

### OVERVIEW

In partnership with key County departments, PAWSITIVE STEPS ACADEMY is an educational foster program that pairs underage kittens needing care with youth at probation camps.

### CHALLENGE

Each year, over 10,000 kittens are brought to LA County's Animal Care Centers by concerned community members. The care centers become unable to care for the increasing census, especially kittens that are too young to survive on their own. Therefore, the care centers need temporary foster caretakers to take in the fragile kittens and care for them until they are old enough for adoption into permanent homes. On the human side, the Probation Department operates rehabilitative probation camps for youth, many of whom have experienced trauma and abuse. The youth are provided comprehensive, wrap-around services including mental health, education and college preparatory courses but many struggle emotionally and mentally while at camp.

### SOLUTION

In September 2018, PAWSITIVE STEPS ACADEMY (PSA), a unique collaboration between Los Angeles County Probation, Animal Care and Care, Mental Health, Public Health and Health Services departments was launched. The program pairs underage kittens in need of a few weeks of loving care with the youth at the camps. The kittens receive the individualized attention they need and in turn, the youth learn medical care, animal behavior, teamwork, collaboration and form a connection with the kittens that bring therapeutic and transformative benefits.

### INNOVATION

PSA saves the lives of vulnerable kittens while teaching valuable skills to youth in an educational and supportive environment. After the youth graduate from the eight-week program, they will serve as mentors to the following academy class, creating opportunities for leadership and deeper learning. The program is ground-breaking in terms of collaboration across County departments and the cohesive partnerships that have materialized. It's a model for other counties, exemplifying what can be done when agencies focus on a shared goal.

"The girls are taught a variety of positive attributes such as selflessness, patience and reliability that will bode well for them upon their exit from juvenile camp. The kittens receive personal attention, nurturing and ultimately a loving home. The program is a win-win for all involved." Chief Deputy Probation Officer Sheila Mitchell

### RESULTS

PSA provides an immediate solution to a problem in the community and creates lasting impact on the youth and their ongoing development. Since the program's inception, three cohorts have participated in the program, caring for fifteen kittens. The youth have expressed that the kittens help them to calm down, provide comfort and give them a sense of purpose and something to love. Three of the youth's families have adopted kittens from the program, all have expressed joy at being able to keep the bond they made while at camp. An added benefit is the effect the program has on the staff at the Probation camp. They have noted that the kittens help the youth express their feelings and see the benefits firsthand.

### REPLICABILITY

The program serves as a model for other communities to work together and develop a system that works for their environment and resources. Because of PSA's success, other agencies have requested sample protocols and procedures to replicate the collaboration in their community. The concept is a simple one with far-reaching impact and benefits.

### PROJECT OR PROGRAM CONTACT

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### OPTIONAL SUBMISSION

Program video on flash drive