

## **Cooperation seen as key for animal cruelty prevention**

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LAS CRUCES - "Fluffy," an imaginary dog, was used by Kate Pullen, with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to make her point to a group of animal welfare advocates Tuesday evening in Las Cruces.

"We can all stand around Fluffy, a little white dog, and there will be 10 different opinions about what we should do with Fluffy," she said. "But at the core of all those opinions, Fluffy needs a home. Fluffy needs to get out of the shelter."

Tackling the problem of helping pets in the shelter - and keeping them from ending up there in the first place - will take cooperation among groups, she said, and specific goals, such as decreasing euthanasias by 6 percent each year.

The need for cooperation was a recurring theme at the townhall meeting, in which three ASPCA representatives answered questions and advised local animal advocates about how to solve problems.

The animal advocacy community in Do a Ana County has been divided in recent years on a number of issues. Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, invited the ASPCA staff to Las Cruces to provide advise.

Bob Hearn, who's been involved with several animal welfare organizations in the past, said other outside groups have visited the shelter, only to offer criticism. But the visit by the ASPCA was different, he said.

"These folks said: 'Here's a positive way you can approach your problems. Your problems are the same as a lot of other people's problems, and we have proven methods for taking them on, and we'll help you,'" he said.

Some attendees asked about how to best to convince public officials, animal control officers and local veterinarians to adopt different stances toward the pet overpopulation problem. Bill Hart, who runs a local beagle and basset hound rescue, criticized elected officials for not doing enough to stem the tide of puppies being born in Do a Ana County.

"How do you motivate our public officials to see this is a serious problem?" he asked.

Tami McReynolds, a veterinarian and director of community initiatives with the ASPCA, advised that it will take elected officials finding out what's working from their colleagues in other places. Plus, she said, the public will have to become engaged in lobbying.

In addition, it will take relationship-building, Karen Medicus of Austin, Texas, ASPCA senior director of community outreach said.

Six members of the city-county animal shelter board attended the session, held at Las Cruces City Hall, 700 N. Main St. Pullen, who's attended similar meetings across the country, commended them for being involved, saying it's "rare for them to show up."

"There's no magic wand here," Pullen said. "It takes a lot of work to move the needle to increase the number of animals leaving our shelters alive."

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