not possible. You're not a veterinarian".

Once, after a presentation on her master's thesis, a member of the audience approached her and said, "Look, if I were you, I'd forget your thesis, because, honestly, no one really cares about the topic".

Today, as a successful consultant, sought-after international speaker and PhD student, Hayley laughs recounting some of the obstacles she's faced in her career. "I believe life throws things in our way to remind us that there are different ways to work around them. If you identify a gap and you believe it's important to fill, then find the 'workarounds' to get the job done. Some of the obstacles I have faced have fuelled my drive to succeed, even when others have said it couldn't be done."

An undiagnosed dyslexic in a family of dyslexics (her twin sister, father and grandfather are all dyslexic), Hayley found school hard. Leaving school with passing grades, she went to South Metropolitan TAFE. She completed an advanced certificate in veterinary nursing and, after a couple years in practice, went back to

study to gain university entrance. "I had a desire to understand the 'why' of what I was doing and I could get this from a university qualification."

It wasn't always easy. "I persevered and eventually found the learning strategies that suited me. I just had to push through and find my way."

It was a part-time job as an emergency and critical care veterinary nurse during her degree studies at Murdoch University that bolstered Hayley's confidence and firmed up the direction of her career. "I loved the immediacy of the emergency environment and thrived. My employer found I could walk into a chaotic room and quietly and methodically return it to order. She knew how to utilise her veterinary nurses fully, but she could also see I had a talent other people didn't have."

Today, Hayley has a veterinary technology and management degree from The University of Queensland, as well as a master's degree from Massey University. She clocked up 18 months assisting and five years leading Massey's veterinary nursing diploma programme before it was disestablished. In 2009, she set up Massey's inaugural veterinary technology degree programme, which she ran for nine years. Looking back, she says, "One of the proudest moments in my career was seeing that first cohort of students walk across the stage at graduation".

Currently, Hayley is completing a PhD in emergency management, while also

contracting to the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and caring for her two children, Jack (10) and Amelia (4), with husband Douglas. She is also an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in Animal Emergency Management at Massey.

"Moving to New Zealand early in my career was a game-changer for me. I found there was little to no veterinary disaster capability within the sector here. It gave me the chance to explore and address those gaps with the support of an amazing team of people who believed in me at times when I didn't, and who were prepared to work together to achieve a common goal."

In 2010 Hayley established Massey's emergency response team to respond to emergency call-outs and offer advice and training. Based at the university's School of Veterinary Science, the Veterinary Emergency Response Team (VERT) includes veterinarians, veterinary technologists and veterinary nurses with expertise in companion animals and livestock. "Our work is community based and really varied. It covers everything from large animal rescues to providing a mobile veterinary service during an emergency," she says.

Nearly three years ago VERT was called to an emergency scene involving a Thoroughbred trapped in a mud pit after heavy rain (See pages 12-13, June 2016 *VetScript*). There have been plenty other call-outs including another horse rescue,



WORKSHOPS WITH HAYLEY SQUANCE

Animal welfare and emergency management consultant Hayley Squance is available to provide veterinarians, veterinary nurses and allied professionals with workshops and training on a wide range of topics, from large animal rescues to animal welfare and emergency planning. You can contact Hayley on 021 051 1764 or email hayley.squance@gmail.com.

this one from the river at Otaki Forks (see photo below left). Led by Hayley, the team has also trained St John intensive care paramedics and dog handlers to treat injured working dogs during a disaster. During the past four years, they've run animal rescue workshops for Fire and Emergency New Zealand staff and veterinary professionals.

"I'm a huge believer in multi-agency teamwork and collaboration. We like to train fire station and veterinary staff at the same time, so together they can start to build relationships and figure out how best to coordinate their responses when the need comes up."

As a consultant, Hayley has helped MPI to develop a policy framework and guidelines on how to prepare for and look after animals during a disaster such as an earthquake or flood. She's done the same for district health boards planning for a pandemic. She's also an MPI Animal Welfare Emergency Management Coordinator, responsible for leading a regional response to any disaster or emergency.

"Research shows that people won't leave a disaster area without their pets, which can lead to additional injuries and fatalities. During emergencies we check on our children and loved ones first, then it's our pets."

"Farmers are the same with livestock. Research and recent experience tell us that people will even sneak into cordon zones to find their pets. We know separation from pets in the aftermath of a disaster causes people huge distress and can delay recovery. Ultimately, the answer lies in keeping the family unit together – and seeing pets and livestock as part of the family unit."

Hayley says the Canterbury earthquake in 2011 underlined this point. Deployed to the Red Zone for 10 days alongside the SPCA, Hayley led Massey's mobile veterinary team.

"The community response to our concern and care for people's pets was overwhelming. They really appreciated it."

But it's easy to get things wrong in an emergency, she says. Called to Thailand



SOME OF THE OBSTACLES I HAVE FACED HAVE FUELLED MY DRIVE TO SUCCEED, EVEN WHEN OTHERS HAVE SAID IT COULDN'T BE DONE."

after flooding in 2011, Hayley was part of a team who cared for, vaccinated and sterilised hundreds of community street dogs known as Soi dogs.

"A decision was eventually made to not return the dogs to the community, but to put them in a sanctuary 12 hours away. It was an idea dreamed up by the non-government organisations. It would've been far better to return them to the community as the people who cared for them came back."

"That's where education comes in. When you look at the research evidence, you're more likely to do things in the best interests of the community."

Last year Hayley completed a busy schedule of local and overseas engagements. In September, she presented three papers on animal welfare during emergencies at the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress

in Singapore. In November, she spoke at the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee forum on animals in disasters.

Two years ago, she was invited to a small, flood-prone fishing town in Alaska to help them figure out what to do with their resident sled dogs during an evacuation.

"Until I sat down with the community members to look at all the options and start planning, they'd decided that they would simply round up the dogs and shoot them. Always my advice is to take time to think outside the square. Consider all your options. Don't just rely on common sense or people's perceptions of what's best. Talk to the community. Recognise that everyone – regardless of who they are – comes to the table with a degree of expertise. Sometimes you just have to take a step back, be open and listen." ¹⁸