

2020 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARD SUBMISSION

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

Managed Intake and Expanded Placement of Animals

OVERVIEW: Implementing a Managed Intake and Expanded Placement program for animals allowed the County of Los Angeles Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC) to rapidly implement a new animal management practice to respond to and enhance services during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

CHALLENGE: The rapid closure of Los Angeles County buildings in response to emergency health orders created an urgent and critical need to retool animal intake and placement efforts at the seven DACC animal care centers (ACCs). Receiving more than 60,000 animals each year, DACC had to change how it could meet its essential worker mandate of protecting public and animal health and safety while experiencing staffing shortages and restricted public contact. At the time, DACC was an open-admission animal care system, admitting animals seven days/week with no measure of control. It also cared for several thousand animals at any time across its seven care centers, creating a large demand on staffing and resources. Many DACC staff were not able to work at an ACC due to underlying health concerns, age, or other risk factors associated with the potential for contracting the virus. Other staff became exposed to COVID-19, had to self-quarantine, and were unable to work. The more than 1,000 volunteers that support DACC suspended their aid due to fear of contagion. DACC was required to continue to admit animals in need and had to find ways to responsibly meet its mandate while also finding positive outcomes for the animals through adoptions and other outlets. Due to reduced staffing and restricted ability to engage the public in person, DACC had to quickly change how it met its mission.

SOLUTION: DACC implemented a Managed Intake and Expanded Placement program to provide alternatives to impoundment, create new opportunities for animal adoptions, and reunite lost pets with their families through innovative pathways. These programmatic changes have significantly altered and improved how DACC provides these services. DACC offers intervention services for owners considering relinquishing their pets. Owners are given education and resources to keep their pets or referred to animal rescue groups to admit the pet into their programs. Residents who find stray dogs are encouraged to find the owners with assistance through a mobile app, flyer templates, and education on using social media to reunite the lost pets with their families. Adult healthy stray cats are deferred from admittance because they are thriving in their community and are not sick, injured, or in need of assistance. Willing residents who find underage kittens are given fostering training and supplies so they can care for the kittens until they are old enough for adoption. DACC greatly expanded its animal fostering program so engaged residents could foster pets in their homes, thereby reducing the demand for animal care considering the limited staffing and resources at the ACCs. In addition, placing animals in foster homes gives them enrichment, comfort and exposure to the community, because walk-in foot traffic at the animal care centers was no longer allowable. The fostering program is now entirely online, and volunteers are trained virtually. Adoptions of pets continue, with adopters viewing the pets online and scheduling appointments to come to the ACC to meet the pet. DACC implemented drive-up fostering and adoption options as well.

INNOVATION: The Managed Intake and Expanded Placement approaches have dramatically changed and improved how DACC meets its mission. Engaging the community in addressing animal welfare has proved to be an uplifting and successful approach to reducing the abandonment of animals at ACC's, reuniting

lost pets with their owners faster and less expensively, and saving the lives of the most vulnerable animals who otherwise would likely face euthanasia. DACC is now meeting its mission by offering intervention and support services so the public can participate in saving animals. Due to the reduced population in the ACCs staff are now able to provide more enhanced care to sick and injured animals, saving more lives than ever. Using online training, fostering, and an appointment-based system for in-person visits allows DACC to ensure physical distancing and safety for staff and visitors. DACC has creatively solved the many challenges prompted by COVID-19 and has made these new programs permanent as the new operating model.

RESULTS: For the first four months of the pandemic, DACC's intervention programs and engagement with the community saw the need for dog impoundments decrease by 55%, and cat impoundments decreased by 70%. DACC's enhanced use of technology for adoptions and foster programs has contributed to an increased live release rate (adoption, fostering, reunification with owners). Dog live release rates increased from 80% to 86%, and cat live release rates rose from 43% to 65%. The 44 cities that contract with DACC saw their animal control costs decrease, because they are charged by the number of animals impounded. The reduced population at the ACCs has allowed DACC to focus its limited resources on the animals most in need – those that are sick, injured, or have no other option for safe housing or placement. Community feedback has indicated gratitude for the intervention services so pet owners could keep the animals they loved, or directly rehome them with new families and have greater peace of mind for the outcome of their pet. Residents who found underage kittens are grateful for the fostering opportunities so these vulnerable animals would not be euthanized. Previous long customer service waiting lines are abolished thanks to the appointment system for adoptions, fosters, and pet reunifications. Adoption interactions are now more robust and meaningful because staff can spend the time with the adopter and potential new pet, ensuring a suitable match between the pet and its new family. Residents who wished to help care center animals during the COVID-19 pandemic have been grateful for the rewarding opportunities to foster or adopt DACC animals. A limited number of volunteers have been brought back to assist on site with DACC operations, maintaining safety and physical distancing. The change in operations allows DACC to schedule volunteers to maximize their expertise and time. The Managed Intake and Expanded Placement programs have been so successful that DACC is adopting them as standard operating procedures to be continued after the pandemic has ended.

REPLICABILITY: Managed Intake and Expanded Placement can be replicated at any governmental or nonprofit animal shelter. DACC has created many policies, procedures, infographics, training modules, and other resources that can be shared with any interested agency who wishes to replicate this approach.

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