



teamshelter USA

County of San Diego

Department of Animal Services

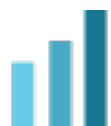
Operational Assessment Summary



***County of San Diego, California
Department of Animal Services***

Operational Assessment

April 2026



INTRODUCTION

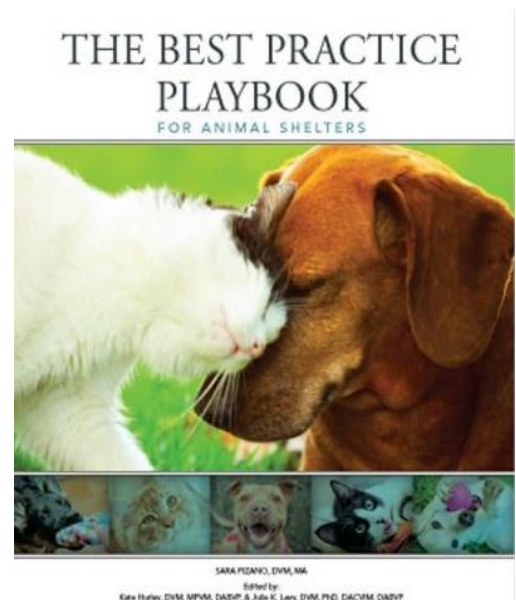
This high-level assessment report of recommendations for the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services (DAS) was requested by Dr. Briana Sarvis who was serving as the Chief Veterinarian at the time and wanted to ensure that all processes and protocols were in line with industry standard best practices. Information presented is based on organizational research, national data and studies, and/or successful programs, representing nationwide industry standards actively utilized by reputable animal welfare organizations. These are sourced from organizations including but not limited to the following that should be used as references as well:

- ⇒ The Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*: [Click Here](#)
- ⇒ The National Animal Control Association: [Click Here](#)
- ⇒ Humane Animal Support Services [Click Here](#)
- ⇒ The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or ASPCA: [Click Here](#)
- ⇒ Humane World for Animals (formerly known as the Humane Society of the United States): [Click Here](#)
- ⇒ Fear Free Sheltering: [Click Here](#)

This summary Report should be considered an addendum to *The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters*, written by Dr. Pizano where additional research and detailed information can be found. The updated [ASV Guidelines Checklist](#) can also be used to track recommendations and progress. Another all-encompassing resource is the Humane Animal Support Services playbook referenced [Here](#).

Team Shelter USA focuses on the delivery of public and animal safety in conjunction with life-saving, opportunities for sustainable resolution of complaints, minimizing challenges and solving for the right problems.

Key areas to concentrate on include increasing the number of dogs kept/reunited in their neighborhoods to prevent the low Return to Owner rate once sheltered, prioritizing canine care and exercise and directing visually healthy, free roaming cats to a spay/neuter pathway instead of a shelter intake. The time sensitive crucial decision regarding the future of the Carlsbad shelter is of paramount importance. These topics and more are discussed at length throughout this report including appropriate staffing levels.



REASONS TO CELEBRATE

- Effective veterinarian and leader appointed as director who is an animal welfare expert
- Very caring and dedicated staff and volunteers
- Employee Recognition Program
- Outstanding medical and surgical care
- 3 trust funds with varying guidelines and the ability to accept donations
- Public clinic for subsidized vaccines, microchips and owner requested euthanasia
- Outsourcing the licensing process for dogs with DocuPet
- Open weekends
- Foster Program
- Dog Day Out Program
- Volunteer dog trainer
- Impressive Live Release Rate
- Now treating for diseases such as ringworm, panleukopenia and distemper viruses that were formerly euthanasia reasons
- Recent partnership with PetSmart Charities and doing cat adoptions at PetSmart
- Pets for Patriots and Senior Adoption Program
- Using Adopt Me app
- At the Carlsbad shelter, ample play yards, divider doors for dogs and portalized cat adoption cages

PRIORITY/IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS

- Implement a Move-One-Down dog sanitation protocol in Bonita
- Fast track the filling of the Volunteer Coordinator
- Reconsider Santee consolidation plan:
 - Keep the Carlsbad shelter open and continue operating 2 shelters (Carlsbad and Santee)
 - Close the Bonita shelter operation when move to Santee
 - Address concerns at the Santee shelter if possible:
 - Since large dogs make up the greatest percentage of the shelter population who experience long lengths of stay, consider using the planned cat colony spaces for 1-2 compatible dogs. Although it is ideal to completely separate felines and canines visually and audibly, the spacious cat colony rooms are not needed. Once a Community Cat program is implemented, there is the potential to reduce cat intake by nearly 1,000 adults as well as kittens.
 - Instead of ordering cat condos that will be very expensive, use existing, high-quality stainless steel cat cages and add portals for appropriate, double compartment cat housing.
 - Since small dogs make up only a small fraction of the shelter canine population, small play yards in the courtyard will be underutilized and expanding those yards or adding a large enough yard in the barn area for dog play groups should be reconsidered.
 - Public surgery pets should be housed in surgery holding and consideration made to use the small room at spay/neuter public entrance for check in only.

- The planned farm area at front of property will house enforcement/court cases so a visual barrier is needed from public view.
- Additional housing and facility recommendations for dogs and cats include:
 - <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/facility-design-shelter-animal-housing-and-shelter-population-management>.
 - The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters, page 23
 - Outdoor dog play yard design (<https://dogsplayingforlife.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/DPFL-Play-Yard-Recommendations-3.23.17.pdf>)
- Before Santee shelter opens:
 - Address staffing needs and create a plan to open both Carlsbad and Santee 7 days a week
 - Create Chameleon Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with screen shots posted near computers to ensure consistent data entry and create a plan to reconcile discrepancies daily
 - Plan to purchase a sufficient number of Kuranda beds using trust fund money
 - Recruit Santee volunteers to start at Bonita now so they are trained once Santee opens
- Reduce the number of clinic appointments in Bonita (vaccines, microchipping, owner-requested euthanasia) so the Animal Care Attendants (ACAs) can provide appropriate care and enrichment for shelter pets, in particular dog sanitation and exercise
- Consider opening to the public at 11am so ACAs have the time they need to properly clean and care for dogs each morning
- Ensure dogs are fed twice daily
- Check the status of any current Field Services vehicle order in the event that more appropriate vehicles can be ordered. Current vehicles force Animal Control Officers (ACOs) to lift large, aggressive/fractious dogs by the neck with a catch pole, which is not considered Fear Free handling and unsafe for the team (see FearFreeSheltering.com). Vans retrofitted with internal cages and ramps are recommended.
- Implement a yard sign program when a dog at large is picked up by an ACO to increase the Return to Owner (RTO) rate of dogs

DATA AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Positives

- High live release rate
- Chameleon software in place with an upgrade/migration in progress to a new version
- Detailed website
- Adopt Me app utilized so pictures and videos from foster volunteers can be uploaded into a pet's record and available for public viewing
- Phone system with instructions to route callers and the ability to hold for a staff person
- The county communications department has a keen interest in social media outreach for the shelter and currently helping with posts
- DAS is fortunate to have 3 trust funds set up already

Opportunities

Chameleon Software

- Key statistics in need of improvement are the reunification rates for dogs (13% from Carlsbad and 16% from Bonita), below the national average of 19% and cats (<2% from each), in line with the national average. Potential solutions will be discussed throughout this report.
- Besides intake numbers, the length of stay is the most crucial variable to track. At this time, however, the length of stay between pets sent to foster and pets who have only been confined to the shelter cannot be determined. While both measurements are important, it is expected for young kittens to stay in foster care for 6 weeks, for example, but the focus should be for the length of stay to be much shorter in the shelter. During the migration process, staff should discuss these reports with the Chameleon team.
- An SOP is needed for Chameleon with screen shots posted near computers to ensure consistent data entry and a plan created to reconcile discrepancies daily. This is important because preventive and solutions vary depending on the category. For example, understanding the data and trends around the numbers of dogs at large brought in by the public vs ACOs require different communication approaches but at this time cannot be determined through a report due to data entry inconsistencies.
- Leadership should consider doing an all-staff training on a Wednesday when the SOP is completed to review key data entry points

Website

- Currently, when visitors to the DAS website click on ‘Relinquishing a Pet’ then ‘Alternative and Resources’, they are rerouted to the San Diego Humane Society that does not service unincorporated San Diego County. A Safety Net program is recommended and discussed later in this report.
- One simple and free addition to the website under ‘Relinquishing a Pet’ is to add the link to Rehome.adoptapet.com (Home-home.org should not be referenced since that program must be managed by staff/volunteers, is associated with a monthly fee and is not currently available through DAS).
- Consider reducing clinic hours and adjust available appointments online so ACAs have more time to care for shelter dogs
- Replace reference to call DAS for further information regarding a lost pet and direct owners to visit the website and visit the shelter in person

Phone System

- Review each hold pathway for content in need of updating
- Currently, if the caller presses the number for the San Diego Humane Society, the number is provided then the message says, ‘OR press 1’ which goes back to Dispatch so caller goes in an unproductive circle. This is an example of a discrepancy that needs.

- Run reports to visualize the heaviest call volume, types of calls, etc., in an effort to ensure staffing is appropriate and to determine if there are any opportunities to add information to the website or to the phone script, provide resolution for callers without taking staff time or correct discrepancies. One such discrepancy to be corrected is the message stating the shelter is accepting owner surrenders, which it is not currently doing on a regular basis.
- If the Front Desk staff is not signed in then calls regarding shelter pets divert to Dispatch. Leadership should determine how large an issue this is and how a solution can be reached.
- When a Community Cat program is implemented (described in the **Community Cat Program**) staff answering the phones will need a script. An excellent reference is kittenlady.org as an option when caller asking for help with neonatal kittens.

Social Media

- Due to issues with social media posts in the past, the county communications office is currently overseeing posts. While this is understandable, staff and volunteers, with clear guidelines and who are managed effectively have the most potential to post the most impactful content. There is a code of conduct for staff and volunteers included in the SOP manual so staff and volunteers should revisit this and be held accountable when there are issues.

Donations

- Most of the people interacting with DAS care about pets, are adopting, volunteering, utilizing clinic services, etc. At each point of contact, staff should invite people to leave a donation and that includes at the subsidized clinics. It is important to engage the community in caring for pets and people in need and this can help in a budget-neutral way.

SAFETY NET

DAS Clinic (Vaccine/Microchip clinic/Owner-requested euthanasia)

Positives

- Subsidized clinic hosted 6 days a week
- Ability to schedule appointments online, wait outside and get a text message when the ACA is ready
- Chips are registered at the time of the clinic appointment

- Since DAS does not currently have the veterinary staff budgeted for the mobile unit to do spay/neuter, the unit has been used for vaccines and microchip clinics

Opportunities

- DAS is applauded for the intention to provide very much needed subsidized vaccines, microchips and owner-requested euthanasia (OREs) but there are not enough ACAs to provide clinic services and care appropriately for shelter dogs (Discussed in **Canine Care and Husbandry**), although the staff cares deeply and works extremely hard trying to accomplish this. Appointments should be required for all services but reduced in number for that reason and consideration made to open an hour later in the day to allow ample time for cleaning/feeding.
- DAS is applauded for offering services for those in areas outside the unincorporated county, but again, there is not sufficient ACA staff to do so. Leadership should consider a pause on that aspect of the clinic.
- A formal Safety Net program for pet owners in the unincorporated areas should be created in partnership collaboration with other area groups and potentially subsidized with trust fund money
- Apply for free vaccines as a Petco Love partner at <https://petcolove.org/shelter-partners/vaccine-partner/> for use in the public clinic

Subsidized Spay & Neuter

Positives

- DAS provides some subsidized spay/neuter for owned pets including free surgeries for unsocialized cats at both Bonita and Carlsbad
- Once the DAS mobile unit is staffed, it will be used for spay/neuter on a regular basis
- Several area organizations that provide subsidized spay/neuter include:
 - San Diego Humane Society
 - Chula Vista Animal Care Facility: Spaying & Neutering
 - Spay Neuter Action Project
 - Home - SNAP San Diego
 - San Diego Affordable Spay & Neuter & Dental Clinic San Diego Affordable Spay & Neuter Clinic - Low Cost
 - Animal Welfare Foundation of San Diego
 - House Rabbit Society
 - Feral Cat Coalition

Opportunities

- Subsidized targeted spay/neuter is correlated with reducing intake and enforcement calls. As a guide, DAS should strive to provide 5-10 subsidized surgeries per 1,000 residents in the unincorporated areas each year. Currently, the staff is doing the best they can to provide surgery capacity but has not yet reached that number that can reduce intake and enforcement calls.
- Since staffing is not yet allocated for the mobile unit, consider partnering with and subsidizing another organization who could utilize it on a regular basis
- Utilizing the mobile unit at Santee, once open, eliminates the need for a driver and simplifies logistics. The presence of the mobile unit would be another example of the commitment to the community. Clinic HQ is the recommended software for this program.

Community Cat Program

Positives

- Unsocialized cat spay/neuter offered for free at DAS
- A person bringing in a free roaming cat may be offered surgery and the opportunity to return the cat to its original home location
- Community Cat programs are now the norm in the US

Opportunities

- Nationally and at DAS, the intended goal of reunification via a 'stray' hold for cats fails 98% of the time. Less than 2% of felines are reunited from shelters so a more effective pathway is needed.
- More than half of all cat owners allow their cats access to the outdoors. Visually healthy adult cats of good body weight should be left where they are unless there is a pathway for spay/neuter and return to their home location and should not enter the shelter as a 'stray intake'. This includes friendly cats who are obviously care for but who have no identification.
- Between Carlsbad and Bonita, this will decrease adult cat intake by approximately 1,000, ultimately reduce the number of kittens entering the shelters and minimize the waste of resources.
- Benefits include:
 - Decreased cat/kitten intake and reduced waste of resources for a cat not in need of assistance
 - Reduced complaints around cats since many nuisance behaviors eliminated with spay/neuter
 - Increases community immunity against rabies
 - Decreases negative effects on wildlife
 - Prevents and/or stabilizes colonies

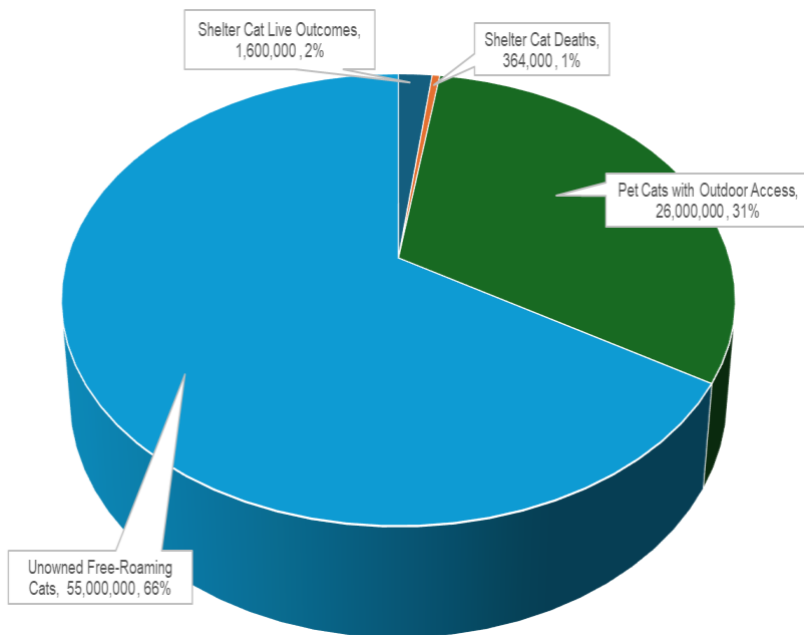


Figure 1: Compares the estimated number of free-roaming cats (unowned and owned) compared to the number of cats entering and dying in shelters in the U.S. This highlights the fact that shelter intake cannot address all free roaming cats so other more beneficial pathways must be in place that divert cats directly to spay/neuter/rabies vaccination and return to their original home location (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2022.847081>).

Foster Finder

Positives

- Foster Finder is the norm in the US
- ACOs attempt to locate the owner of a free roaming dog in the field

Opportunities

- Most free roaming dogs are not stray but simply off their properties and in their own neighborhoods so a formal program for finders to foster increases the chance of reunification compared to a shelter intake
- Staff report that a Foster Finder program was tried previously but said it was not launched appropriately. A simple support system for constituents should be clearly outlined on the website with information about returning a dog home. This should include a courtesy post by DAS for those owners searching for their pet.
- Consider installing microchip scanner stations at police and fire stations and direct constituents to check for microchips as they attempt to reunite dogs with their families.

<u>Resource Title</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Link</u>
Rehoming Options	Online platforms and general tools for rehoming.	ReHome Home-Home
All Paws – Sample Website	Sample animal shelter website created with streamlined messaging to reflect best practices	Click Here
Foster Finder Program	Human Animal Support Services	Click Here
What to do if you've found a pet	Example resource from City of Rochester, NY	Click Here
Example SOP: Foster Finder	Pasco County Foster Finder SOP	Click Here
Oakland Animal Services Website	Example of Owner Surrender practices	Click Here
HASS: Intake to Placement	Owner Surrender	Click Here
Rethinking the Animal Shelter's Role in Free-Roaming Cat Management	Journal Article, Dr. Kate Hurley and Dr. Julie Levy (Front. Vet. Sci., 08 March 2022)	Click Here
Implementing a Community Cat Program	The Life-Saving Impact of Community Cat Diversion; Cameron Moore, UF Shelter Medicine	Click Here
Community Cat Program Resources	Example resources & guidance from other municipalities that have successfully implemented Community Cat Programs	Charlotte, NC El Paso, TX Greenville, SC Yuma, AZ
Kitten Lady Resource Library	Resources for comparing kittens who do not need assistance to kittens who need intervention	Click Here
Kitten Care Resources	Greenville County, SC has great example Kitten Care Resources	Click Here
Appointment Based Intake	NACA appointment-based pet intake recommendations	Click Here
Managed Intake Training Playbook	Recommendation by Best Friends Animal Society	Click Here
The Evolving Role of Triage & Appointment Based Admissions	Published article by Dr. Kate Hurley; Frontier, Vet. Sci., 04 March 2022	Click Here

to Improve Service, Care & Outcomes in Animal Shelters		
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FIELD SERVICES

Positives

- ACOs are members of Cal Animals and the National Animal Control Association
- Bullet proof vests are on order for ACOs
- ACOSs have standard tools, truck and hand-held radios, cell phones, laptops, microchip scanners and pepper spray
- ACOs focus on public and animal safety, sick/injured and only pick up dogs at large if confined
- In last 3 years, staff described many improvements such as reducing pending calls, prioritizing cases and addressing court cases in a timely manner
- A volunteer officer helps with transports
- ACOs vaccinate pets on intake when able
- Protective custody foster care is decided on a case-by-case basis
- Injured wildlife taken to specialized wildlife care center
- Spanish speaker scheduled in Dispatch or Front Desk
- If the finder of a dog at large expresses an interest in Foster Finder, Dispatch may transfer to the Front Desk
- For constituents calling about concerns about neonatal kittens, Dispatch may recommend a ring of flour around the kittens to confirm paw prints of mother

Opportunities

- A priority item to be addressed as soon as possible, is the order for new ACO vehicle(s). All staff need the appropriate tools to perform their duties but the current trucks do not have cages designed for stable ramps. As a result, ACOs are forced to lift aggressive dogs with a catch pole by the neck to place them in the truck. This is not in line with industry standards and Fear Free handling.
- Safety of ACOs is of paramount importance. Bite Stick training is pending and should be prioritized.
- ACOs and animal welfare staff in general, are subject to Moral Injury and Compassion Fatigue, that is now at the forefront of the industry. The National Animal Control Association provides a variety of training tools including <https://nacatraining.org/aco-mhfa-certification/> to address these issues.
- When an ACO is called out on emergencies overnight, even if they are on the road most of the night, they are expected to report to work as usual the following day with the only option to take a sick or vacation day. Consideration should be made to address this at the staff's request.
- The RTO rate for dogs at large in Carlsbad is 13% and 16% in Bonita which is below the national average of 19%. Since ACOs are interacting with constituents who have confined the dogs, ACOs should ask their permission to place a yard sign. This yard sign should have a title such as 'Found Dog' and space for the ACO to write a short description of the dog. The sign should include a QR

code for Carlsbad or Bonita depending on the location with the hours of operation and address of the shelter so the owner can reclaim.

- Suggestions to Manage Dispatch Services include but are not limited to:
 - Consider working with the San Diego Humane Society regarding the coverage of certain towns/jurisdictions that may be split with DAS. The goal should be to have one or the other organization cover a town completely to avoid confusion.
 - Complete a call volume analysis showing days of the week and times of the day most busy to ensure staffed appropriately
 - Complete a monthly analysis regarding overnight Dispatch calls and consider the possibility of 911 triaging overnight calls if more efficient than a full-time overnight Dispatch
 - Update phone messaging as currently the message says that the best way to reunite animals is to bring them to the shelter. In reality, less than 2% of cats and 13%/16% of dogs entering as stray in Carlsbad or Bonita, respectively, are reunited so this message should be replaced with suggestions to locate the dogs' home or leave the visually healthy cat in place if not an enforcement issue.
 - Consider implementing a Foster Finder program described above and provide a phone script on the recording and for Dispatch staff
- Injured free roaming animals may be taken to the emergency clinic overnight but there is a need guidelines/SOPs/MOUs to prevent calls to shelter leaders for permission to treat and/or euthanize overnight
- Once programming is updated, that could include Foster Finder and a Community Cat Program pathway, a handout should be created for the Field Services team that includes area subsidized spay/neuter and vaccine clinic information

Port St. Lucie Return to Owner Program	Page 40, <i>The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters</i>	
Cabot Animal Support Services	Website about helping pets get home and the First 48 program	Click Here

Licensing

Positives

- Utilizing DocuPet for the last year and:
 - Reduced staff workload and overall yielded a cost savings
 - Increased donations to the Spirit Medical Fund
 - Includes reminders to pet owners
 - The DAS team expects an increase in compliance and revenue over time

Opportunities

- Since licensing is part of the state statute requirement, the county is encouraged to continue to depend on DocuPet to operate this program that reserves staff time for more productive tasks.
- According to DocuPet, only 18,155 of the dogs in unincorporated San Diego County are licensed, a fraction of the estimated number of dogs, which is typical of licensing programs. Increased compliance year over year should be monitored moving forward.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

Positives

- The appropriate preventive care is provided at intake
- Pets go directly to general population area from intake with the exception of enforcement cases, working cats, etc.
- Pre-adoption spay/neuter done with minimal surgery wait time if pending at adoption
- Supervisors monitor movement of pets for best outcome
- Using the Dunbar Scale and Sophia Yen bite guidelines
- Pathway planning meetings held twice a week

Opportunities

- Each pet should be given a name (if their name is not known) at the point of intake that should be printed on the cage card
- Since all pets typically go through medical at intake, any other issues throughout their stay should be addressed in real time so they do not have to go back to medical for a 'check' once adopted. This part of the process can be streamlined and minimize waste of staff time.
- Since the kennels do not open from the public side and the middle aisle is locked, discontinue locking each kennel that wastes staff time and is not necessary
- Most shelters struggle with placement and euthanasia decisions around aggression or other serious behaviors. Guidelines should be created regarding documenting behaviors and decision trees around shelter policies and staff along with volunteers should be updated. Honest and open, ongoing communication is crucial around these very sensitive topics as there has developed a level of distrust between some volunteers and staff.
- As a general rule, leadership should plan on operating at 80% capacity (or less) depending on staff availability
- Length of stay should be monitored for foster care and shelter confinement separately
- It is crucial that the entire DAS respect a 'One Touch' rule. That means that at the point of intake, staff attempts to provide whatever the pet needs to avoid scheduling a task for later follow up during their stay, if possible. With so many pets in care, this will help streamline all processes.

<u>Resource Title</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Link</u>
FAS Ladder	PDF of FAS Ladder for Dogs & Cats	Dogs Cats
Philadelphia Pet Evaluation Matrix	Sample matrix capturing uniformity in reporting on the condition of animals	Click Here
Fast Track Planning	ASPCA Pro	Click Here
Capacity For Care Score Chart	Cal Animals	Click Here
Kennel Staffing Needs	Calculating Capacity for Care	Click Here
ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters	See section 9- Behavior and Appendix E, F and G	Click Here
Length of Stay (LOS)	UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program resources on LOS	Click Here
Overview of Capacity for Care (C4C)	UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program resources on C4C	Click Here
Calculating Shelter Capacity	UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program resources on how to calculate shelter capacity	Click Here
Determining Housing Capacity	ASPCA Pro resources on determining housing capacity	Click Here
Mastering Daily Rounds	Dr. Erin Katribe: Counting All Paws	Click Here
Implementing Daily Round	Maddie's Fund Resource Hub	Click Here

SHELTER MEDICINE AND SURGERY

Positives

- Using behavior drugs appropriately
- The interim director (as Chief of Veterinary Services) revamped medical protocols so no longer euthanizing for ringworm, distemper, upper respiratory infections, etc.
- Variety of life-saving and needed surgeries done in addition to spay/neuter
- Spirit Fund in place to help pets with medical/surgical conditions
- Using Vetcove.com to ensure best pricing for pharmaceuticals

- When there is a medical issue, the Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVT) address them with available template protocols and flag advanced medical needs for veterinarian using Chameleon reports
- Excellent partnership with the local veterinary technician school and have student(s) assisting year-round which has led to employment opportunities at the shelters
- Surgery 6 days a week in Bonita so very little delay once pets are available (1-2 days)
- Consistent goal of pre-adoption spay/neuter

Opportunities

- There may be up to 20 pets on the veterinary check list so leadership should ensure there is ample support staff to assist the doctors
- A Safety Net program for constituents in the areas served by DAS should be created that does not hinder care of shelter pets. Such a program would require additional staff or collaboration with other organizations.
- When a Community Cat program is implemented, there will be far fewer felines housed at the shelter (especially when undersized cages are portalized that cause stress and therefore lead to upper respiratory infections (URI)). As a result of a Community Cat program and portalized cages, the URI rate will plummet. The best treatment for URIs is a short length of stay and since the viruses can flare up over time, there is no reason to do a strict or lengthy quarantine.

CANINE CARE AND HUSBANDRY

Positives

- Feeding consistent diet of dry food
- Volunteer dog trainer provided training for staff recently
- Carlsbad
 - Several long-term volunteers (decades)
 - Doing dog play pairs on a regular basis, ample play yards
 - Puzzle feeding program and some kennels with treat buckets
 - Quieter than Bonita so often send dogs with behavior challenges to Carlsbad
 - Have Kuranda beds and toys
 - Double compartment runs with appropriate cleaning procedures
- There are double compartment runs planned for housing dogs at the Santee shelter

Opportunities

- Unfortunately, dog runs are undersized and single compartment in the Bonita shelter which leaves no good options for staff to clean, feed and care for dogs efficiently. Hosing kennels with dogs in them is against the Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* and Fear Free Sheltering and this practice must be discontinued immediately.

Instead, consider the unreasonable workload of the ACAs and what optional work they are doing. The care of shelter pets must be prioritized so consideration should be made to open to the public an hour later and reduce the number of clinic appointments.

Since there are not enough staff and volunteers to take all dogs out during the morning cleaning process, ACAs should use the following practices for morning sanitation often referred to as Move-One-Down and the SOP updated:

- Leave one kennel empty at the end of each row of kennels
- Place a bowl of food (canned mixed with dry) in the clean, empty kennel with an interactive toy then move the dog from the neighboring run into that run
- Move the cage card with the dog
- Pick up any feces, etc
- Remove any toys, beds, etc.
- Rinse the dirty kennel with water then scrub with detergent such as Dawn dish soap
- Squeegee
- Spray Rescue at a concentration of 1:32 and let sit for 10 minutes
- Use the Rescue test strips to spot check dilution
- Rinse with water then squeegee
- Once dry, repeat the steps above
- The following day, move the dogs back one to their original cage. The entire staff must be alerted to this change as their kennel location in Chameleon will be between 2 numbers.
- When spot cleaning runs throughout the day, coordinate with other staff and volunteers so the dog can be walked or put in an outside pen

Note: Despite marketing claims, Rescue is not a one-step cleaner and disinfectant. While Rescue maintains some killing activity on dirty surfaces, the full killing activity is compromised by dirt and organic matter such as fecal smears, urine, etc. In addition, not using a detergent to clean surfaces allows buildup of biofilms that trap organic matter and pathogens and cannot be penetrated by the disinfectant. Dawn is a common dish soap that can be used.

- During the consult visit, Rescue test strips were ordered. It is important to check dilution of Rescue on a regular basis. The corrosion staff is seeing on some surfaces is likely due to increased concentrations that can be reduced to 1:32.
- Dogs at Bonita show signs of anxiety, stress and frustration that can be minimized with:
 - Shorter lengths of stay
 - Active free play in play groups with staff and/or volunteers (see dogsplayingforlife.com)
 - Allowing dogs to play in the pens meant for livestock that are appropriately fenced in and secure. There are 4 dogs part of an enforcement case since May of 2024 who would benefit greatly from being housed in the large farm pens as opposed to the single runs without ample exercise. They do need attention from both volunteers and staff throughout the day but at least the pens provide space for them during their exceptionally long confinement, since no foster homes have been found for them.
 - Provide interactive toys that cannot accidentally clog the drain or be torn apart

- Have stainless steel treat cups for all kennels
- The hose reels at the Carlsbad shelter are in need of repair

Big Dog Master Class	Resources for big dog playgroups	Click Here
Dogs Playing for Life	Resources for dog playgroups	Click Here
Enrichment Board & Activity Schedules (Tips & Tricks)	PowerPoint compiled by Heidi Marston, MMPC	Click Here
Simplified Enrichment Schedule	Maddie's University	Click Here
Canine Care & Enrichment	Best Friends Animal Society	Click Here
Dr. Kelley Bollen; Enrichment & Behavior Resources	Enrichment resources	Click Here
At Risk Dog Flow Process	Kristen Hassen, Outcomes Consulting, Euthanasia Decision Tree	Click Here
Dunbar's Bite Scale	Dog Bite Severity Scale by Dr. Ian Dunbar	Click Here
Weekend Warrior & Dog Day Out Programs	Sample Protocols, Contracts & SOPs	Click Here
Fido Field Trip Orientation	CASPCA Sample	Click Here
Effects of Sleepover & Field Trips on the Welfare of Shelter Dogs	Research; Dr Lisa Gunther	Click Here
How Stress Is Sabotaging Your Dog Adoptions	Maddie's University Webinar	Click Here

FELINE CARE AND HUSBANDRY

Positives

- Hiding boxes in use
- Portalized cat cages in adoptions (Carlsbad)
- Spot cleaning (Carlsbad)
- No longer screening for retroviruses
- Using cardboard litter boxes

Opportunities

- When the Community Cat program is implemented there will be far fewer cats housed so there will be ample room to portalize stainless steel cat cages at Bonita. These Shor-line cages are extremely high quality, durable and expensive and should be used in the Santee shelter in lieu of purchasing additional cages with less square footage.
- Approximately 49 portals should be installed in the stainless steel cages at Bonita (~ \$9,000 to provide appropriate housing for cats). See <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/cat-portals-order-information-and-instruction-for-installation>. Trust fund money should be considered to pay for the portals.
- Carpeted cat trees cannot be disinfected and can hold pathogens like ringworm. These should be replaced with Kuranda cat towers that can be disinfected.
- Update SOPs around spot cleaning and sanitation and confirm staff is spot cleaning in Bonita

<u>Resource Title</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Link</u>
How Stress Is Sabotaging Your Cat Adoptions	Maddie's Fund Webinar	Click Here
Feline Enrichment & Housing Playbook	Best Friends Animal Society	Click Here
Simple Shelter Enrichment for Cats	UF Shelter Med	Click Here
Feline Assessment Spectrum	ASPCA	Click Here

FOSTER PROGRAM

Positives

- Ample kitten fosters
- Staff describe easy onboarding process
- Using Adopt Me bandanas for dogs in foster and encouraging direct placement
- Using Adopt Me app so when a website visitor clicks on the pet's profile they can see videos and pictures in foster
- Dog Day Out program
- Potential to grow program through Foster Finder program

Opportunities

- Although there are 600 foster volunteers on the master list, not all are active, so the list needs to be organized by status and the types of pets the volunteer wants to foster. This may be done with a survey, emails and phone calls done by one or a few volunteers and include the question of continuing to foster once Bonita is closed and Santee is open. This is an excellent volunteer job that can be done remotely in coordination with the foster coordinator.
- The foster coordinator needs an automatic way to communicate with volunteers. Chameleon staff should be questioned about a Postmaster add-on to accomplish this or other process. Another tool is Doobert's FosterSpace Connect (doobert.com).

RETURN TO OWNER (RTO): DOGS

Positives

- Using Pawboost
- ACOs attempting to reunite dogs in the field

Opportunities

- The RTO for dogs at large is below the national average of 19% so new approaches should be considered, such as the yard signs described in the Field Services section. Leadership should read about the Port St. Lucie police department in Florida and Washoe County, Nevada RTO programs with return rates over 70% and adapt their practices.
- Discontinue telling callers via the phone message to schedule an appointment to visit the shelter and instead direct them to come to the shelter to look for their dog in person.
- Create a formal Foster Finder program encouraged by ACOs and Dispatch. Research shows that dogs at large are close to home but have less of a chance at reunification when they enter a shelter.
- If using the mobile unit for vaccine and microchip clinics, focus on high intake areas so more dogs are chipped and registered.
- As stated, consider scanner stations at police and fire stations

ADOPTIONS

Positives

- Pets are typically placed in the adoption area from intake with the exception of enforcement cases, working cats, etc.
- Open weekends
- Recently started cat adoptions at PetSmart
- Adoption Information form in place (not an application)

Opportunities

- Consider opening evening hours
- Create a plan to open Carlsbad, Bonita and ultimately Santee, 7 days a week
- Complete a cost analysis to determine the benefits of using Found Animal Foundation microchips that includes free registration and free updates for pet owners
- Consider Foster to Adopt program
- All staff, Friends of & volunteers should read and implement [Adopters Welcome](#) by the Humane World For Animals. These guidelines will help focus attention on making the right match but remove unnecessary barriers to adoptions and address any concerns about the current program.
- Consider utilizing free Post-Adoption support tools like [Petszel](#)
- Assess & audit current adoption process utilizing the [HASS Barrier Busting Checklist](#)
- Consider fee waived or as close to free adoptions for dogs and cats as it is considered the best way to increase adoptions and decrease the length of stay in the shelter. Offering BOGO specials for cats and kittens will also encourage the adoption of pairs.
- Discourage meet and greets with the family dog and replace this with a discussion about introducing a new dog on neutral territory, etc. (<https://dogsplayingforlife.com/introducing-new-dog-dog-home/>)
- Recommend online dog training platforms for adopters to include goodpup.com or <https://easepetvet.com/>
- Update SOP (Adoption of Sheltered Animals, Sec 4.1.6 page 112) and remove landlord permission, encouraging family dog meets and in lieu of adoption returns, create a plan to help the adopter rehome if needed, as opposed to returning the pet to the shelter
- Note: Consider all recommendations to reduce stress, anxiety and frustration for shelter dogs to create a calmer environment for visitors

Bark to Basics: Creative Adoption Ideas for Dog Adoptions	Pedigree Foundation Toolkit	Click Here
Build Your Dog Adoption Super Highway	Pedigree Foundation Toolkit	Click Here
How to host offsite Adoptions Events	E-Learning through Fetch Find - PetSmart Charities	Click Here
Cat Adoption Staff Training Manual	HeartSpeak	Click Here
Breaking Down Barriers to Positive Outcomes	Human Animal Support Services	Click Here
Getting to Yes! Making Great Matches Between Pets & People	American Pets Alive	Click Here
Conversation Based Adoptions	Human Animal Support Services	Click Here
Adoptions With No Applications!	Operation Kindness	Click Here
Sample: Adopter Information Form	Information form instead of application; SEACCA Example	Click Here
Sample: Adopter Information Form	Information form instead of application; Fresno	Click Here
Competitive Pet Placement	Lifeline Animal Services Case Study	Click Here
Bio Writing Tool for Shelters	Rescue Writer	Click Here
Marketing vs Adoption Counseling	Maddie's University	Click Here Click Here
Hills Sheltering Report	2024 State Of Shelter Pet Adoption Report	Click Here

RESCUE PARTNERSHIPS

Positives

- 100 groups on the master list
- No charge for rescue groups to transfer pets

Opportunities

- There are approximately 100 groups on the master rescue group list but not all are active. Updating this list and communicating with groups prior to moving to the Santee shelter is another excellent volunteer project.
- Rescue groups may be charged an altering fee (\$40-48). Spay/neuter should be provided for shelter pets at no cost and since public surgeries are limited in number, they should continue to be reserved for individual pet owners. Whenever there is surgery capacity or last-minute open appointments, consider assisting rescue groups with spay/neuter at no charge.
- The foster coordinator needs an automatic way to communicate with Rescue groups, just as they do for foster volunteers. Chameleon staff should be questioned about a Postmaster add-on to accomplish this. Another tool is Doobert's FosterSpace Connect (doobert.com).

STAFFING

Positives

- Many caring, dedicated and resilient staff members
- Extensive written SOPs that include cross reporting for ACOs with respect to child and elder abuse, allowing for fee waived adoptions and Foster Finder program, detailed instructions to capture dog behaviors and a Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers

Opportunities

- All supervisors should be provided with a basic management training review as a group, develop an onboard training process that includes cross-training and update the SOPs and job descriptions as needed
- SOPs include guidelines on appropriate, humane and safe animal handling but staff area at risk with single compartment dog kennels in Bonita and cages in Field Services vehicles too high for one person to lift an aggressive dog into
- While all positions are important, ACAs are responsible for direct animal care. When short staffed, care and enrichment are compromised as staff have no good options. Ways to streamline the filling of critical vacant positions in a timely manner should be discussed.

- Complete a monthly analysis regarding overnight Dispatch calls and inquire if overnight calls could be handled through 911. Since staff reports there are nights with no overnight calls, then Dispatch staff could be moved to a day shift.
- Analyze the volume of overnight call numbers to ensure the on-call ACO system is most efficient
- Fast track the volunteer coordinator (currently open)
- Consider the following positions that may be reclasses of current positions, filled with temp/contract workers or added positions:
 - Reclass Chief Veterinarian position
 - Reclass Foster/Rescue Coordinator
 - Reclass 1 ACO into Field Tech
 - Experienced dog behavior/trainer
 - Safety Net Coordinator
 - 2 ACAs
- Once leadership decides on recommendations to be implemented and prior to moving to Santee, SOPs need to be updated

Shelter Safety Assessment	Outcomes Consulting	Click Here
Onboarding & Training Animal Care Staff	Best Friends Animal Society	Click Here
A Roadmap to New Hire Orientation	ASPCA Pro	Click Here
Just In Onboarding for Veterinary Assistants	ASPCA Pro	Click Here

VOLUNTEERS

Positives

- Program in place
- Many dedicated, caring volunteers between Bonita and Carlsbad
- Volunteer Coordinator position currently being advertised

Opportunities

- Review volunteer SOP with all staff and volunteers that includes a Code of Conduct on and off duty
- A robust volunteer force has the potential to alleviate the staff workload and enhance animal care and advocacy. Consider an anonymous survey to staff and volunteers to understand any tension so conflicts can be prevented and resolved moving forward.
- Recruit volunteers now from the Santee area for Bonita so they can be prepared when Santee opens

Volunteer & Shelter Orientation	AZ Animal Welfare League	Click Here
Volunteer Integration Toolkit	Human Animal Support Services	Click Here
Sample Volunteer Program	Pima Animal Care Center	Click Here
Sample Volunteer Program	Lifeline Animal Center	Click Here

MOVING FORWARD

While it may seem that there are superfluous recommendations in this report, leadership should stay focused on the foundational challenges at the highest level. These include keeping pets in their homes and neighborhoods, increasing the RTO rate for dogs, diverting cats with access to the outdoors to spay/neuter/rabies vaccinate in lieu of shelter intake and assessing optional programs with existing staff and resources. As leadership addresses those issues, symptomatic negative sequelae are minimized.

Team Shelter USA applauds the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services for welcoming and engaging in the operational assessment process. Staff and leadership were open, thoughtful and extremely dedicated to the mission of helping pets and people. Once leadership has reviewed this report, a meeting will be scheduled to discuss any questions or concerns about recommendations of best practice industry standards.