

identify and reduce or eliminate the sources of animal problems in the community.

As MDPASU works to redefine itself in a manner that meets current and future needs of the people and animals in Miami-Dade County, the guidance and support of the county regarding community outreach will be critical. The following trends are contributing to the evolution of the traditional animal shelter into more of a “community resource center” and a temporary haven for animals on their way back to lifelong homes:

- Returning animals to their original owners. Some shelters are increasing return to owner rates by heightening the visibility of their services, giving "free rides home" to tagged animals, streamlining lost-and-found reports and sharing them with other shelters, microchipping animals to complement registration-tag identification, and working with retailers such as PetsMart to list lost and found animals at computer kiosks in stores and shelters. In the future, better inter-agency communication and Web site listings will continue to increase the number of reunions between people and their pets, and to decrease the number of animals filling shelter kennels and cages.
- Focusing on population controls. Even in communities where accidental breeding and pet overpopulation are not as severe as they once were, aggressive sterilization programs are still critical to continue the decrease in population numbers. MDPASU should be commended for its commitment to make a real dent in long-term numbers. The MAC unit should also help in reaching more pet owners in low-income neighborhoods.
- Enacting animal care and control legislation. Clear and consistent animal care and control laws, and effective enforcement of those laws, are obviously critical to maintaining public safety and protecting animals from abuse and neglect. But they are also important ingredients in educating the public about responsible pet caretaking. Even the more routine efforts of ACOs and other field personnel add up to a huge difference in the way communities perceive and respond to animals. Local leash and waste-disposal laws can go a long way toward keeping non pet owners happy and making communities more pet friendly.
- Targeting rental housing. Because "landlord doesn't accept pets" has become a common reason for relinquishment, many shelters are seeking to tear down the metaphorical fences that stand between pets and people in rental units. By providing information and advice to property managers and helping pet owners find appropriate rental housing, shelters can help more people hold onto their companion animals.<sup>86</sup> In terms of adoptions, the numbers speak for themselves: Researchers say that if all rental housing units permitted pets, about 6.5 million more animals could be placed in new homes.

---

86 HSUS brochures, “Profiting from Pets” and “13 Steps to Finding Rental Housing That Accepts Pets”\*

- Collaborations. Both municipal agencies and private organizations will be more successful if they involve citizens and other animal groups in their programs. Many shelters have already initiated such partnerships, working with placement partners to find more homes for animals, partnering with free-roaming cat caretakers to identify and reduce cat colony numbers through TTVARM programs (trap-test vaccinate-alter-release-monitor), and involving volunteers in socializing and training shelter animals.<sup>87</sup> Veterinarians and other animal professionals are working with shelters to identify behavior problems or lifestyle issues while also promoting shelter animals and services.
- Making the case for funding and resources. Effective animal care and control services must begin with sufficient funding from local governments.<sup>88</sup> Staff training, proper equipment, and a sanitary shelter are the basic essentials. But local leaders who truly want to increase the number of animals available for adoption, while decreasing the numbers euthanized, are now recognizing the importance of devoting resources to providing adequate staff and development of innovative programs that increase return-to-owner rates and strengthen people's relationships with their pets.
- Preserving the bond. In seeking to keep pets and people together, some organizations have launched programs that provide temporary assistance to pet owners who are ill or elderly, or to those who have been displaced from their homes. In some areas, victims of domestic violence can turn to shelters for temporary boarding of their pets. In others, pet owners who have lost their jobs or are experiencing other financial setbacks can turn to pet food-banks at local shelters for help. Community organizations have been established specifically to help people living with HIV/AIDS to obtain veterinary services, in-home pet care, and re-homing services for pets.
- Providing behavioral assistance. Shelters around the country are beginning to stave off relinquishments by providing free or subsidized behavior training and advice. The new push to address such issues as house-soiling and other destructive behaviors includes pet-parenting classes, pre-adoption counseling, and behavior training. Shelter studies reveal a clear need for such programs, indicating that many people who surrender animals are unaware of effective methods for dealing with routine behavior issues.<sup>89, 90</sup>
- Working with sheltered animals. By making animals comfortable during their stay and keeping their minds occupied through light training and stimulating toys, shelters around the country are seeing noticeable differences in the mental health of their furry residents. Dogs that otherwise might languish in their kennels are

---

87 HSUS *Animal Sheltering* magazine, "Teaching Manners for Life," January/February 2000\*

88 HSUS *Animal Sheltering* magazine, "Show Me the Money," May/June 2002\*

89 HSUS *Animal Sheltering* magazine, "Minding Their Manners, Teaching People and Their Pets," March/April 2000\*

90 HSUS *Animal Sheltering* magazine, "Help! My New Cat is Peeing Outside His Litter Box," November/December 2001\*

learning basic commands during walks and feeding times - and showing off their newfound education to potential adopters. Because the dogs take what they learn with them to their new homes, stress-reduction and behavior programs are not only increasing adoptions but also reducing return rates.

- Ensuring the best environment possible. As shelters develop programs and services to extend their outreach to the general public, they are also redesigning their physical structures to make facilities more comfortable for the animals in their care. New designs now include more elements intended to reduce noise, increase sunlight, and add a touch of home to dog kennels and cat rooms. By making use of windows, mirrors, plants, high-quality ventilation systems, and sound absorption materials, shelters can create a more relaxing and stimulating environment for animals, employees, volunteers, and visitors.
- Becoming a true community resource. In the same way that shelters have rallied around the spay/neuter message, they are now beginning to market a broader message about the important roles companion animals play in human lives. Pets have become an integral part of the family in an increasing number of households, but many pet owners still have more casual relationships with their companion animals. Through media campaigns and creative marketing strategies, shelters can raise public awareness of their services and of the value of animal companionship.

### **Public Relations**

MDPASU must be ready whenever a crisis strikes that may bring negative publicity to their door. Animal shelters must be seen as a safe haven within their community. Conflicts relating to animal care and services (legitimate or otherwise) depicted primarily in the local media tend to lead only to further divisiveness among those involved, rather than resolution. And, by providing the public with only a rough sketch rather than the full clear picture, ongoing negative publicity has the potential to lead to increased animal abandonment by an untrusting public.

The best way to address an image problem is to show the public, through actions in everyday service, that the department cares about animals and is committed to their protection. To do so also means not only producing good press but also demonstrating consistency, kindness, and timeliness in dealing with the public's concerns. When animal care and control professionals take pride in their work, the public clearly notices. The best "PR" for the agency is ensuring that the community receives the highest level of service when dealing with MDPASU and the animals receive consistent, high-quality care.

This being said, the fact remains that the very nature of animal control work is such that it creates conflict. The department must have the time and staff to be able to turn around reporters' requests almost immediately. With the advent of on-line media, reporters are often working under the constant pressure of imminent deadlines. Broadcast reporters generally need to conduct on-camera interviews by early afternoon, in order to be able to: a) transport the videotape back to the station; b) allow for editing; and then, c) air the story that evening.

It is extremely beneficial to have an appointed spokesperson available that has been well-trained

to respond to media inquiries. Reporters, readers and viewers are likely to remember a face or a name they've seen before and will, over time, come to respect that person as an authority on that subject matter. Responding to media inquiries on a timely basis, asking about deadlines, and making every effort to accommodate the deadlines will also likely lead to a stronger relationship with reporters and will give them a sense that they are dealing with professionals who understand and respect their needs.

It is important for animal care and control officials to understand the role of the media. The media provides entertainment, disseminates public information, and acts as a watchdog for the community. A publicly funded animal control agency is likely to be scrutinized by reporters, and the combination of the public's interest in animals and society's fascination with political scandal contributes to a news organization's desire to publish or air any stories related to animal care and control. Any activity or situation appears more sinister when reporters are blocked or stories are recorded by undercover camera. On the other hand, a camera crew that is welcomed to the shelter, given a thorough tour by a shelter director or manager, and encouraged to ask questions is more likely to portray an objective or even positive portrait of the shelter and the shelter staff.

## 9.2 VOLUNTEERS

### **Observations:**

Although MDPASU did have an unstructured volunteer program, there were no written SOPs. Several weeks before the site visit, the volunteer program was suspended due to liability reasons according to shelter management; however, those performing community service were still allowed to work at the facility.

The HSUS team was provided with a *Volunteer Information Sheet*, which was used to gain some basic information and interests from potential volunteers. Volunteers were also required to sign a *Volunteer Agreement and Release* holding MDPASU harmless in the event that a volunteer is injured.

MDPASU did not actively recruit volunteers, hold a volunteer orientation, provide formal training, use job descriptions, or use scheduling for volunteers. There were no exit interviews with volunteers who left the shelter nor was there any formal recognition for volunteers.

### **Recommendations:**

- ✓ Immediately begin addressing the liability issues and then consider reinstating the volunteer program at MDPASU. If reinstated, once the following recommendations are implemented with the current level of volunteers, proceed to expanding the program. If these recommendations are not addressed, the program is doomed to failure and continued controversy.
  
- ✓ For volunteer section recommendations, please refer to *Volunteer Management, A Guide for Animal Care Organizations* accompanying this report. This manual contains more detailed information on how to implement a volunteer program.

- ✓ Develop written SOPs for the volunteer program.
- ✓ A paid MDPASU staff member should formally be put in charge of the volunteer program and should act as volunteer coordinator. Depending on the size of the program, this can be a full-time job. The key to a good program is a competent volunteer coordinator with a comprehensive, structured training plan complete with rules and regulations for volunteers.
- ✓ To be successful, MDPASU's volunteer program will need funding resources - an earmarked budget.
- ✓ Staff needs to "buy-in" to a volunteer program. They must be involved with planning the program and need to see how volunteers will help them in their job, rather than create more work for them.
- ✓ Staff will value volunteer positions they see to be of direct assistance to them. To uncover possible volunteer jobs, conduct interviews with staff to determine their needs and interests. Based on that survey, volunteer job descriptions and a complete training program should be developed. Before volunteers start working, a manual should be developed and should contain information about the following:
  - Positions assigned to volunteers
  - Job descriptions
  - Duties volunteers may and may not perform
  - Minimum age for volunteers
  - Uniforms, color-coded clothing, name tags
  - Volunteer contact with the public
  - Volunteer contact with the animals
  - Areas of the agency where volunteers are permitted to work
  - How, when, and where orientations will be conducted
  - Required training specific to each position
  - Recording time donated
  - Minimum time commitment per week and for how many months
  - Resolution procedures for staff-volunteer conflicts
  - Protocol for reviewing and dismissing volunteers
  - Actions taken if a volunteer is injured "on the job"
  - Insurance coverage for volunteers or separate under the shelter's general policy
- ✓ Meet with staff to determine their comfort level with volunteers. Address any concerns they may have by creating policies that put staff at ease.
- ✓ Although MDPASU seemed to have a group of volunteers knowledgeable in companion animal issues, remember that many of the people who volunteer know only that they want to help animals. They may have little or no understanding of the actual work your shelter does or the philosophical issues surrounding animal sheltering. Volunteers are your ambassadors and they need all the information they can get to assist visitors at the

shelter. The volunteer manual serves as an invaluable resource that volunteers can refer to time and again during their service with your organization. So, in addition to the previous basic rules and policies, make sure that the pages of that manual contain:

- Goals of MDPASU and the goals of the volunteer program
  - Services MDPASU provides
  - MDPASU's philosophy on complicated issues such as intakes, adoption and euthanasia
  - General information about MDPASU, including operating hours and important phone numbers
  - MDPASU policies such as adoption procedures and holding periods
  - A brief history of MDPASU and its achievements
- ✓ Create volunteer jobs that are meaningful! If volunteers aren't made to feel like an important part of the agency, they will leave.

### **Recruitment**

- ✓ Discontinue allowing volunteers to show up to do whatever it is they feel like doing. Volunteer recruitment should be conducted based on the needs of MDPASU. The staff needs to determine what positions volunteers can fill and how many they need at one time. Recruitment should be done to fill those positions rather than trying to accommodate the requests of every individual that contacts MDPASU with an idea. Volunteers are brought into the agency to do a service. It is important that MDPASU recruit volunteers based on need to prevent a dilution of efforts or an unruly volunteer program. Remember: You don't need a job for every person that wants to volunteer. You just need a volunteer for every job you need to fill.
- ✓ Consider requiring a minimum length of service for all volunteers. For example, volunteers can be required to commit for a six-month period, working a minimum of 10 hours a month or whatever hours and commitment MDPASU needs. It is a big investment for any agency to recruit, properly train, and supervise volunteers. The purpose of a minimum time commitment is to help weed out volunteers who are not serious about the volunteer job.
- ✓ Advertise for volunteers. Include information about the positions available and their requirements, time commitment, shelter contact information, and orientation information. This will provide prospective volunteers with enough basic information about the program that they can decide whether or not they wish to attend the orientation and make the commitment. Advertising can be done several ways including on your Web site, through a press release, during events, in a newsletter, etc.

### **Training**

- ✓ Schedule group orientations to educate potential volunteers about MDPASU so they can decide if MDPASU is the right place for them to volunteer. Alternate days and times for orientations to accommodate as many potential volunteers as possible.<sup>91</sup>

---

91 HSUS *Animal Sheltering* magazine, "How to Host a Volunteer Orientation," November/December 2002\*

- ✓ In addition to a formal volunteer orientation as part of the recruitment process, all volunteers need a formal training class that will give them the basics they need to work in the shelter. Some shelters choose to have a mandatory animal handling class during which all new volunteers learn the basics of the shelter operation and how to handle the animals. Once that training is complete, the volunteers are then trained on their specific job assignment. For example, a dog walker will have different training requirements than a volunteer adoption assistant. It's important to tailor the training to the job that needs to be done.
- ✓ As much as possible, try to schedule training sessions during quiet times. This can be challenging, but balancing between when the volunteers are most often available (evenings and weekends) and when the staff is available is important.
- ✓ Create and keep a separate area as a formal equipment station for volunteers. All supplies volunteers will need to do their jobs, such as leashes and poop bags for dog walkers, should be located here and be kept stocked at all times. This helps volunteers feel autonomous (which is important for volunteer motivation) and efficient, while ensuring that staff isn't interrupted for basic supplies.
- ✓ If special training events are offered to the staff, consider offering it to special volunteers as well (but, be sure to spread the wealth and not always offer it to the *same* volunteers—give everyone a chance to participate at one time or another).
- ✓ Post instructions as much as possible. Be detailed. It's worth the time because it will keep volunteers from making mistakes. It will also make the volunteers feel more autonomous because they won't have to bother staff every time they forget how to complete a task such as mixing the cleaning solution or completing licensing paperwork. Even though volunteers are trained, they are not generally there full-time like the staff so it will take them longer to get the hang of things. They will often need reminders. The "How To" sheets published in *Animal Sheltering* magazine are great for this purpose.<sup>92</sup>
- ✓ Keep in mind the more you increase a volunteer's responsibilities, the more time staff members will have to spend training the volunteer. Once the program has stabilized, consider using well-trained volunteers to teach new volunteers the ropes. This will not only alleviate staff pressure, but will provide a growth opportunity for your seasoned volunteers.

### **Scheduling**

- ✓ Volunteers should be required to set a schedule. Each volunteer position can have a different schedule depending on the shelter's needs and the volunteer's availability.

### **Supervision**

- ✓ Provide a clear chain of command for your volunteers. Volunteers need to know whom to report to within the organization, and that person needs to be available to the volunteer.

- ✓ Set high expectations for your volunteers. Don't be afraid to challenge them. Volunteers usually leave their assignments because they are underused, not because they are overworked.
- ✓ Deal with volunteer problems right away. Your volunteers and paid staff will respect you for it. Document volunteer performance and keep a record in the volunteer's file.
- ✓ From time to time, problems with volunteers are bound to occur. However, if you take the time to create a solid program, you will have fewer problems and the problems you do have will be easier to solve. Remember that it is perfectly acceptable to fire a volunteer when necessary.
- ✓ Keep in mind that volunteers will need to know much of what the staff needs to know when issues arise or there is a change in shelter policy. Be sure to keep the volunteers informed about current events related to MDPASU's operations.

### **Recognition**

- ✓ Highlight a volunteer of the month on the MDPASU Web site. This not only serves to recognize the good work of your volunteers, but also helps recruit new volunteers that visit the site.
- ✓ Consider holding periodic volunteer meetings or send out a volunteer newsletter via e-mail to help build camaraderie and to keep volunteers informed.
- ✓ As volunteers leave the program, MDPASU should consider conducting exit interviews. This information will assist the volunteer coordinator in improving the program and help to address problems, which may have lead to the volunteer's departure.

### **Discussion:**

Volunteer programs can be extremely effective in supplementing staff efforts. They can build goodwill and trust for the agency in the community. Volunteers are ambassadors for the agency in promoting its mission to the community. Citizens willing to give their time are a resource that is vital and important to many government agencies.

But for a volunteer program to be successful, you must lay a strong foundation for the program. Adding volunteers to a disorganized sheltering operation will only serve to make things worse. You risk doing damage to your programs and your organization's reputation if you bring in volunteers before you are ready.

Due to the emotional nature of this business and the fact animals must be euthanized, the MDPASU volunteer program must have different guidelines than for other volunteer opportunities such as at the public library. Volunteers must be completely oriented to all aspects of the operation and must understand that they are there to assist, not direct the activities of the agency. Achieving this understanding is the difference between success and failure.

While the long list of benefits offered by a volunteer program is immediately compelling, the

