

On the Positive Side: Getting to the 'Zero-in-7' goal at animal shelter

by Frank Bryce

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On May 4, the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley board of directors conducted a work session to plan and prioritize goals and objectives for the ASCMV and the public spay and neuter program. ASCMV vice chairman Billy Garrett initiated the work session with a comparison of 2014 and 2015 statistics, analyzing reasons for improvement and factors impacting the 2015 numbers.

His analysis, while noting shortcomings, helped positively focus a path for the next three years.

There was a dramatic drop in intake of animals at the shelter, from 11,133 in 2014 to 9,884 in 2015, a reduction of 1,974. The number of animals placed out of the shelter was 5,130 — 633 fewer than the placement target for 2015, and none of the adoption, return to owner, and transfer to rescue targeted levels were reached at the shelter.

The largest decrease of intakes was probably attributable to microchipping and return to owners by city and county animal control departments, and strong adoption and pet re-homing program efforts by a growing number of outside animal advocacy organizations. An awareness and enforcement of new regulations and animal control ordinances and education outreach undoubtedly contributed to greater pet owner responsibility, too.

Garrett stated that while no real criteria identifies healthy and treatable animals at the shelter, that effort is based on the capacity of the shelter to treat animals that are very ill or have issues that prevent adoption. He said a working assumption is perhaps as high as 20 percent of shelter animals are identified as very ill or not suitable for adoption. Garrett's goal is to reduce that number to 10 percent over the next three years as the shelter takes advantage of greater reduction of animal intake numbers.

This reduction should be aided with strong support of adoption programs and transfers to rescue organizations, although it is felt that would not fully reach the county's Zero-in-7 goals alone.

The Zero in 7 plan, which means no adoptable pets euthanized by the year 2019, has a goal to reduce ASCMV's intake of animals by 900 for each of the next three years.

Garrett identified efforts for the following three areas: "Reduction in unwanted animals due to uncontrolled pregnancies (spay and neuter program); increased owner responsibility for reliance on microchip identification, rabies shots, and sterilization (education and licensing); reduction in the number of animals brought in by animal control officers (interpretation of ordinances, training of officers, clarification of public policy.)" The ASCMV work session identified the key areas of concern and agreed to set another work session in the next 30 days. While there was consensus by the board as to the issues to be addressed, how the capability and availability of services needed would be provided was not sufficiently addressed. The issue of acquiring a mobile spay and neuter surgical unit was essentially scrapped in favor of perhaps a much expanded "transport" program conducted by the shelter to assist participants in getting dogs and cats to the shelter for spaying and neutering. If fully supported and closely administered, this program will help pave the path desired over the next three years.

Frank Bryce is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors may contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.