



September 8, 2016

Hetti Brown
Office of Animal Welfare
Delaware Health & Social Services
1901 N. Du Pont Pkwy.
New Castle, DE 19720

Dear Ms. Brown,

I am writing about gaps in the existing safety net in Delaware in the hopes of assisting Delaware improve service delivery to animals throughout the state. As you know, our organization was instrumental in the drafting of Delaware's 2010 Shelter Standards Law, which you have credited with improvements in sheltering practices as it "established common-sense statutes to improve the health and wellbeing of animals temporarily housed in shelters," including "vaccination upon intake," "veterinary care for sick or injured animals," and "holding periods to allow owner reunification or transfer."

Specifically, you have stated that the law requires that animals must be held and given to rescue groups rather than killed and thus "has improved the quality of care animals receive in shelters and has saved thousands of animals that would have otherwise been euthanized due to outdated policies and practices. Prior to this law, healthy dogs and cats were euthanized very quickly, sometimes while their owners were looking for them."

We fully agree with this assessment and are very proud of what Delaware has accomplished. Specifically, death rates have declined statewide at all shelters by 64% (for cats, the killing has declined 90%), Delaware Animal Services (DAS) is saving 89% of cats, 93% of dogs, and 98% of other animals year to date, and many Delaware municipalities are embracing community cat sterilization in lieu of roundup and killing as had been the practice prior to the 2010 law.

While there has been tremendous progress, however, there are still gaps in the safety net. Given the strong foundation provided by improvements over the last several years, we believe that Delaware is in a strong position to fill those remaining gaps. Specifically, DAS should expand sheltering services to all stray

Hetti Brown
Office of Animal Welfare
September 8, 2016
Page two

cats and provide rehoming services for “owner” relinquished animals. As it stands, some of these animals have no services available to them beyond those provided by private organizations. And while many of these groups are doing excellent work, the mandate to care for Delaware’s animals belongs with the state.

I want to emphasize, however, and do so in the strongest possible terms, that DAS should not take in more cats and relinquished animals if all it will do is kill them. Between killing animals and not taking them in, the latter is the more humane option. But these are not the only two choices presented and shelters across the country, including communities taking in as many as 20,000 animals per year, have proved that an “open admission” shelter can operate in a humane way by saving as high as 98-99% of all animals. (See No Kill Advocacy Center, “Defining No Kill,” at nokilladvocacycenter.org/defining-no-kill.html and “No Kill 101” at nokilladvocacycenter.org/no-kill-equation.html.)

In fact, expanding services to provide a safety net for relinquished animals can be done on a managed admission basis while DAS improves and expands its operational capacity. Doing so would allow DAS to save all relinquished animals who are not irremediably suffering, without putting them at risk for abandonment as studies have proved, and, more importantly, without any interim period of killing.

Second, DAS should embrace community cat sterilization and provide the services to all Delaware residents assisting cats and to all stray cats presented to DAS at no cost, especially in light of research showing that cost is the primary barrier to sterilization (see, e.g., <http://goo.gl/akoxPV>). Currently, DAS is doing so on a small, *ad hoc* scale, with the bulk of the services provided by individuals at their own expense or through the largesse of private charities who, unlike DAS, are not in a position to assist all residents and all cats who need it.

The reasons to embrace community cat sterilization by DAS in earnest can be compelling. First, some of these cats are not lost. They are outside, but they get lost when they are taken to a shelter. Returning them merely returns them home. Even if they were lost when they were picked up, the likelihood of being reunited with their families is greater for cats if they are allowed to remain where they are rather than being admitted to the shelter. In one study, cats were 13 times more likely to be returned home by non-shelter means (such as returning home on their own) than by a

Hetti Brown
Office of Animal Welfare
September 8, 2016
Page three

call or visit to a shelter. And another study found that people are up to three times more likely to adopt cats as neighborhood strays versus adopting from a shelter. At the same time, the risk of death for street cats in communities has been found to be extremely low, with outdoor cats living roughly the same lifespan as indoor pet cats. In other words, the risk of death is lower and the chance of adoption higher for cats on the streets than cats in the shelter. In a study of over 100,000 alley cats, less than one percent of those cats were suffering from debilitating conditions. As such, community cat sterilization meets the two goals of a shelter better than impoundment in a shelter does: reclaim by families or adoption into a new home.

But if the cats are truly lost or abandoned, shelters should not forget that they have a mandate to help reunite families. Moreover, shelters also have a mandate of finding these cats new homes and can do a better job for those cats who truly need it. As it stands, this option is not always available at DAS and it should and can be, especially if the cats find themselves abandoned or without care. And once again, sterilization and a return to field back up option during peak periods would allow DAS to save all relinquished animals who are not irremediably suffering, while it expands organizational capacity, without any interim period of killing.

If DAS would commit to these programs, Delaware would not only become a model state, but the first in the U.S. with a verifiable save rate of at least 90%. As always, if we can assist in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Nathan J. Winograd

Enclosures