



Sheriff's Department San Luis Obispo County

[Contact Us](#) | [Home](#)
[Public Alerts](#) | [Animal Services](#) | [Employment](#) | [Community Programs](#) | [Volunteer](#) | [About Us](#)

HSUS Report

Animal Services

[Lost Pet Info](#)
[Animals in Shelter](#)
[Our Services](#)
[Fee Schedule](#)
[County Ordinances](#)
[Volunteer](#)
[Humane Education](#)
[HSUS Report](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In 2007, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department, the County agency currently responsible for the Animal Services Division, initiated contact with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to request a thorough assessment of Animal Services operations, services and programs. HSUS services were contracted in early 2008, the review was undertaken in March, and a report on findings issued in early July.

The study was initiated by Sheriff Pat Hedges in order to obtain an objective analysis of Animal Services in light of complaints and comments received from community members as well as Animal Services volunteers. The complaints reflected a concern over facility management and perceived priority given to the care of shelter animals.

Representatives from the Humane Society of the United States visited the Animal Services facility, reviewed procedures and assessed shelter conditions, interviewed Animal Services staff, volunteers, government officials and other area animal organization representatives; and reviewed all information provided, including operations procedures and relevant media publications.

Report Organization

The emerging industry best practice in public animal service agencies is a dual mission of protecting the health, safety and welfare of people and animals in the community. This translates into three overarching priorities for Animal Services:

- Fund full service field operations
- Fund full service shelter operations
- Maintain a high level of humane care for the animals

These priorities are fully detailed in the report and can be categorized into four areas: (1) Facilities, including the maintenance, interior and layout of the Shelter; (2) Operations, including services, systems, processes, and procedures; (3) Community Outreach, including branding, social marketing and volunteerism; and (4) Organization, including governance, management, leadership, and human resources. Presented within each of the categories are examples of current practices within the facility—both the good and those in need of improvement—and benchmarks to industry standards.

General Observations

- The HSUS team reports that many of the challenges facing Animal Services in SLO County are common to the sheltering industry nationwide: the high cost of operations, the unpredictability of demand, the high demand for staffing supplemented by volunteers to maintain service levels and the ongoing demands of facility physical operations.
- We are encouraged that the report finds Animal Services scores better than other shelter agencies nationwide on a number of measures (reduction of euthanasia rates, housing for exotic and small animals, livestock facilities, utilization of high quality cleaning products, efforts to find alternative/rescue placements for impounded animals, humane education, 'lost & found' animal programs, and information management system,).
- Nonetheless, there are a number of areas needing improvement, including staffing, supervision and policy clarity on shelter processes ranging from facility sanitation to cat euthanasia.
- Many of the challenges faced by Animal Services arise from the overpopulation of cats and dogs due to residents' unwillingness to and/or negligence in spaying and neutering pets. The high

demand for service places unrelenting strain on staffing and budget management.

- Some of the recommended changes are simple and easy to implement, others will require more time, effort and funding.

The HSUS team recommends a Task Force be created to review the report and create a working plan of action.

Specific recommendations by category include the following:

(1) Facilities

- Improve cleanliness and sanitation
- Increase safety and security
- Develop consistent and clear signage
- Provide for ongoing and preventative maintenance
- Determine and implement suitable configuration

(2) Operations

- Significantly improve overall animal management program (such as identification, animal handling, medical care, etc.)
- Finalize and train comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures for a range of activities
- Provide full service field and shelter operations convenient to the public

(3) Community Outreach

- Develop official branding of Animal Services
- Create a structured volunteer program
- Reinforce public understanding of the community's role in creating animal related challenges facing Animal Services through Social Marketing principles and techniques

(4) Organization

- Formalize reporting/organization structure of Animal Services
- Create a long-range plan for Animal Services
- Determine and implement appropriate staffing, role and responsibilities
- Implement a personnel policy manual currently in draft format
- Develop a formal performance review program

Summary

A number of the recommendations made by HSUS have already been implemented by Animal Services, including:

- The initiation of "Closed for Cleaning" hours allowing kennel staff to better supervise and direct Honor Farm workers
- Implementation of a structured volunteer policy
- Standardized volunteer orientations
- Initiation of a process to develop comprehensive SOPs for shelter operations
- Systematic identification of individual animals through ID collars
- Provision of formal staff training on topics ranging from bite prevention to compassion fatigue
- Implementation of alternative methods for handling and moving feral cats

In addition to those recommendations already implemented, a number of others are currently being planned or evaluated:

- Development of a Task Force to review and create a working plan for addressing the report recommendations
- Implementation of Sunday hours
- Further modification of feral cat housing and handling processes
- Recruitment of paid kennel staff with specific interest in cats
- Identification of additional staff training opportunities to include zoonotic disease, recognition

and mitigation of stress in sheltered animals, and animal adoption matching

HSUS reviewers note that many of the changes identified in the report can be implemented quickly and easily by actions as simple as procedural changes. Others will require time to fully integrate into shelter operations. A concerted effort to obtain residents' help in spaying and neutering pets is needed to reduce the demand for shelter space. There are simply too many unwanted animals requiring sheltering.

Internally, overall refinement of the operation, including development of and adherence to written policies and procedures and improved communication between staff, volunteers and the public will help Animal Services perform at an improved level.

This summary is provided as an overview of findings. To view the HSUS report in its entirety, please [click here](#). Community comments and feedback are welcome via email to [HSUS_Comments](#).

Copyright © SLO Sheriff Dept.