

## **REDUCING PET EUTHANASIA IN DOÑA ANA COUNTY: A PROPOSAL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE, COMMUNITY-WIDE INITIATIVE**

### **Introduction**

Dogs and cats can be wonderful companions and provide important services. They may also carry disease, pose a threat to public safety, and be general nuisance. In some instances the animals are themselves in need of protection from neglect, abuse, or mistreatment. Addressing health and safety issues while ensuring animal welfare and protecting owners' rights is complicated and challenging.

**The following proposal outlines an innovative approach to addressing animal issues in our area. Comprehensive and community-based, the effort will increase public health and safety, enhance animal welfare, and increase the effectiveness of public expenditures.**

The existing system for animal care and control in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County is working well on several fronts. Major successes include rabies control, removal of animals from bad situations, and having a place for people to take unwanted animals.

**Unfortunately the current system also results in the premature deaths of thousands of animals.** Up to two-thirds of all the dogs and cats taken in at the shelter—more than 8,000 healthy or treatable animals—are killed there every year. Unless significant changes are made, the very system that is supposed to protect animals will put tens of thousands of them at risk over the next decade.

Healthy or treatable dogs and cats are being killed at the shelter because more are being admitted than the facility can hold. **This situation can be corrected if the placement of animals in good homes can be greatly increased, and if the number of animals going to the shelter can be significantly reduced.**

**Accomplishment of these objectives requires participation** by animal advocates, Animal Control Officers, and the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley (ASCMV). **The effort will take as many as seven years to finish.** It will require investment of time and fiscal resources above existing levels, and modification of policies and procedures.

The initiative will work **if everyone actively supports the same 12-point plan, if organizations align their programs with the campaign, and if the initiative can capitalize on the benefits of broadly based cooperation and coordinated action.**

### The 12- Point Plan

Experience around the country suggests that 12 activities are needed to reduce, if not eliminate, killing of savable animals at the shelter. The activities fall into three categories: (1) building a strong support base, (2) lowering intakes, and (3) increasing positive outcomes.

The four activities that would **build a strong support base** include:

- A compassionate and resourceful shelter director,
- Adequate funding for all aspects of the initiative,
- A strong public relations program to gain community involvement, and
- Engaging lots of volunteers.

**Lowered intake rates** result from four more activities:

- Increased pet retention by owners,
- A proactive approach to returning lost animals,
- High-volume, low-cost sterilization, and
- A program to address feral and loose cats.

And finally, we can **increase the number of animals leaving the shelter** with yet another set of activities:

- Medical and behavioral programs for animals in the shelter,
- Active reliance on rescue groups,
- Foster care, and
- A comprehensive adoption program.

Underlying the 12-Point Plan are three assumptions. First, animal **owners must understand their responsibilities** and be held accountable for meeting those responsibilities. Second, **the dog and cat population must be brought down** to a number more closely related to actual demand for these pets. And third, public **policy and enforcement activity must minimize the unintended consequence** of high euthanasia rates without compromising public health and safety.

### **The Strategic Frame**

From October through December of 2011 a group of roughly 40 people worked on ways to translate the 12-Point Plan into a workable strategy for Las Cruces and Doña Ana County.

The group agreed that the best way to carry out the 12-Point Plan is by a consortium dedicated exclusively to this effort. Because many different entities are involved in local animal issues, the consortium must include animal advocates and organizations, City and County Animal Control units, and the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley (ASCMV).

The 12-Point Plan will be carried out by work groups. Each group will be dedicated to one or more of the plan elements and each will have as much independence as possible to organize and carry out their respective activities. Tasks will focus on meeting specific goals with measurable results.

### **Operational Details**

- **Name:** “The Mesilla Valley Campaign for Pets and Owners”

The name of the organization is of primary concern in dealings with governmental entities, potential sources of funding, and the public at large.

The intent of this title is to convey: (a) that the organization is focused on change in the settled areas of Doña Ana County, and (b) that the focus of concern is with both pets and their owners.

- **Objective:** “Zero in Seven”

Killing of healthy and treatable dogs and cats at the ASCMV shelter will be reduced to zero by the end of 2019 – that is, within 7 years.

Using 2010 statistics, this goal can be attained if the number of dogs and cats taken in at the shelter drops and the number of animals placed in good homes increases by a combined average total of 1200 animals each year between 2012 and 2019.

- **Initial marketing frame:** “Feel the Love”

This approach is focused on changing the expectations, assumptions, and behavior towards dogs and cats by emphasizing the mutual benefits to be gained through responsible, humane ownership.

Whether the main point of a message is positive (get your dog vaccinated), negative (avoid accidental pregnancies), or potentially controversial (don't just feed stray cats) – the tag is that all of these actions are a sign of real caring and that, if done, will be reciprocated.

- **Structure of the Consortium**

The consortium will be composed of all organizations, governmental entities, and individuals that publicly endorse the objectives of the campaign and commit to support of campaign activities through contributions of time, money, or other resources.

The consortium will be coordinated by a council and organized into work groups.

- **The Council**

The consortium will be coordinated by a council. The council will be composed of one representative from each organization of more than 10 members, one from each Animal Control unit, one from the ASCMV Board and the ASCMV Director, and 3 representatives elected at large from the people working on the campaign. The council will meet monthly or more frequently as called by the council chair. A quorum will consist of 51% of the designated representatives.

The council will elect a chairperson on an annual basis. The chairperson will be authorized to speak on behalf of the campaign and will lead council meetings.

Primary functions of the council include: (a) setting intermediate goals and monitoring progress of the campaign, (b) seeking and distributing funds, (c) facilitating efforts of individual work groups, (d) helping work groups synchronize their efforts, and (e) establishing such policies or procedures as may be needed for achievement of the stated purpose of the campaign.

The council will determine how best to handle the financial matters of the campaign including whether or not to formally organize as a not-for-profit corporation.

- **Work Groups**

Work of the campaign will be done by individuals organized into work groups. Each work group will be dedicated to making progress in one or more of the campaign's strategic areas. More than one work group may be engaged in advancing a strategic area so long as the efforts of those work groups are not in competition with one another.

Each work group will put together a work plan at the beginning of the year. The work plan will consist of specific tasks or activities, a schedule, a budget, and assignments. The group may adjust the work plan during the year based on changing conditions. Groups will collaborate with one another as needed to accomplish their objectives.

- **Ground Rules**

The campaign will be move more smoothly and efficiently if participants work within the following principles:

- Keep everything positive and moving toward our goal of "0 in 7"
- Focus your time and energy on achieving the objectives of your own team.
- Ask for help when coordination is needed – accept that it might not take the form you expect.
- Listen to the requests of others – meet their expectations if at all possible.

## APPENDIX A.

### Getting Started in 2012

#### WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO GET DONE BY THE END OF 2012

*The following are preliminary suggestions for goals to be accomplished in 2012. They are not listed in any kind of ranked order of importance.*

1. Fully equip all Animal Control Officer's (ACO) with chip-readers and other related equipment; markedly increase **Return to Owner (RTO)** statistics.
2. By the end of the year have everything in place—funding, agreements for facilities, staffing, etc.—needed to increase **sterilization procedures** by 1000 surgeries per month.
3. Ensure that a sustainable **funding** strategy is in place and showing results in terms of private grants, City and County appropriations, and donations.
4. Develop a comprehensive strategy for **education and marketing** that targets people of all ages and has materials ready to use in January 2013.
5. See that new City and County **ordinances** are in place that address critical issues and have reduced unintended consequences or a mitigation strategy regarding euthanasia.
6. Develop and select a **logo and slogan** for the campaign based on market testing.
7. Increase **adoptions, rescues and fosters** from the shelter by 15% over 2011 statistics.
8. Decrease **owner surrenders or drop-offs** to the shelter by 10%.
9. The Mesilla Valley **Campaign is fully organized** and all work groups are functioning.
10. **Resolutions or letters of support** are in hand from all governmental entities and partnering organizations.

*Note: Items #7 – 10 were proposed after the group meeting. (BGG)*

## WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO DO IN THE FIRST 90 DAYS OF 2012

*The following suggestions are preliminary ideas regarding work to be done in the first 90 days of 2012. They are not listed in any kind of ranked order of importance.*

1. **Resolutions are passed** by the ASCMV Board, City Council, and County Commission in support of “Zero in Seven”.
2. **Letters of support** or resolutions are approved by animal advocacy groups wishing to participate in the consortium.
3. The **first meetings** are held of the consortium, the council, and all work groups.
4. Information related to the 12-Point Plan is collected and analyzed to establish a good **baseline** regarding animal-related issues throughout the county.
5. Agreement is formalized regarding protocols for measuring success.
6. The **target area** for 2012 is selected. Owner education, public outreach, RTO programs, reduced surrender practices, sterilization programs, and owner assistance are focused in this area to the greatest extent possible.
7. Formal agreements are put in place with the **Animal Control units** in support of “Zero in Seven”.
8. **Microchip reading equipment** is purchased and distributed for ACO use in support of Return to Owner (RTO) efforts.
9. An initial **logo, slogan, and branding message** are developed and approved for use during the first year.
10. A **website & social media strategy** are developed, approved for use, and implemented in support of the campaign.
11. Plans are developed and initiated to **broaden support for the campaign**. High priority contacts include judges, veterinarians, pet-related businesses, youth groups, civic groups, and news media.
12. A **fund raising plan** and case statement are drafted, approved, and initiated by the council.

**APPENDIX B.****\*Budget & Fundraising**

<b>Expense item</b>	<b>Est. cost</b>	<b>Potential sources</b>
High-volume, low-cost spay & neuter program (2 full-time vets or equivalent, tech staff, supplies & facilities) + (mobile van)	\$375,000	City / County (\$25,000) Grants (\$50,000) **Fees (\$300,000)
Equipment for Animal Control Officers	\$12,500	Donations (\$12,500)
Graphic design services	\$1,500	Donations (\$1,500)
Owner education literature – develop & publish	\$10,000	Grants (\$10,000)
Media advertising – local papers	\$6,000	Donations (\$6,000)
Travel costs for out-of-state rescues	\$20,000	Grants (\$15,000) Donations (\$5,000)
ASCMV staff to support increased adoptions, fosters & rescues	\$75,000	City / County (\$75,000)
Shelter improvements to facilitate adoptions	\$50,000	City / County (\$25,000) Grants (\$25,000)
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$550,000</b>	<b>City / County \$125,000</b> <b>Grants ----- \$100,000</b> <b>Donations ----- \$25,000</b> <b>Fees ----- \$300,000</b>

\*Preliminary -- for illustrative purposes and as a point of departure

\*\*Spay & Neuter Surgical Fees – assumes \$25 for each surgery x 12,000 surgeries.

Donations: animal organizations (\$2,500); businesses (\$2,500); individuals (\$20,000).  
Individual breakdown: 1 @ \$1,000, 5 @ \$500, 20 @ @ \$250, 50 @ \$100, 100 @ \$35.

Funds from City and County would be above current levels of support for ASCMV.

## **Appendix C.**

### **Draft Resolution**

WHEREAS, dogs and cats can be wonderful companions and provide important benefits to their owners; and

WHEREAS, domestic animals may also carry disease, pose a threat to public safety, and be general nuisance, and in some instances the animals may themselves be in need of protection from neglect, abuse, or mistreatment; and

WHEREAS, addressing public health and safety issues while ensuring animal welfare and protecting owner's rights requires active involvement of pet owners, animal advocates and advocacy organizations, the Animal Control units of the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County, and the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley (ASCMV); and

WHEREAS, the existing system for animal care and control in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County is working well on several fronts, with the notable exception that thousands of healthy or treatable dogs and cats are killed each year at the ASCMV shelter; and

WHEREAS, this situation can be corrected only if the number of animals placed in good homes can be greatly increased, and if the number of animals going to the shelter can be significantly reduced.; and

WHEREAS, the most effective and responsible way to increase animal placement and reduce shelter intake is through a multi-year, comprehensive, community-based effort; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that this governing board does hereby endorse the "12-Point Plan" of the *Mesilla Valley Campaign for Pet and Owners* offers as an important opportunity to improve the way our community addresses animal issues while enhancing the benefits of pet ownership; and

FURTHERMORE, agrees to support and work with other governmental entities, organizations, and individuals over the next seven years to reach the goal of having no healthy or treatable dogs and cats killed at the ASCMV shelter – while maintaining or improving existing conditions regarding public health and safety, animal welfare, and effectiveness of public expenditures.

## Appendix D.

### Work Groups

TEAM	PURPOSE(s)	TARGET
TERRIER (Management)	Coordination & Monitoring	Teams meet 75% of all established objectives
	Secure Adequate Funding	Develop initiative budget & secure funding to support 7-year effort
	Expand Buy-in & Support through Media & Personal Contact	75% of residents in target area are exposed to one message every month for one year
	Recruit & Place Volunteers	Generate 5000 volunteer hours in 2012; Increase to 10,000 volunteer hours in 2015
SHEPHERD (Enforcement & Animal Return)	Increase Pet Retention by Owners (RTO) & number of lost animals returned to their owners	Number of impounded animals from the target area is reduced by 50%  95% of all micro-chipped pets brought to the shelter are returned to their owners  Proposed animal ordinances are reviewed and comments provided regarding potential effect on killing of healthy and treatable animals.
SIAMESE (Spay & Neuter)	Increase number of sterilized animals thru high-volume, low-cost spay and neuter	By the end of 2012, an additional 12,000 sterilization surgeries are done throughout the county above 2011 numbers from all sources.
TABBY (Cat Placement)	Increase the number of cats fostered or adopted through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rescue groups</li> <li>• Medical &amp; behavioral programs</li> <li>• Foster care</li> <li>• Adoptions</li> </ul>	Number of cats fostered or adopted increases by 15% over 2010 / 2011 average

PERSIAN (Cat Colony Mgt)	Promote responsible colony management with emphasis on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vaccination &amp; sterilization</li> <li>• Restraint &amp; catteries</li> </ul>	100% of all known cat caretakers in the target area are contacted and provided with information regarding their responsibilities.
BULLDOG (Dog Placement)	Increase the number of dogs fostered or adopted through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rescue groups</li> <li>• Medical &amp; behavioral programs</li> <li>• Foster care</li> <li>• Adoptions</li> </ul>	Number of dogs fostered or adopted increases by 15% over 2010 / 2011 average

NOTE:

Additional ideas and information have been developed by the following work groups:

- Terrier
- Shepherd
- Siamese
- Persian

\*PROPOSED TARGET AREA FOR 2011 – 2013

Zip Codes: 88001, 88005, 88007, and 88047

General description: Area west of I-25 / I-10 from Radium Springs to Brazito and on either side of US-70 from the I-25 interchange to the Las Cruces Airport.

Includes: Radium Springs, Hill, Dona Ana, Fairacres, Picacho, Picacho Hills, parts of Las Cruces west of I-25 / I-10 (except for NMSU), Mesilla, Mesilla Park and Brazito.

\*During 2012, initial campaign efforts may be limited to a portion of this area.

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