

Pet Retention Programs

South Carolina Pet Care and Humane Treatment Study Committee
Presented by Jennifer Land, Founder/Director of Monroe's Mighty Mission
Thursday, December 1, 2016 at 9:30am

What is Pet Retention?

Pet Retention is continued possession of an animal. Programs focused on pet retention supply and/or meet needs in an effort to assist pets that are in challenged households remain where they are or provide alternatives to shelter surrender, abandonment or unintentional neglect.

Need for Pet Retention

Local shelters cite these following preventable reasons as primary reasons for owner shelter surrender:

- Financial Burden (basic and veterinary care)
- Housing Difficulties
- Behavior Issues
- Too many animals

Challenges of Pet Retention

- Shelters often do not have resources to devote to intervention programs
- Programs are mostly grassroots efforts by volunteers
- Often shelters and grassroots programs operate independently of each other which causes inconsistencies in data and statistics
- Funding – plethora of grants for truly homeless animals and shelters, however, not nearly as many opportunities for funding of proactive pet retention programs

FIVE MODELS OF PET RETENTION PROGRAMS

Pets For Life

National Program of the Humane Society of the United States

35 local programs, Charleston Animal Society is included

Pets for Life builds humane communities using innovative strategies and fresh approaches designed to extend the reach of animal services, resources, and information to underserved areas. Addressing the critical need for accessible, affordable pet care, our program helps animals by empowering the people who care for them.

By comprehensively addressing the lack of accessible, affordable pet care in under-served communities, Pets for Life keeps pets in the homes they already have, improving their quality of life and elevating the human-animal bond.

Pets in poverty

Here's a snapshot of the United States in the 21st century: One in six Americans lives in poverty, one in five Americans speaks a language other than English at home and 6 out of 10 U.S. households include at least one pet. As our cultural landscape changes, so must our approaches to addressing animal welfare in all of our communities.

There are tens of millions of people living in poverty with their pets—and our research shows that 87 percent of pets in these communities haven't been spayed or neutered. To respond effectively to this, we must reach out to people who have the least access to animal wellness information and services. Pets for Life is creating transformational change for dogs and cats by going into these communities and staying there for the long haul, closing the service gap that exists for pets in under-served neighborhoods.

Working within communities

Pets for Life conducts in-depth community assessments, provides ongoing neighborhood outreach and offers free services such as dog training, spay/neuter surgeries, vaccinations, pet supplies and general wellness care. We strive for partnerships with animal welfare organizations and other important community leaders and service providers, including faith-based entities, social service programs, health care agencies and local businesses. We also develop tools for and offer training and mentorship to other animal welfare organizations.

We've combined the valuable lessons our program staff have learned over time with extensive data collection and innovative strategies for reaching new audiences. We are meeting people where they are instead of waiting for them to come to us—building relationships and giving people and pets life-changing resources.

Comments from Aldwin Roman - Director, Anti-Cruelty & Outreach with Charleston Animal Society

A big premise of Pets for Life is that we serving a part of the community whose animals are not being represented in our shelter data. What we have found in our data is that over 60% pets in our outreach communities have never seen a veterinarian. A good number of the ones that had seen a veterinarian was through our spay/neuter clinic. There is a great need for affordable veterinary services in these communities. These target areas are typically low income and under-served communities. However, it is important to note that we help families with our outreach program that would not be considered low income. Even for a middle-class family, veterinary bills can quickly add up to a lot especially when people own multiple pets. The majority of our work is with preventive care, spay/neuter, vaccines, and parasite control. But we regularly have cases that involve more intensive care like hit by cars, skin conditions, parvo, mass removals, etc. Our goal is to help families keep their pets for life. These are not always surrender situations but situations where an animal is suffering and the owners aren't able to afford the necessary treatment.

We serve 963 families comprising of 1802 pets in our Pets for Life program. Over 80% pets we meet are unaltered. We have been able to get 83% of these altered through our clinic. Affordability and accessibility are the biggest obstacles we have found to people getting their pets altered and really any and all veterinary services. We do not do any means testing with our program. We are trying to build a relationship with under-served parts of the community. Having to ask for income and government services before we can help a family would be a barrier and would most likely create distrust in our program. We want to make that human connection and things like checking IDs, fees, and income verification get in the way. Our data is not specific to Charleston or even South Carolina. There are 35 other Pets for Life communities across the country and their data is the same as ours. This need for affordable veterinary services is throughout the country.

I want to add that a lot of the veterinary services we provide through outreach is done using local veterinarians and not always through the shelter clinic facility.

In a sense our PFL program is also prevention aspect of our cruelty department. A large part of animal cruelty is unintentional cruelty, or neglect, and fines and jail time don't do anything help stop it.

We applied to become a Pets for Life community and so do receive support from HSUS. Every year so far, they have worked to secure a grant to help with the cost of the program. However, these grants cover only a portion, at most 30% of our expenses, so it helps but the rest of the funding comes from general donation funds. Most of the support that we receive from HSUS with the program is logistics and strategy help, with some assistance on how to financially sustain the program.

Most of the big expenses come from either hospitalization or surgery with a rough cost range estimate of \$500 to \$2000 dollars. Things like parvo treatment, reconstructive jaw surgery, mass removal, eye surgery, and other orthopedic surgery. These are items that if our client would get a quote from a for profit clinic the prices would easily be in that range and is just unaffordable for many families, even middle class families. Some families may be able to afford the initial visit and diagnosis but can't afford treatment and follow up treatments.

For partner vets, we have the clinic bill us. We typically offer up to \$500 of services at a partner vet when going through our Pet Help Desk. The family is fully informed of the limit so we can determine if they can afford the rest, or what they can afford. We have offered more in some cases. Our Pet Help Desk was supported by a grant but we have already used up those funds and still have people in need that we didn't turn away. What we offer through Pets for Life is really up to what we have time for and the necessary equipment.

We recently helped a client who had taken his dog, which he had found as a stray just 1 year earlier, to the vet because she was sick. He gave me a copy of the bill. He spent \$600 to find out the dog had heartworm disease and some initial medications. He had to sell his car to pay for the appointment but then was left with the option to treat the dog for heartworms or euthanize it. Families shouldn't be left in those types of situations.

Lt. Governor's, Office of the Aging, Senior Pet Care Program

South Carolina agency program receiving no federal or state funds. Partnership with South Carolina Association of Veterinarians among other agencies

Mission

The mission of the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging Senior Pet Program is to provide low or no cost pet care to qualifying individuals receiving services through the LGOA.

Through the program, seniors will be able to live at home and have meaningful relationships with their pets.

Program Goals

- Offer nutritious meal options for both the senior and the pet(s)
- Educate seniors on proper ways to take care of their pet(s)
- Provide seniors the opportunity to live in their own homes with their pet(s)
- Establish statewide partners that will provide pet supplies/services to seniors receiving other Aging services

Some statistics from the program:

- There are four active regions participating in the pet program to include: Central Midlands, Trident, Appalachia, and Upper Savannah.
- Approximately 2,125 pounds of pet food has been distributed.
- 4,226 pieces of pet education materials have been distributed to seniors receiving home delivered meals.
- 2,842 flyers about the pet program have been distributed at various outreach events throughout the state.
- Approximately 79 seniors receive pet food on a monthly basis.
- Four senior citizens have been referred to a veterinarian through a partnership with the SC Association of Veterinarians.
- 32 senior citizens have been referred to other pet-related programs for services.

Additional Information

The Senior Pet Program is being piloted in the Central Midlands and Appalachia regions. Once best practices are achieved, the program will expand statewide.

Individuals who receive Home-Delivered Meals are being surveyed to determine what their pet's needs are in each region. Once the need is determined, staff from the Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging will work with current partners, in addition to building new relationships to provide pet food and other much-needed pet services.

When the senior receives his or her Home-Delivered Meal, he or she will also receive food for the pet. This will ensure that no senior will have to choose if he or she eats or if his or her pet will eat, as both will receive a nutritious meal.

For additional information about the Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging Senior Pet Program initiative, please contact Jennifer Van Cleave by e-mail (jvancleave@aging.sc.gov) or by phone (803-734-9933).

Monroe's Mighty Mission

Spartanburg County grassroots 501(c)(3) tax exempt nonprofit focused on keeping pets together with families.

Core Programs:

Monroe's Meals Pet Food Pantry – We maintain a pet food pantry which supplies the Mobile Meals of Spartanburg Companion Pet program every month as well as other struggling households in our community. Our hope is to grow this pantry to supply soup kitchens, community centers and other drop locations throughout the county on a monthly basis.

Monroe's Medical Services & Support Program – We provide pet medical services for Mobile Meals of Spartanburg recipients, low-income families and households facing economic hardship by covering portions, and sometimes all, medical costs for their family pets. By partnering with local veterinarians and low cost clinics, we relieve the burden of spay & neuter costs along with other necessary medical care such as routine vaccinations, microchipping, skin & allergy care, dental care, grooming, worming medicines, emergency surgery, and heartworm preventative and treatment.

Monroe's Miscellaneous Services Program – Food and medical may not always be enough. Through our Miscellaneous Program, we provide pet supplies (food bowls, beds, crates, collars, leashes, etc...) as well as outdoor dog kennels & fencing. We have also covered pet deposits in rental situations for families who have not been able to afford such a fee and behavior modification services. Miscellaneous Services, is exactly that, a miscellaneous catch-all that fills a need, a gap in care that could lead to owner surrender or abandonment.

PATCH Program (Providing Animals Temporary Care & Housing) – By providing an animal with a temporary home we save a life. As fosters are available, we provide an alternative to owner surrender or dumping stray animals on the shelter system. Sometimes it is a temporary stay until the animal can return to its permanent home with the family it already belongs with and sometimes, when the animal can't stay with a family, it is until the animal can find a new, loving home of which to become an important part. Either way, the goal is to keep the animal from ever entering a shelter and always knowing the comfort of a home and being loved.

Since MMM's beginning, the organization has:

- Fed 200-300 animals each month from our Monroe's Meals Pet Food Pantry, delivering over 25,000 lbs. of pet food to Mobile Meals for their companion pet program and others throughout our community that are in need.
- Provided over \$21,000 of medical care to 176 animals that needed extra assistance beyond pet food by utilizing our Monroe's Medical Fund. These services included, vaccinations, spay/neuter surgeries, flea/tick/heartworm preventatives, treatments for ear, eye, bladder and skin infections, deworming, dental surgery, eye removal surgery, microchips, heartworm treatments, tumor removal, broken leg repair surgery, basic grooming and other emergency surgeries.

- Covered the costs associated with extra pet supplies, pet training/behavior modification, kenneling, pet fee deposits in rental situations and, in some cases, rehoming the pet when no other options were viable.

For more information, contact Jennifer Land, Founder/Director, Monroe's Mighty Mission, admin@monroesmightymission.org or 864-381-7740.

Austin Pets Alive – PASS Program (Preventing Animal Shelter Surrender)

The Pass Program seeks out ways to help keep pets of the public out of the shelter by providing resources, education and sometimes by placing ads for people who are unable to do it for themselves.

Most successful aspects of the PASS program

Re-homing pets through ads

We have had an enormous amount of success on the hotline and at the shelter in re-homing pets so they never have to enter the shelter system. On the hotline we ask that people send us pictures and behavior info on their pet so we can place ads and postings. Our ads go out on craigslist, facebook, to listserv's and to different rescues.

Temporary Boarding For Emergencies:

We have had further success with finding temporary boarding for pets of people in hospice, people in domestic violence situations, and more that have kept pets out of the shelter and in some instances kept them from being euthanized.

Keeping Pets Out Of The Shelter By Offering Food And Medical Assistance

Additionally we have been able to save pets from the shelter by offering people free dog or cat food, free litter, kennels or crates, and low cost medical treatment through our community hospital.

Keeping Pets Out Of The Shelter By Offering Training Resources

Another great avenue for keeping pets out of the shelter has been a program called The Schrodi Fund that people here can apply for and if they are approved it gives them free training for their pets. This has kept a lot of behavior cases out of the shelter. We also have a list of training facilities in our area that are low cost and specialize in aggression cases.

Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association – Companion Animal Foundation

Every day veterinarians across Rhode Island see pet owners who are elderly, disabled, or on a fixed income. Often, these individuals and families are faced with extremely difficult, even unbearable decisions regarding the future of their pets because they lack the ability to pay for veterinary care. Veterinarians give away thousands of dollars in free and reduced price care each year, but still cannot meet the demand for services.

The Mission of the RIVMA Companion Animal Foundation (CAF) is to make compassionate veterinary care available to all pets by funding the cost of treatment for the sick and injured pets of low-income owners. *Established in 2004, the CAF is the first veterinary-based assistance program in the nation.*

Since the program's inception, CAF has dispersed funding via grants recommended by veterinary practices that are members of the Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association (RIVMA). Each RIVMA member practice receives an annual CAF allocation based on the number of veterinarians on staff, dollars that are available for the practice to use in assisting low-income clients. This system works well and the number of pets receiving treatment has increased each year. **In**

2014, the organization distributed more than \$65,000 throughout the state to aid in the treatment of hundreds of pets of low-income owners.

In May 2013, the CAF launched a pilot voucher program as an alternative means of providing low-income pet owners with access to veterinary care. **In the initial year of this program, the CAF issued 137 vouchers. Of those, 63% were redeemed at participating veterinary practices.**

RIVMA Companion Animal Foundation (CAF) funds are used to treat patients in need of emergency care, management of chronic illness, and routine wellness. Cats, dogs, rabbits, birds and pocket pets have all received grants from the CAF.

To receive assistance, must be low income or requiring government assistance. If you have a veterinarian or veterinary clinic that you visit with your pet on a regular basis, please contact them directly and ask whether they have any **Companion Animal Foundation** funding available. If you do not have a veterinarian that you see on a regular basis, you can apply for support through the CAF Voucher Program. If you qualify for support, you will receive a \$100 voucher certificate that can be redeemed at one of the **Veterinary Practices that Accept Vouchers.**

Limitations

- Individuals can receive only one voucher certificate per pet per year (*one year from the date that the voucher was issued*)
- All vouchers expire within 30 days of issue date.

The RIVMA CAF Board of Directors will review all requests for more than **2** vouchers from one household.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CASE STUDY

2013 South LA Shelter Intervention Program Statistics

As we closed out our first year for the South LA Shelter Intervention Program, I want to share our year-end stats with everyone, hoping that this will inspire other cities and counties to think in terms of expanding existing resources for families in need with pets. **Most of the 2041 pets that we assisted were dogs – 1789, 241 cats and 11 rabbits.**

Spay/neuter was very important and while the numbers were huge – 986 pets (almost 50% of all reasons why a family was considering surrendering their pet), we have to consider that in many cases, spay/neuter might have been the first reason, but the situation was often multi-layered. For example, a family might not qualify for a voucher due to lack of ID or other reasons. We paid for the surgery but they also needed pet food, a dog house, maybe a gate or fence repair and often other medical needs, such as a cherry eye surgery or an ear infection; all very treatable issues.

We offered 151 pets a more humane end of life. This number represents how many senior and terminally ill pets were humanely euthanized with their family present at Ber Mar Animal hospital in Inglewood, instead of being surrendered to the shelter South LA shelter. All but one person, who was offered this service, gratefully accepted this alternative option.



South LA Shelter Intervention Program Service Inquiry by Type

April 2013 - December 2013 (Year one of pilot program)

2,041

PETS PREVENTED FROM ENTERING THE SOUTH LA SHELTER



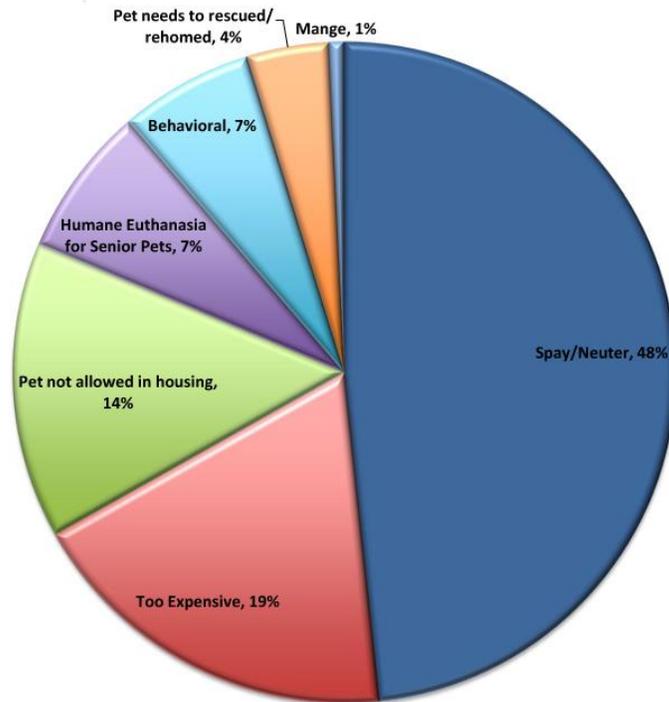
1,789 DOGS



241 CATS



11 RABBITS



Lots of dogs were right on the edge of being surrendered because of barking, pulling on the leash, aggression and more. Trainers worked tirelessly with countless dog owners, inspiring them to not give up, try one more day, stay committed to your dog. They taught socialization, basic obedience, and address common problems like barking, potty training, growling at other dogs or new people – all seemingly simple yet complex behavioral challenges that often land dogs into the shelter.

For 82 pets, rehoming or rescue was the only solution to prevent a pet from entering the shelter. We asked each family to hold on to their pet while we worked together to find a foster, an adopter or rescue to take on their pet. Dogs of all ages, from puppy to senior, were prevented from entering the shelter.

The program started on April 6, 2013. The level of dedication and positive attitude she has is amazing. Together, our team has continued to learn just how challenging keeping a pet, while living in poverty can be. Poverty is and continues to be the #1 reason why the majority of our families felt the need to surrender their pet, despite the fact that there was no way to record this on our daily log.

Starting as early as next month, we will have a part time team member, walking door to door in zip code 90011(which ironically is geographically in South LA but is serviced by the North Central shelter) offering free spay/neuter services and identifying pet owners who need our help. Help will include dog houses, dog training at the nearby park, collars, leashes and dog food. I'm confident that this will make an immediate impact, since we have seen so many people come to the shelter to surrender a pet, but would have gladly taken help earlier if it had been offered in the community.

Grants, dedicated service providers, volunteers with the hearts of teachers, and patience are all extremely important but without the support of LA Animal Services staff members and dedicated LAAS volunteers, we could not turn so many situations around, keeping pets out of the shelter and sending them back home. Often, it's only because an Animal Care Technician or officer gets involved and identifies a situation. The kennel supervisors also play a role in preventing pets from entering the shelter, counseling the pet owner about the fact that there is an alternative to surrendering a cat or

dog. Working together as a team, supporting each other in good and bad times; the program works because we work together as a team!

Lori Weise
Founder
Downtown Dog Rescue

ASPCA Policy and Position Statements

Position Statement on Keeping Pets and People Together

The ASPCA believes that pets and people belong together; that financial circumstances alone are not reliable indicators of the capacity to love and care for a companion animal, and that strong bonds between people and pets make for stronger communities. From our direct care of companion animals, our work with animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, law enforcement and policy makers and our own research, we've also learned that there are a variety of challenging circumstances that can cause pets to lose their homes. Poverty, short term emergencies, illness, lack of affordable, accessible vet care, and a shortage of pet friendly housing can conspire to force even the most devoted pet owner to relinquish a beloved pet to a local shelter or rescue group.

For owners who are either unable to care for a pet or who no longer wish to do so, surrender to a shelter or rescue group may, at times, be the best outcome. But, as we continue to work closely with communities and to study the reasons why people relinquish their pets, we've learned that too often pet owners who have strong emotional bonds with their pets would choose to keep their pet, if only provided the short term help needed to make it possible. That help can come in many forms, like affordable veterinary care, pet care supplies, a well insulated dog house, waiver of fees that keep owners from reclaiming lost pets, referral to supportive human services or affordable pet friendly housing options.

Providing the support that helps owners keep their pets when it is best for the animal to remain in his or her home has become a focus of the ASPCA and many other animal welfare organizations in recent years. We know that this approach 1) allows shelters and rescue groups to focus their sheltering and rehoming services on animals most in need, 2) frees up critical public safety resources to address the most serious criminal activities that threaten our collective well-being, and 3) fosters the human/animal bond that provides quality of life benefits to people and pets alike.

Shelters and rescue groups play critical roles in our communities by providing refuge, protection, and care for animals that truly need it. Because funding for animal sheltering is often inadequate to meet the demand placed on shelters and rescues groups, it's especially important that these organizations focus their efforts on the animals most in need of their services. Victims of intentional cruelty, lost pets who have strayed from home, animals displaced by disasters and animals who pose public safety threats (e.g., dangerous dogs, rabies quarantines) are plainly animals for whom the shelter and rescue system is a vital and necessary refuge. Focusing efforts on sheltering the animals most in need also

frees up resources that can be directed towards community pet retention programs that focus on keeping pets and people together.

Criminal charges and seizure of animals that have been harmed or are at grave risk of harm is appropriate and necessary in cases of intentional cruelty, where the safety of the animal victims and the communities in which they live must be the priority. Yet there are many situations that instead involve pet owners, who, with help, can and wish to continue to care for their animal companions. Working with law enforcement and the animal welfare community to help distinguish between these situations, and supporting law enforcement's exercise of discretion to treat cases as criminal when appropriate and to refer other cases for intervention that will provide support to pet owners, is a linchpin of our efforts.¹

Simply put, keeping pets and people together is often the best outcome for the pets, the people, and the community. Accomplishing this goal requires that we shift our thinking, especially when it comes to preconceived notions about a person's financial circumstances and his/her desire and ability to take good care of a pet. Of course learning from our experiences is nothing new to animal welfare professionals. We have learned that open adoption practices (those that do not set up barriers to adoption due to financial, social, or other issues) allow more pets to leave shelters and find new homes than practices that entail rigorous adoption applications and background checks (Weiss et al 2014; Gibbons et al 2014). We have also learned that people who buy pets on impulse or who receive pets as gifts are as, if not more, committed to keeping their pets than those who obtain pets in other ways (Weiss et al 2013). And finally, we have learned that people who get a pet for "free" do not value their pet any less than those who pay a fee to adopt a pet (Weiss & Gramann 2009).

We have also learned that people who are financially disadvantaged do not love their pets any less than those with more wealth. Surveys of homeless pet owners reveal a level of attachment to their pets that may be greater than that reported by pet owners who live in traditional residences (Irvine 2013). Indeed, as Leslie Irvine, who conducted a study of 72 homeless pet owners in California, Colorado and Florida points out, keeping a pet while homeless involves an intense level of commitment and more than a little hardship (Id.). The homeless routinely give up offers of shelter housing that would require them to give up or separate from their pets.

Just as there is no reason to believe that those living in persistent poverty (or those facing temporary financial hardship) are any less committed to their pets, there is no data to support the notion that they do not desire to provide the care their pets need. Indeed, existing studies point to the opposite; that there is not a correlation between income and a pet owner's desire and commitment to provide necessary care to her animal companions (Poresky & Daniels 1998; Staats et al 1996).

However, people with fewer financial means do face some daunting obstacles to keeping their pets. While solving the complex societal issue of poverty is beyond the ken of the animal welfare field, we absolutely can solve some of the obstacles to pet retention by committing to the following principles and actions.

Accountability

First, we must ensure that our own attitudes and actions do not create further obstacles to people keeping their pets. We should treat people with dignity and respect, no matter their financial or life circumstances. We should suspend judgment and inherent bias and make sure that we do not allow people's appearance, ethnicity, manner or language of speech, or attire influence our judgment about their ability or desire to care for their pets. We should demonstrate our commitment to these principles by ensuring that our staff is representative of the communities we serve and that our programs engage with and include those communities in a meaningful way.

Responsibilities of Shelters

Shelter policies must reflect the complementary goals of keeping pets and their people together, reuniting lost pets with their families, and finding new homes for pets who have lost theirs. In our position statement on the responsibilities of shelters ([Responsibilities of Animal Shelters](#)), we make clear that shelter policies should treat potential adopters respectfully and should never discriminate against them based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or identification or financial circumstances. Just as importantly shelter policies should not create barriers to owners reuniting with lost pets. Shelters should have, and liberally employ, discretion to reduce or waive return to owner fees. While shelters may rely on these and other fees for income, the cost of caring for, rehoming or possibly euthanizing an animal is often more than the lost income. Sending the animal home is frequently the better outcome for the pet, the family and the shelter.

Pet Retention and Community Engagement Programs

Strategic and well resourced safety net programs should be in place to enable and encourage collaboration between key agencies (animal shelters, rescues, veterinarians, law enforcement, human service providers, food banks and policy makers) to identify situations where keeping pets and people together may be the best course of action and ensure that vital services are provided to accomplish this goal. Through our own pet retention and community medicine work in New York and Los Angeles, we are learning how effective collaboration between animal welfare, law enforcement and human service agencies can be in helping people keep pets, reducing the numbers of animals entering shelters, and allowing more effective use of shelter and law enforcement resources. In a survey we conducted focusing on owners relinquishing large dogs in New York City and Washington D.C., more than half of the respondents reported that assistance may have helped them keep their pets. Many of the reasons for relinquishment cited in this survey were short term challenges that would have been easily resolvable with supportive services (Weiss et al 2014b). Even more powerful was a survey in L.A., where we found that 88% of those surveyed chose to explore safety net options when they were made aware of them (Dolan et al 2015).

Accessible and Affordable Veterinary Care

Pet sterilization and preventative veterinary care should be accessible to all pet owners in the community and financial, transportation, immigration status and language barriers should never undermine access to these services. A study we conducted in Los Angeles revealed that the vast majority of owners relinquishing pets were doing so based on inability to afford or access medical or spay/neuter services (Dolan et al 2015). Another national study showed that 40 percent of

low income owners who rehomed their pets reported that access to affordable vet care would have helped them keep their pet (Weiss et al 2015).

Pet Friendly Housing

Laws and policies should expand affordable pet friendly housing options as well as the ability of the homeless and victims of domestic violence to seek refuge in shelters with their pets (or with provisions made for their pets in alternative housing facilities). Our rehoming study revealed that nationally, those who rent are more likely to need to rehome their pets for housing issues than for any other reason (Weiss et al 2015).

Housing laws and policies that ban pets, prohibit specific breeds, require cats to be declawed or dogs to be debarked or severely restrict pet ownership based on size should be rejected. In their place, we should support reasonable pet and housing policies that help keep people and pets together while enhancing the safety of residents and protecting the interests of landlords. Examples of such measures include policies that hold owners accountable for providing proper care and supervision for their pets (including leashing requirements, prohibitions on chaining/tethering, and requirements that owners pick up after their pets); policies that require reasonable, refundable pet deposits to encourage more property owners to make rental housing pet friendly; and policies that ensure even-handed, non-breed specific enforcement of these measures.

Breed Discrimination

Laws and policies that categorize certain dog breeds as inherently “dangerous” or “vicious” without regard to their behavior and that permit insurance companies to refuse coverage for homeowners and renters owning specific breeds of dogs should likewise be strongly opposed.

Laws with Unintended Consequences

Care should be taken to ensure that laws enacted with the aim of better protecting pets don't instead have the opposite effect. For example, many animal control laws; including those requiring licensing, identification, sterilization, rabies inoculation, leashing in public places and adequate outdoor shelter; entail monetary penalties and sometimes seizure of the animal with payment of fines as a prerequisite for return to owner. While these provisions play an important role in ensuring pet and public safety, they can also unwittingly increase shelter intake and euthanasia when owners do not have the funds to pay for a new dog house, license fees, sterilization costs or attendant penalties. Ensuring that these laws are never enforced in a manner that discriminates against or targets segments of the community, and that there is discretion to waive or reduce penalties based on owner compliance, is crucial if we are to achieve the goal of keeping people and pets together.

Conclusion

The ASPCA believes that keeping people and pets together, whenever it is possible and appropriate to do so, should be a priority for the animal welfare community and for society as a whole. To achieve this goal, we must put aside

preconceived notions and treat people with respect and dignity whatever their financial or other life circumstances. We must support laws and policies that strengthen and support rather than break the bond between people and their animal companions. And perhaps most importantly, we must all work together; human and animal service agencies, pet owners, veterinarians, landlords, and policy makers; to ensure that pets and their people continue to live together; safe, secure, happy, and a vital part of the community.

¹We do not suggest that financially challenged pet owners be held to a lesser legal standard of animal care than those with greater resources. Instead, we believe that the capacity to care for pets should not be judged based on financial resources. We also recognize the distinction between a devoted pet owner who eagerly assumes responsibility for proper care of his pet and simply needs help in overcoming financial or other obstacles, and the pet owner who, despite offers of assistance, persists in failing to provide necessary care to their pet, resulting in unnecessary suffering or other harm. For the former, we support the notion of keeping the person and pet together. For the latter, we support the judgment of law enforcement to hold the owner accountable for their actions, including through imposition of criminal charges.

FINAL NOTES & FOCUS POINTS

- Spay/Neuter to reduce overpopulation
- Affordable and/or Subsidized Veterinary Care, even middle-class families struggle with climbing medical costs for their pets
- Education to reduce the number of unintentional cruelty and neglect cases and to improve public health and the health of the animal
- Housing Limitations for animals and specific breeds to reduce the number of homeless, but wanted, pets needing shelter
- Behavior Training to aid pet owners struggling with easily resolved problems to avoid surrender
- More support for Lost and Found, microchipping and reclaim fee forgiveness in order to return more pets back home when they have been missing.