



### Samantha Allemann

Samantha Allemann is a Melbourne based writer, educational content developer and sometime radio announcer.

[sam\\_allemann](#)

Approx 3 minute reading time

Valerie Wangnet's favourite animal is that purveyor of mischief and fun, the pig, but that's neither here nor there. Although she heads up humane education provider **Think Kind** and shares her home with a menagerie of pets, Valerie is hesitant to call herself an animal lover.

"I've always been reluctant to use that term," she admits. "I enjoy spending time with my companion animals and enjoy feeling awe over the beauty and majesty of certain species of animals, so that might make me one... but there's a common misconception that animal rights activism is synonymous with being an animal lover. I think you can have no particular fondness for animals but still acknowledge that their interests ought to be respected."





Valerie's awareness of animal rights grew after she journeyed around China in 2010 and learned about the dog meat trade. Horrified, she also began to see her own meat based meals differently, unable to reconcile her carnivorous diet with the unease she felt about raising dogs for food. Three years later Valerie founded not-for-profit organisation Think Kind. With a background in educational publishing herself, Valerie wanted to provide an alternative to school teachings she says have traditionally focused on animal agriculture.

"From very early on, children start learning about how humans use other animals for their own purposes," Valerie explains. "From the time they start learning words, patterns and shapes, children are already being taught that certain animals are simply commodities to use for our benefit."

Valerie says that these teachings are becoming dated as our world rapidly changes, and not for the better. "We've created unsustainable food systems in which billions of animals suffer, and they're having a devastating impact on the planet and its resources," she reflects. "And we're leaving this for the next generation. So it's no longer acceptable to teach children that these are perfect systems."

Refusing to rely on graphic, gory images to get their message across, Think Kind purposely avoids the use of shock tactics. Valerie says that ensuring their content is balanced, engaging, thought-provoking and above all, positive, is necessary for inspiring future change makers. "It isn't productive to teach children about the problems we face in the world without offering them hope," says Valerie. "We want to raise children who are solutions-driven and feel empowered by their knowledge and abilities to drive the changes they want to see."



Kindness Club St Clair

And that approach is working. Although they don't push their resources into schools, Think Kind's offerings, written by a team of teachers throughout Australia, have proved popular with other teachers as well as parents and animal rights activists. Over 500 people regularly access Think Kind's online resource library to download free lesson plans, info sheets, student magazines and critical thinking activities such as 'paddock to plate' worksheets and debates on contentious issues like horseracing. "Humane education isn't just about educating students on the issues," Valerie explains. "What's equally important is helping them develop the tools they need to tackle these issues head on; skills in areas like critical thinking, writing and communication, research and effective debating."

Kindness Club kits have also proved popular among pint-sized activists, with practical tips on how to form your own animal kindness posse, run your own campaigns and fundraisers, create petitions, flyers and videos and write effective letters to influential folk like MPs. Plus there's stickers and posters as well, because what kid kit would be anything without those? Valerie is pleased by the response, explaining that these humble kits have been instrumental in helping create change in communities. "A number of schools have started clubs, several have implemented animal rights-related units and many have participated in fundraising programs for local animal shelters and rescue groups," she enthuses.

A recent Humane Research Council survey found that 86% of respondents want humane education to be taught in primary and secondary schools, and Valerie notes that the Australian school curriculum now mandates that students learn about environmental sustainability. “Our ideas on what education should be about is changing as we become more aware of the importance of solving many of the challenges we’ll face in the future,” Valerie says. She’s heartened by these findings, but knows this isn’t an area we can rest on our laurels on. “We need collective action, from activist groups, individuals, organisations, parents and school administrators, to make humane education integral.”

TAKE SOME ACTION

**Join Think Kind’s Kindness Club and download humane education resources**

 **Download**

Categories

[Activism](#)

, [Feature](#)

, [Interview](#)



[Who we are](#) / [Contribute](#)

[Privacy](#) / [Terms](#)

Copyright 2017 Fairfax Media



**Get The Vocal in your inbox**

Enter your email address

**Subscribe**