

## V. COMMUNITY/PUBLIC RELATIONS

This section provides an assessment of the Kern County Animal Control Services Division's *Community Relations And Public Relations* activities.

### A. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The Division lacks a comprehensive and well-organized community education and public relations program. Specific community education objectives have not been established to measure the effectiveness of existing efforts. A public information plan and strategies have not been developed. Coordination with other organizations concerned with animal welfare could be improved. Existing public information and education efforts are not monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to determine their effectiveness.

Little advantage has been taken of utilizing the print and broadcast media to inform the public of animal services and issues. The Division could enhance its image by making more extensive use of press releases, public service announcements, and formalizing its relationships with the media.

#### Volunteer Program

The Division's Volunteer Program consists of two to five volunteers who assist with Lost and Found, Adoptions and the Promotion of Responsible Pet Ownership. The Program is directed by the Shelter Supervisor. Volunteers are solicited by utilizing the Division's web site (See <http://www.co.kern.ca.us/acd/Volunteer.asp>).

A volunteer Program Handbook has been developed. It provides general information regarding policies and procedures in general and volunteer-specific information in the following areas:

Application Process, Personal Behavior and Performance, Resignation, Orientation, Training and Education, Attendance and Hours, Dress Code, Safety, Public and Media Relations, Equipment, Supplies and Files.

Specific volunteer position duties in the three main program areas are also noted as follows:

#### 1. *Shelter Office Assistant*

- ◆ Maintains and updates records of animals that are reported lost or found; identifies reports of lost animals with animals in the shelter for a positive match.
- ◆ Contacts owners of lost animals regarding possible location of their lost animal
- ◆ Maintains and updates records of people wishing to adopt an animal
- ◆ Identifies a request to adopt a particular animal with animals in the shelter
- ◆ Contacts possible adopters concerning animals available in the shelter
- ◆ Maintains and updates records concerning rescue groups
- ◆ Contacts rescue groups regarding potential animals for rescue.

2. *Animal Adoption and Redemption Assistant*

- ◆ Assists the public when they arrive at the facility regarding animals that are available for adoption
- ◆ Assists the public when they arrive to search for a lost animal.

3. *Education and Outreach Assistant*

- ◆ Assists Animal Control Services Division staff with the Rabies Vaccination Clinics by assisting the public with forms and setting-up and taking-down necessary equipment
- ◆ Assists Animal Control Services Division staff with community events that encourage the adoption of shelter animals
- ◆ Assists staff by assembling informational packets for community outreach
- ◆ Assists staff in outreach programs to promote licensing.

The volunteer Program has not been successful for the following reasons:

- ◆ The program lacks direction due to the assignment of this responsibility to the Shelter Supervisor. The incumbent occupies a key position within the Division and is not able to devote the time necessary to grow the program and manage her other responsibilities.
- ◆ The Program lacks a clear focus and specific goals and objectives.

### Community Education Program

Community education efforts need to be expanded. The Animal Control services Division's community education program is inadequate given the low level of pet ownership responsibility in the County. Education efforts need to be focused on these primary areas:

1. Safety Around Animals - Bite Prevention
2. Responsible Pet Ownership
3. Humane Education
4. Community Public Information.

#### *Safety Around Animals - Bite Prevention*

Last year 793 people were bitten by dogs in Kern County. Safety Around Animals means not taking chances with unfamiliar or unfriendly animals. Most animals seem friendly and harmless. Yet every year in the U.S., animals:

- ◆ Bite over a million people – at least half of them children
- ◆ Seriously injure thousands of people
- ◆ Kill about 17 people.

Most biting incidents involve dogs. However, any kind of animal is potentially dangerous. More likely than not, most people's job or a favorite recreational activity will bring them in

contact with an unfamiliar or unfriendly animal at some time. Citizens can protect themselves and others by knowing how to:

- ◆ Recognize the warning signs of aggressive animal behavior
- ◆ Avoid or prevent an animal attack
- ◆ Defend themselves, if attacked.

Who is AT RISK of being attacked by an animal? Almost everyone is at one time or another, but especially:

- ◆ Animal control/shelter personnel
- ◆ Bicyclists
- ◆ Cable TV and repair personnel
- ◆ Delivery personnel
- ◆ Joggers
- ◆ Law enforcement personnel
- ◆ Mail carriers
- ◆ Meter readers
- ◆ Newspaper carriers
- ◆ Pedestrians.

Safety Around Animals should be a primary component of an Education Program. Bite prevention is taught in the schools but the program should also be made available to the U.S. Postal Service, local utilities, UPS, FedEx, homeowner associations, etc.

### *Responsible Pet Ownership*

This program focuses on the proper care of pets and the need to spay/neuter dogs and cats to prevent pet overpopulation. It is almost exclusively a school-based program but can also be presented to youth based organizations, e.g. Boys and Girls Clubs, scout troops, and summer youth programs. The pet overpopulation problem is primarily caused by irresponsible individuals letting their animals roam and their failure to have them sterilized. Some attitudes, once ingrained, are hard to change. Therefore, early introduction of these concepts is crucial if a long-term change in the community's perception of animals is to occur.

### *Humane Education*

Youth who are violent to animals rarely stop there! Violent acts toward animals have long been recognized as indicators of a dangerous psychopathy that does not confine itself to animals. Many of the young high-school shooters tortured animals before they turned on their peers. Teaching students to have empathy for animals considered essential is to raising kind, compassionate citizens. Humane education should be an essential part of a student's education as it reduces violence and builds moral character in the following ways:

- ◆ Empowering students to take responsibility for their actions

- ◆ Helping students to apply the concepts of respect and kindness toward animals in their own lives
- ◆ Inspiring students to become active participants in helping animals and others
- ◆ A 2001 survey, commissioned by The Humane Society of the United States, noted that nine of ten Americans believe that lessons about kindness to animals and responsible pet care should be part of schools' efforts to encourage good character.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education awarded nearly \$2.8 million to 12 states to develop programs to teach values.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ By 2002, federal grants had increased to nearly \$16.7 million, awarded to 39 states.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ Fourteen states mandate character education through legislation: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and Virginia.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ Fourteen states encourage character education through legislation: Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Texas.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ The Humane Society of the United States is an excellent resource for this program. They can provide program guidance and written material in support of local programs.

In is important to be aware that the State Education Code Section 233.5 states: *“Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government.”*

### Public Information Program

A well-developed public information program in Kern County could:

- ◆ Make pet owners aware of their responsibilities
- ◆ Increase public awareness of animal services
- ◆ Inform the public that animal laws will be enforced
- ◆ Sensitize the public to the importance of the humane treatment of all animals.

Kern County should prepare a limited number of objectives and performance measures to determine specific public information strategies, for example:

- ◆ Preparation of information brochures on specific topics

- ◆ Distribution of brochures to particular audiences
- ◆ Preparation of press releases and suggestions for feature articles
- ◆ Delivering education programs
- ◆ Preparing articles to be included in the Bakersfield Californian
- ◆ The target for achieving the objectives could be the fiscal year to correspond to funds budgeted for information purposes
- ◆ Specific strategies and their approximate costs should be developed using the following public information and education tools:
- ◆ Distribution of pamphlets and brochures
- ◆ Preparation of an annual report to the public
- ◆ Audio, video and print news releases
- ◆ Public service announcements
- ◆ Open houses and tours of the shelter
- ◆ Special events sponsored in cooperation with other animal organizations such as dog walks, pet of the week, adopt a shelter animal month, National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week, Dog Bite Prevention Week
- ◆ Web sites
- ◆ Speakers bureau
- ◆ School visitations
- ◆ Classes on obedience, dog training, animal behavior, pet health, pet care, etc.
- ◆ Information flyer providing basic information on the shelter location, phone numbers, hours, how to file complaints and services
- ◆ Posters for placement in pet stores, veterinary offices and other locations
- ◆ Poster contests in the schools
- ◆ Recorded messages
- ◆ Paid advertisements
- ◆ Utility bill inserts
- ◆ Videos
- ◆ Presentations to civic and other community and neighborhood groups
- ◆ Distribution of a newsletter with license renewals
- ◆ Reprints of articles and information prepared by other humane organizations such as the Humane Society of United States, National Association for Humane and Environmental Education, American Humane Association, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- ◆ Appearance on local radio and TV talk shows

- ◆ Animal trading cards with photos and information about licensing, bite prevention, adoption and spaying/neutering
- ◆ Letters to the editor
- ◆ Promotion on retail store bulletin boards
- ◆ Display of placards on public transportation, benches and bus stops
- ◆ Community access television
- ◆ Newsletters
- ◆ Staff participation in neighborhood events. Put up a booth or display and distribute materials and answer questions.

In many cases, there is no need to reinvent the wheel, since The Humane Society Of The United States and other organizations offer a wide selection of attractive and informative brochures for purchase. Another excellent source is information materials prepared by other animal service agencies.

Special effort should be made to maximize the distribution of information materials by inserting them with utility bills and an Animal Control Services program newsletter. Distributions to businesses, libraries, schools and professional office waiting rooms are just a few examples of available methods. Distribution by the Animal Control Officers to people they contact and as door hangers is an effective approach. Information racks at the shelter and other public offices can also be helpful.

**Funds committed to public information and education offer an opportunity to reduce costs associated with impoundment including the need to expand shelter facilities. Another benefit is the potential for additional licensing revenues.**

Continual evaluation of the public information program is essential to determine its effectiveness in cost benefit terms. One type of evaluation is to solicit feedback from readers of printed materials and those attending education programs and other presentations. Another method is to monitor the impact of the program on increases or decreases in the number of adoptions, strays, altered pets and licenses issued. Finally, statistics on the number of people attending presentations and information materials distributed should be collected and analyzed.

Extensive use should be made of news releases to promote adoption of animals, pet owner responsibilities, the importance of licensing and other services. News releases that are accompanied by photographs and practical information have a good chance of being used by the media. Human-interest stories such as a pet rescues and cruelty investigations have considerable appeal. Local newspapers, radio stations and TV are always looking for interesting stories. Examples of stories that have appeared in local and national newspaper include: stray pet problem; how to get a pet; volunteer's help in pet selection; pets and disasters; pet theft and the dog squad. Most of the feature articles included photographs of pets.

A media kit should be prepared to inform the print and broadcast media of services provided and a description of the Division including budget, staffing and other relevant background information. A photograph of the shelter and its location should be included along with phone numbers and contact persons. Inclusion of fact sheets on adoption, licensing, animal laws and complaint handling is useful. Information on Division accomplishments should be included and

statistics on strays, animals returned and licenses issued. Preparation of letters to the editor focusing on specific issues is an effective technique.

Media representatives should be invited to visit the shelter for a briefing on the work of the Division and current animal issues. Suggestions for feature articles and short radio and TV spots should be developed. Newspapers, TV and radio are often looking for material to be used during slow news periods. Maintenance of a current mailing list of media contacts is important. Groups such as the United Way and the Public Relations Society of America may have local guides containing contact names, phone numbers and other important information about the local media. Releases should be distributed to media sources serving minority and non-English speaking audiences.

Many animal services organizations arrange with TV stations to display a dog or cat available for adoption on the evening news or supply photographs of pets available for adoption.

Creative public service announcements are another means of delivering a message. National animal protection organizations such as the Human Society of the United States, the American Humane Association and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals make available public service announcements.

One way to maximize limited resources in designing a public information program is to solicit the assistance of marketing, advertising, communication and public relations talent in the community on a *pro bono* basis. Such professionals can provide advice and assistance on graphics, design a logo, develop print ads, plan a campaign and other information and marketing strategies. Volunteers who have experience in writing, graphics, photography and other educational marketing and public relations skills should be recruited to assist in preparing materials and making presentations. An effort should be made to find a volunteer to serve as a public information coordinator and to train Division staff in public information and education techniques.

University public relations, marketing, communication and business faculty members are often interested in class projects to provide hands on experience for students. Possible projects could include preparation of educational materials, focus groups, surveys, design of a public information strategy, organizing an advertising campaign and planning other creative ways of helping the Division to deliver its message.

Nonprofit foundations often provide funding for innovative educational campaigns. Advertising agencies may provide advertising space for public service messages. Commercial enterprises often sponsor educational print ads. Local foundations and trusts are a possible source of funding. Opportunities for funding joint ventures with other animal welfare agencies should be explored.

## Community Relations

The relationship with rescue groups, while improving, is still in need of improvement if an effective public private partnership is to be developed and maintained. The non-profit animal community can be an invaluable resource or it can be a source of constant irritation for an animal control agency. The Division and the non-profit animal groups should seek out areas of common understanding and purpose and strive to build on this commonality.

No one that the study team met who works for the Animal Control Services Division likes to kill animals. The people we have met want to do a good job and would welcome the understanding participation of the non-profit animal community in significantly reducing the killing of companion animals in the County's shelters. In a similar vein, the non-profit animal community needs assurance that there is commonality of purpose and a real commitment to improve the current situation.

## ***B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY/PUBLIC RELATIONS***

**Recommendation V-1:** Hire a Community Relations Specialist to manage the Volunteer Program and the Education Program.

**Recommendation V-2:** Task the Community Relations Specialist to lead, coordinate and maximize volunteer resources from the community.

**Recommendation V-3:** Develop a comprehensive Education Program for the citizens of Kern County.

Task the new Community Relations Specialist with developing the Education Program. The specific emphasis of the Education Program should be on bite prevention, responsible pet ownership with an emphasis on the need to spay/neuter companion animals, humane education and public information.

**Recommendation V-4:** Develop a program to make effective use of the print and broadcast media.

Use the newly hired Community Relations Specialist to develop a program to make effective use of the print and broadcast media in educating and informing the public about animal services and issues.

**Recommendation V-5:** Establish a written volunteer program policy specifically for the Animal Control Services Division.

Establish a written volunteer program policy specifically for the Animal Control Services Division to identify the program areas where volunteers are needed – for example, adoption counseling, lost and found assistance, dog grooming, dog exercise, etc. Develop job descriptions, training guidelines, attendance expectations, etc. Recruit volunteers. Train volunteers. Integrate the volunteers into the program and foster staff acceptance and appreciation.

**Recommendation V-6:** Strengthen relationships with the leaders of every rescue group currently contracting with the Division.

The Division Manager should work on strengthening relationships with the leaders of every rescue group currently contracting with the Division and ascertain how the Division and the



group can increase the number of animals released to these groups. The monetary resources of rescue groups are limited. These groups can help the division to reduce the number of animals euthanized by the division. It makes sense to waive the adoption fee for 501.3.(c) animal rescue groups who execute a contract with the Division to spay/neuter released animals and provide proof that the sterilization has taken place. The Division should suspend any group that does not comply with the spay/neuter requirement or who fails to maintain and supply proof of sterilization.

**Recommendation V-7:                      Provide an orientation for interested community members regarding the application of and need for “SAFER” testing.**

“SAFER” testing was initiated with insufficient community (i.e. animal group) involvement. Consequently, the animal groups are distrustful of the program and its effectiveness is potentially compromised. The Division should provide an orientation for interested community members regarding the application of and need for “SAFER” testing – for example, public liability, fewer returned animals, customer satisfaction, etc. The Division staff should be aware of the differences between alternative Temperament Testing Programs and decide if “SAFER” is the best model for Kern County.

The behavior evaluation of dogs placed for adoption is not without controversy. However, it would be imprudent not to take advantage of available testing protocols. Liability issues and the desire to make sure that an animal placed in a home will not be returned for behavior related issues must be considered. Most large shelters are conducting some form of behavior evaluation. We believe, though not perfect, these testing methods are a valuable tool in managing a shelter adoption program. The community should be given the opportunity to meet with shelter managers to discuss their concerns regarding this issue. Shelter management should review other alternatives to determine if SAFER is meeting the needs of the Division and the community.