



ACS Open House Message from the Community: Be the Change that You Want to See

by KATE KARP  on FEBRUARY 02 2017 16:07 in PETS

 Tweet

 SHARE

1

 Comment 9

Disclosure: The author is a volunteer at ACS, Fix Long Beach, Friends of Long Beach Animals and Helen Sanders CatPAWS, and does various and sundry other efforts. She also has one shelter-adoption cat and one foster-failure cat from ACS, a foster from CatPAWS, and one attitude-heavy tortie picked up off the street and whom she agreed to foster. That cat, too, became a foster failure.

“Be part of the change!” was the spirit of this year’s [Long Beach Animal Care Services’ \(ACS\) Open House](#) on Saturday, January 28 at the P.D. Pitchford Companion Animal Village and Education Center. The well-attended event included scores of animal lovers and advocates; Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn, Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud, and Herlinda Chico, field deputy for Long Beach, Signal Hill and Avalon/Catalina with Supervisor Hahn’s office, were also in attendance.

The decline of shelter intake and euthanasia rates (see [“Community Invited to Animal Shelter Open House on Saturday”](#)) and the corresponding uptrend of live release, which comprises adoption, rescue pulls and pet/human reunions, is a result of strong passionate and impassioned efforts by the area’s animal-welfare groups and concerned individuals coupled with those of the staff and manager. ACS Manager Ted Stevens said that the shelter spent over \$98,000 in spay/neuter assistance, which also affected the drop in euthanasia. The numbers are not yet at the respective zero and 100 percent numbers and rates, but Stevens is hopeful.

“We’re making a dent in this, and we’re seeing a big trajectory,” Stevens said of the euthanasia rate.

The number of euthanized dogs has decreased from 1,579 in 2005 to 437 in 2016. The total 2016 euthanasia rate of 1,662 from 6,167 in 2008 shows a drop of 73 percent. This is a slide in the direction of the goal of zero euthanasia, which has been the demanded target for years of vocal animal-welfare advocates and organizations (see the full stats at the end of the article).

“There are fewer dogs coming in here,” Stevens said. “Cats, too—another drop. This has a big impact on euthanasia, too. All this is because of the hard work of volunteers working together as a team. I shouldn’t go on the record here, but we hope to get below 1,000 this year. And then to zero.”

Zero euthanasia, as with all shelters, doesn't include gravely ill and injured animals, aggressive animals and those impounded for attacks on people. These pets will be subject to euthanasia in any case.

Honoring the Voices of the Voiceless

The role of the advocate and rescue community in the numbers going in the right direction was represented by the recipients of the ACS annual awards. The Spirit of Dr. Loren Eslinger award is named for a veterinarian who donated her medical services to shelter pets before her death late in 2009. It's given to a volunteer who's gone over and above the call of duty. The One Too Many award is presented to a group or organization that has mitigated anything that there's at least one too many of—and even one is too many: one too many unwanted litters, backyard breeders, abandoned animals, irresponsible owners and anything detrimental to animals. The winners of the awards are community members and vocal proponents for animals who regularly exhort shelter management to try something new and to reform and tweak what may not be working. They often succeed in their efforts. And their work doesn't stop at ACS, and they have the creds to show it. They're ubiquitous throughout the pet-welfare community, and they're definitely not “yes people.”

April Smith Devane won the Spirit of Dr. Eslinger award. Devane's day-to-day life as a volunteer looks like a mosaic—it includes but is not limited to volunteering for ACS events, participating in pet transports to out-of-town rescues and owners, running the shelter-cat adoption program at [Pet Food Express](#), executive directorship and volunteer for Fix Long Beach's [spay/neuter program](#), trapping feral cats and showing others how to do it, bottle-feeding newborn kittens, bringing pet food and supplies to families who cannot afford it, and rescuing and fostering both cats and dogs. Devane is also outspoken about the need for city funding and community involvement in the success of the goal of zero euthanasia; in an emotional acceptance speech, she was forthright about becoming aware of this herself.

“I decided to stop saying someone should do something and realize that I am someone and I can do something,” she said during the award presentation. She urged the shelter visitors to “be the change that you want to see and work together to make LBACS a shelter we can be proud of.”

Deborah Felin, co-founder of Helen Sanders [CatPAWS](#), was no less frank when she accepted the One Too Many award for her organization.

“Not one entity—not the shelter, not rescues—can do it alone,” she said. “The public has to be part of the solution, too. If you give them the resources, give them the education, tell them what the resources are and ask for their help, I think that together we can save them all.”

CatPAWS cofounder Deborah Felin, second from left, accepts the One Too Many Award, flanked by a number of the organization's volunteers. Photo by Kate Karp

Helen Sanders CatPAWS is a cat rescue centered in Seal Beach. They pull cats and kittens of all types and needs from the shelter and facilitate their adoptions, making sure that they're vetted and altered.

"We've been working with them for a couple of years," Stevens said. "They help us with unwanted litters, adult cats, fostering cats, and they send adopters to the shelters."

But it was their efforts toward involving the community in bottle-feeding newborn kittens that won them the One Too Many Award. During kitten season, which lasts several months from early spring (and even late winter) to late in the fall, the shelter is flooded with litters of kittens, many of which undergo euthanasia because the shelter is not equipped to care for them all and rescues can only take so many. In order to directly involve people who find the litters and bring them in, Helen Sanders CatPAWS put together 80 bottle-feeding kits in plastic containers that each held a bottle and nipples, cans of formula mix, a warming disc, a small fleece blanket, and a kitten-care guide and information about obtaining spay/neuter vouchers when the kittens are old enough. The containers can also be used for bathing.

"Instead of giving [the kittens] to us, where they'd have a very unlikely chance of being saved, we have these free kits here, and we show you how to do it," Stevens said. "A lot of people took us up on this, and thus, the kittens survived. There are a lot of caring people out there."

Stevens added that the new bottle feeders were offered help in finding rescues and CatPAWS assisted with boarding, but many became involved enough to themselves find their little charges homes when the kittens became 3 or 4 weeks old. ACS assisted with vouchers for spay/neuter for all the thriving kittens.

Every year, one shelter volunteer is awarded Volunteer of the Month. This year, six people were awarded the honor: Ricky Kim, Rookie of the Year; Pamala Machado, Helping Hand; John Czopek, Cat's Best Friend; Pauline Standish, Dog's Best Friend; and Dee Glick and George Themelis, Dynamic Duo. Machado teaches ACS's level-two volunteer classes every Saturday, and Czopek applies his talents with cats to the ones in the shelter's Cat Cottage as well as those in Pet Food Express's permanent shelter-cat condos. Themelis is a professional photographer, and he and Glick, as his assistant, volunteer their efforts in showing each pet's inner and outer adoptability.

"Dee is a certified smile maker," Stevens said of Glick.

Boy Scout Chris Williams received an award for his Eagle Scout project, a chicken coop that stands next to the Bunny Barn (see ["The Sky May Fall, but Chicken Little Will Be Safe and Sound"](#)).

2016 Progress

Stevens was joined by Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia in presenting the progress made in 2016 and priorities for the year to come. The shelter's recent hire of Jessica Gonzales as the new marketing and outreach coordinator filled the position vacated by Kelly Miott, who had left the area. Among other duties, Gonzales helps to manage transports and adoption facilitation. The videos she creates of the pets at play, which Stevens said are greatly helpful in showing an animal's personality and adoptability, can be viewed on [ACS's Facebook page](#).

Stevens also underscored the following accomplishments:

- Continuing partnerships with [Friends of Long Beach Animals \(FOLBA\)](#), which provides spay/neuter vouchers to the community, and [Fix Long Beach](#) and [Hope for Paws](#), which provide free spay/neuter procedures, low-cost vaccines and free microchips to Long Beach residents who cannot afford them for their pets
- FOLBA's donation of a fully equipped medical suite
- A fourth year of working with the Community Cat Shelter-Neuter-Return project headed by Anna Wong, which results in fewer impounds and the birth of unwanted kittens
- The partnership with Pet Food Express's state-of-the-art adoption center, which permanently houses shelter cats until they're adopted
- The purchase of ACS's own spay/neuter mobile vehicle
- A new Catio play area, made possible by an anonymous donation, created through the Florence Jones Trust with the assistance of Sid Melnick, an ACS volunteer.
- An ASPCA grant for a new tagging machine
- A mobile adoption center, made possible through an anonymous donation, which Stevens and Mayor Garcia joined in christening after the presentation

In 2015, Mayor Garcia's inaugural [Kitty Hall adoption event](#) saw all 14 cats go home, and the number was more than doubled in 2016, when all 39 were adopted.

"Every single cat that came, including some who weren't invited, got adopted," Stevens said. The Mayor promised not one but two Kitty Halls this year.

Services provided by ACS were reviewed. They included special investigations, public safety for people and animals, field services working day and night, rehoming, adoptions, transports and life-saving efforts.

"There's never a dull day around here," Stevens said, recounting the rescues of owls, snakes and once, a parrot in a tree through the use of a bucket truck. "We also do customer service—I invite anyone to hang out on a Wednesday by the front desk—it's quite the spectacle."

Partnership with spcaLA

Stevens and spcaLA's Director of Operations Denise Jakcsy detailed ACS's partnership with spcaLA, which is also housed at P. D. Pitchford. SpcaLA has the lease on the building and makes a part of it available to ACS at a reduced rate. The two agencies have collectively adopted out 40,000 pets since the facilities opened.

Jakcsy also mentioned spcaLA's animal-cruelty program, the efforts to include pets as part of domestic violence, and education for police officers to prevent them from shooting dogs when out in the field. She talked about spcaLA's Friends for Life Summer Camp for children 8 to 13 years old to learn about animal care. Juveniles who have abused animals are also sent to the camp for education purposes.

Two of the six [pit bulls rescued from the 710 Freeway in March of last year](#) were also pulled by spcaLA. Four of them had found homes through ACS, and spcaLA adopted out the other. Honey is still available for adoption.

In response to a question by an attendee about the role of spcaLA in the adoptions and whether the funds from Measure A will go to spcaLA instead of ACS, Mayor Garcia explained that the partnership between the two entities is a land partnership and has been in place since 2001.

"All animals come in to one location [Animal Care Services], and they are part of the relationship," Garcia said. "The numbers that are being presented include all the animals adopted." Stevens added that spcaLA takes on the expense of altering and rabies shots so that the shelter doesn't have to do it.

"The fees we collect don't even cover it," Stevens said. "Having spcaLA do it means that they can move the animal [to a new home] the next day. They have the resources and expertise to move the animals out quickly."

Other questions from attendees included the need for better signage, to which Marie Knight, the director of Parks, Recreation and Marine responded that the department is working on a signage plan now and doesn't want to spend funds on single signs; if there's room to build a special play area for dogs—Stevens answered that all dogs are allowed to use the one at spcaLA; and why, when the Los Angeles County shelters offers occasional low adoption fees of \$20, ACS doesn't do this as well. Stevens responded that they do and have. Low rates have been offered at offsite events such as Dogs of Downtown as well as during Clear the Shelters Day and Veterans Day, in conjunction with spcaLA. Any special-events fees that spcaLA holds are also matched by ACS.

Carrying On: Shelter Audit in the Works

Laura Doud also announced an upcoming shelter audit that was requested by Garcia.

“We know that there are a lot of challenges to get to this level,” Garcia said of the shelter’s gains. “But just because it’s improving doesn’t mean that we can’t do better. As an educator, I’m a data guy, and it would be our goal to move the data forward.

“I appreciate the Mayor’s request, so we are going to do everything we can to help this area,” Doud said. “We’re in the infancy stage of this project right now, so we’re looking for an animal-care expert to assist us and partner with us. This person can help with best practices in shelter management and veterinary services as well. We will be coming to the public to hear thoughts and ideas of how we here in Long Beach, can meet these best practices. We are taking this project very seriously.”

Mayor Garcia thanked the community at large for their involvement and acknowledged the award winners’ call to the public to become part of the movement forward.

“I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for your love and support of the animals here,” he said. “We appreciate all your contributions here. We are fortunate to have so many animal advocates here in Long Beach.”

