

**Psychology and  
Sentencing:  
Mental Health  
Evaluations for Animal  
Cruelty Offenders**

Kathleen Wood  
Brittany Hill



# Disclaimers

Some mildly graphic images and content

We are not psychologists or clinicians

# Scope

Evaluations in sentencing, not competency/insanity



# Problematic framing

## 'IT'S CONCERNING': Cops hunting cat killer in Vaughan

Kevin Connor  
More from Kevin Connor

Published:  
June 16, 2020

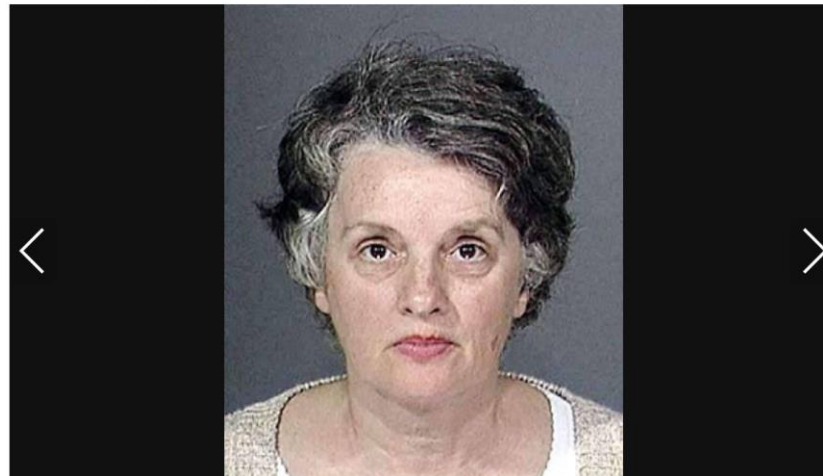
Updated:  
June 16, 2020 10:36 AM EDT

Filed Under:  
Toronto SUN › News ›  
Toronto & GTA



York Regional Police may have a budding serial killer on their hands as cats keep turning up tortured and killed.

## Looking Back: The Cat Lady of Petaluma



The phrase "Crazy Cat Lady" was not technically coined to describe Marilyn Barletta, but there are few individuals in recent memory for whom the term fits so well. To this day - though many have forgotten Barletta's actual name - the story of the




# Links to Mental Health Issues

Active abuse v. passive neglect



# Links to Mental Health Issues – Juveniles



 WXII The Triad

## New charges filed in animal cruelty video investigation involving teens

It is, it's a very disturbing to see anyone treating an animal like that, especially a teenager or juvenile," Yadkin County Sheriff Ricky Oliver said.  
Mar 2, 2020



 Fox News

## Teen accused of abusing deer in 'reprehensible' video pleads guilty to animal cruelty

Check out what's clicking on Foxnews.com. A young man in Pennsylvania has pleaded guilty to misdemeanor animal cruelty charges stemming ...  
May 13, 2020



 WKMG News 6 & ClickOrlando

## Florida teen recorded himself beating dog with belt in video posted to social media, deputies say

A Palm Coast teen was arrested on an animal cruelty charge Monday after he repeatedly beat his dog with a belt and posted videos of the ...  
1 month ago



Responses of the criminal justice system are not always tailored to address the offender's underlying reason(s) for committing animal cruelty



# Importance of Evaluations

- Identify and address root causes
- Encourage rehabilitation
- Protect future victims

SYMPTOM



CAUSE

# When Do Mental Health Evaluations Occur?

- Evaluations are typically completed after a defendant has been convicted of or pleads guilty to animal cruelty
- As we see in numerous laws, psychological treatments are often part of sentencing
- In turn, evaluations can help inform and tailor appropriate sentencing

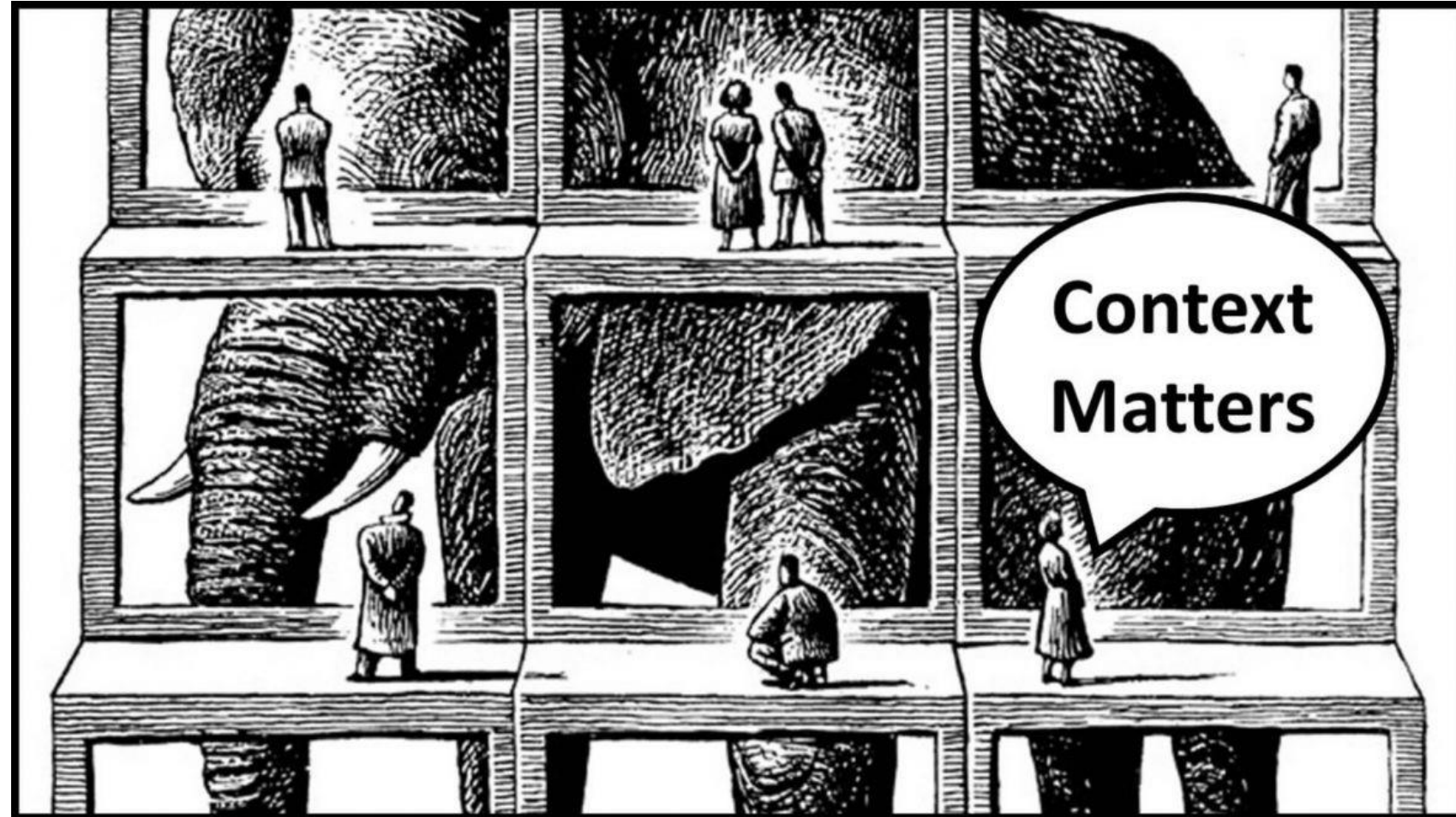
*Example: if there are underlying issues associated with impulse control that are discovered during an evaluation, it would be beneficial to include impulse control treatment as part of the defendant's sentence*





# Considerations in Evaluations

- Competent clinician
- Evaluation vs. assessment
- Complete picture of incident
- Complete picture of offender history and environment

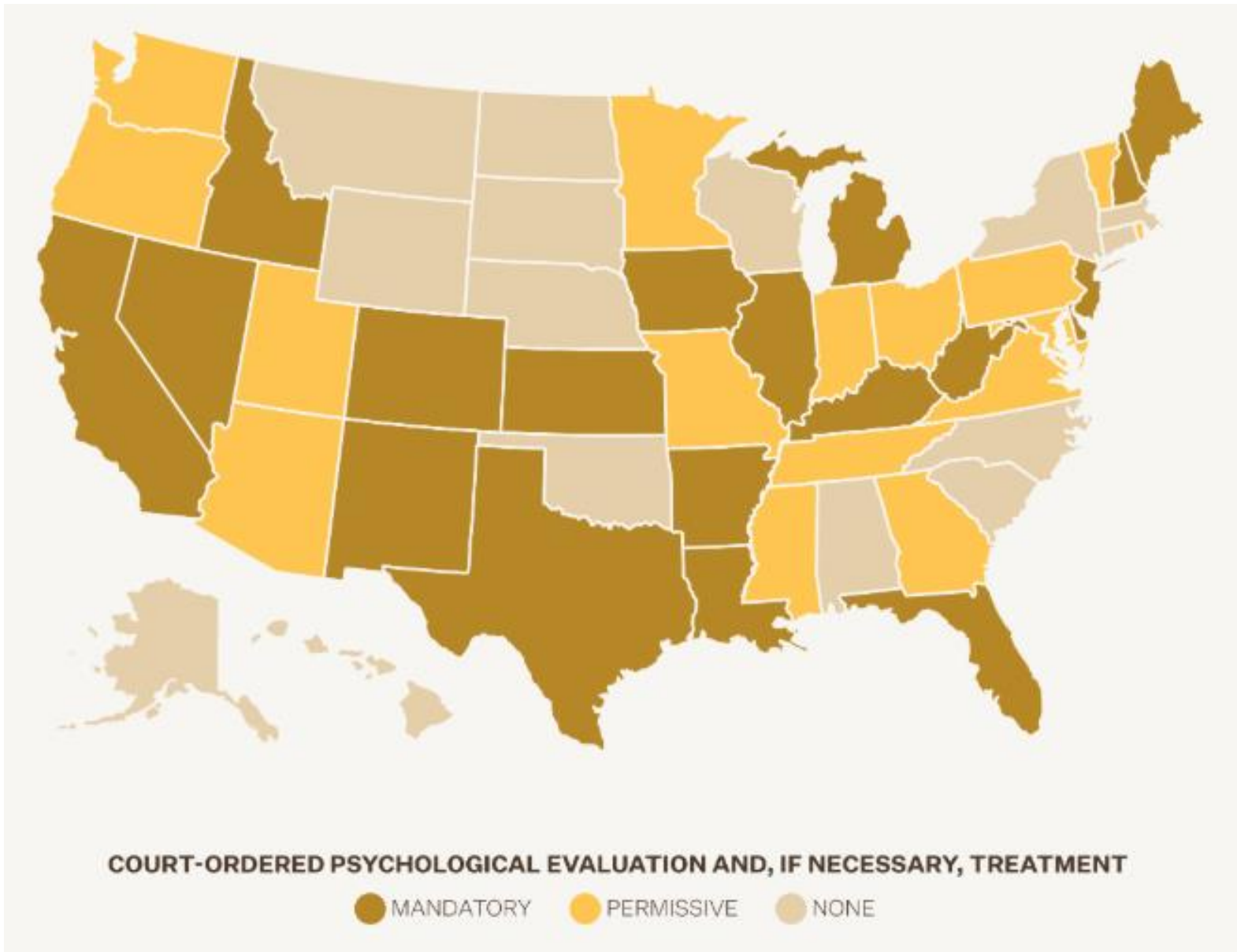


# Challenges

## Criminal Justice System

### Identifying Targeted Interventions





# Colorado Statute § 18-9-202

(III) The court shall order an evaluation to be conducted prior to sentencing to **assist the court in determining an appropriate sentence**. If the violation is a felony offense in violation of subsection (1.5) of this section, a felony offense in violation of subsection (2)(b)(II) of this section, or any other violation of this section demonstrating knowing torture or torment of an animal that needlessly injured, mutilated, or killed the animal, the court shall require a **comprehensive evaluation to help determine the causative factors**. The person ordered to undergo an evaluation shall be required to pay the cost of the evaluation, unless the person qualifies for a public defender, then the cost will be paid by the judicial district. If the evaluation results in a recommendation of treatment and if the court so finds, the person must be ordered to complete, as a condition of any sentence to probation or a deferred judgment or sentence, an anger management treatment program, a mental health treatment program, or any other **appropriate treatment program designed to address the underlying causative factors for the violation**.



# Challenges

## Mental Health Care Professionals

### Identifying Underlying Issues

- Many mental health care professionals are unaware of the issues related to the diagnosis and treatment of animal cruelty offenders

### Offense-Specific Treatment

- Currently, a handful of offense-specific treatment programs exist
- None have been evaluated for effectiveness; little data to gather because they are not used often
- However, they are promising!

### Viewing Animal Cruelty as Untreatable

- Animal cruelty is sometimes seen as “exotic” and untreatable



**But, there is hope!**



# Opportunities

**More collaboration**



# Opportunities

Encourage clinicians to treat cruelty offenders





**Remember why evaluations and treatment are so important for:**

- Reducing recidivism
- Increasing rehabilitation
- Protecting animals



# Reminder: Take Care of Yourselves and Each Other

## **Think about when clinicians and attorneys intervene in cruelty cases**

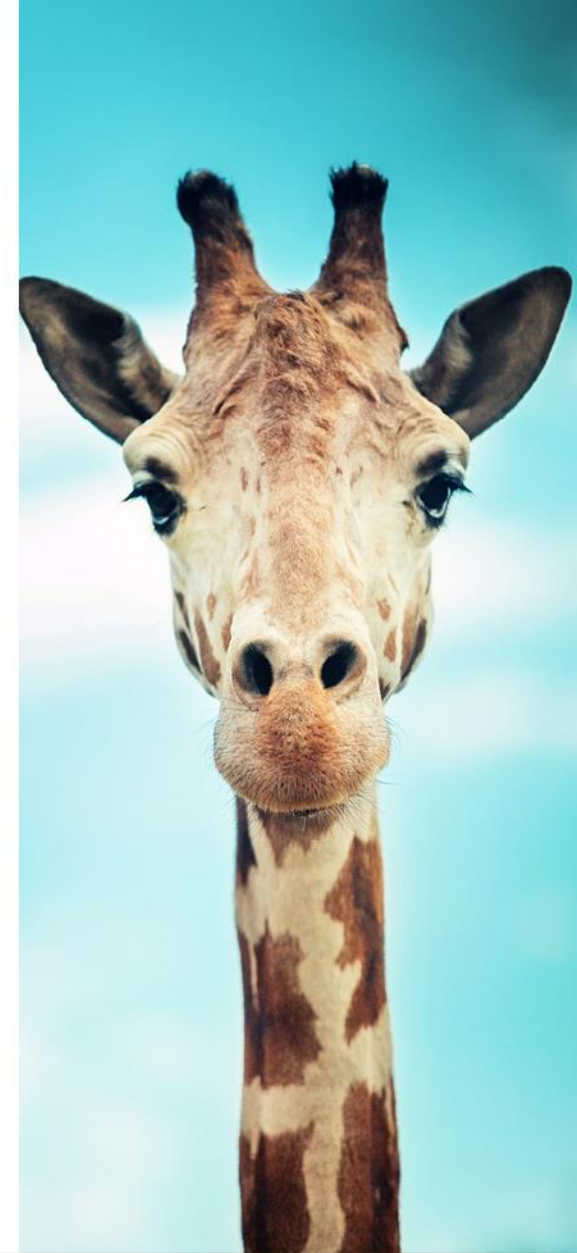
- Often, it is when things are at their worst
- We do not always see when things get better or see how our work has positively impacted people and animals

## **It can be a “thankless” job**

- Animal clients do not say “thank you”

## **No one is immune to compassion fatigue**

- These are tough topics and it is okay (in fact, encouraged) to recognize this



# Additional Resources

[\*Animal Cruelty's Link to Other Forms of Violence\*](#)

[\*Animal Legal Defense Fund Position Statement Sentencing for Animal Cruelty Cases\*](#)

[\*Interventions with Animal Abuse Offenders\*](#)

[\*Animal Maltreatment: Implications for Behavioral Science Professionals\*](#)

[\*Conceptualising Animal Abuse with an Antisocial Behaviour Framework\*](#)

[\*Animal Maltreatment Forensic Mental Health Issues and Evaluations\*](#)

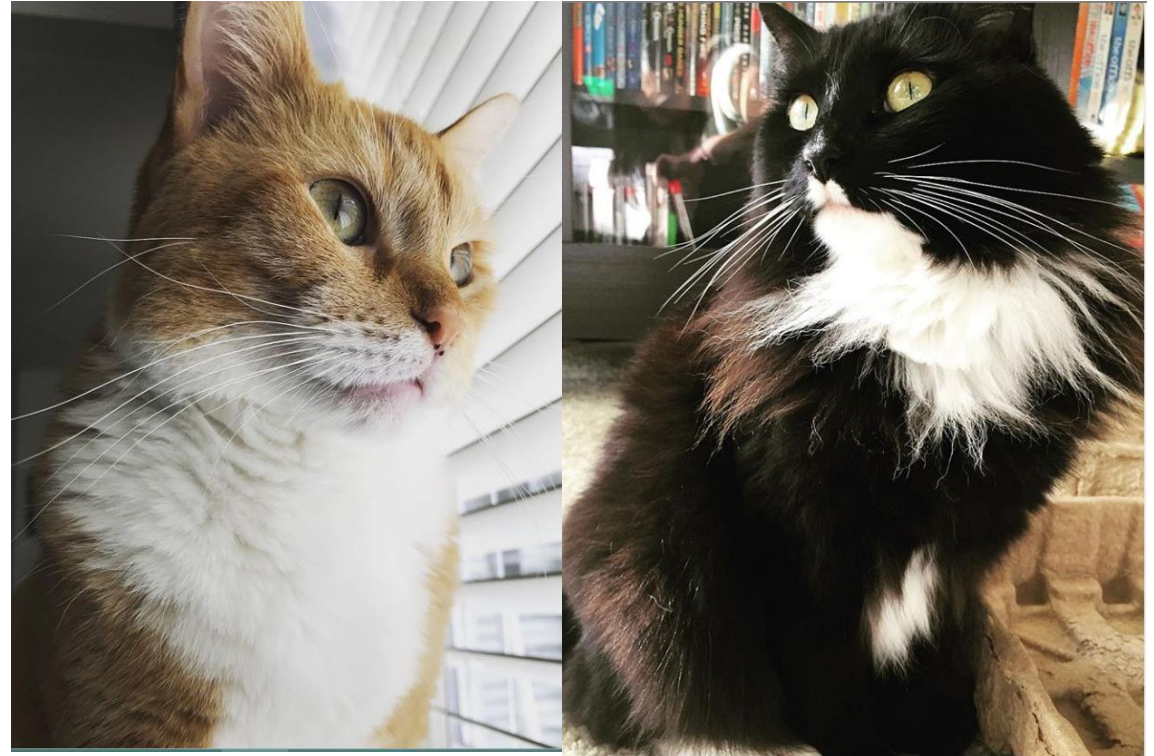
[National Link Coalition](#)



Thank You!



Kathleen Wood  
[kmwood@aldf.org](mailto:kmwood@aldf.org)



Brittany Hill  
[bhill@aldf.org](mailto:bhill@aldf.org)