Amarillo Animal Management & Welfare
Shelter Assessment

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August 2014

Introduction

The Target Zero Institute (TZI) was invited to complete an assessment of the Amarillo Animal Management and Welfare Shelter (AAMW). This report is the result of a week-long period of observation in the shelter, interviews with the Amarillo-Panhandle Humane Society (HS) and AAMW staff and management along with review of local ordinances and current standard operating procedures. It is meant to provide a brief overview of how the organization currently functions and recommendations for improvement. Recommendations are based on the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for the Standards of Care in Animal Shelters.

There are many positive aspects about the operation that should be acknowledged:

- Leadership interested in change and improvement
- Search is underway for a new AAMW director
- Long time partnership with HS
- Adoption option for reclaims in lieu of a citation
- Sizable indoor/outdoor runs with guillotine doors for shelter dogs
- All animals are available for adoption except for quarantine
- HS director works with media five (5) days a week
- Number of days open to the public was recently increased from five (5) to six (6) days
- The HS subsidizes a discount spay/neuter card
- Online lost and found system

This report will focus, however, on opportunities to improve. The Target Zero Institute recommendations focus on three simultaneous goals:
Strategies to decrease shelter intake
Recommendations to keep pets healthy while in the shelter
Decreasing the length of stay to live outcome resulting in a 90%+ save rate

Organizational Structure

Status

The HS has had a long-term relationship with the AAMW shelter and has rented space for a monthly fee in the city building for many years. The partnership has historically been strained under previous administrations but now greatly improved. Responsibilities of each organization at times overlap and contradict one another leading to confusing processes for the public and limiting life-saving potential. There is no signage from the parking lot directing a first time visitor to the appropriate entrance. If an owner enters the AAMW door to surrender their pet, they are sent to the HS side. There are times, however, that the HS will not accept a particular pet and the owner will be sent back to the AAMW side. The HS does not accept owner surrendered animals if they are not vaccinated.

Animals in the shelter are separated with respect to the HS and the AAMW, with animals under the umbrella of the HS housed in two (2) distinct buildings only. On August 20, twenty-two (22) dogs were posted on the HS website out of 103 dogs in the shelter.

Recommendations-Highest Priority

The AAMW and the HS should create a joint <u>mission statement</u> that includes attention to public health, preventing cruelty, decreasing the number of homeless animals in the community/shelter and reaching a save rate in excess of 90%. The shelter should operate in a partnership with <u>clearly delineated responsibilities</u>. The process by which a visitor enters the building and walks through the property should be streamlined. A member of the public surrendering a stray or their own pet should enter through the AAMW door (also see ***Surrender Prevention*** section).

An owner looking for their lost pet or reclaiming their pet should enter through the AAMW door. It is important that the owners looking for their lost pet enter through the AAMW as staff is seeing the stray population surrendered by the public and is more likely to match an incoming stray pet with an owner that has lost their pet. Anyone interested in adoptions, rescue or foster should enter through the HS door.

<u>Animals brought to the shelter by an animal control officer or the public should be placed in newly designated sections (see also ***Canine and Feline Housing*** sections)</u>. All shelter animals must be viewed as one adoptable population with no distinction between the HS and the AAMW. The exception to this is the bite quarantine cases where the public should not have access. Once the shelter database is implemented, the information about every pet in the shelter could be available in real time online on both the HS and AAMW websites. Alternatively, a link on the AAMW website could lead to the HS website where all shelter pets including those available for adoption and strays could be viewed.

<u>Standard Operating Procedures</u> (SOP) must be updated with input from the HS and AAMW staff so a single book is followed by the staff from each organization. This includes the enforcement section. Each SOP should list in the heading which staff is responsible for each task. Once the updated SOP book is

complete, a joint training should occur to introduce any changes and ensure that all staff understands how the entire shelter team, whether employed by the HS or AAMW, will operate.

Recommendations regarding staffing levels cannot be made at this time due to the current inaccurate data tracking system (see *Data* section). Once appropriate shelter software is implemented and statistics can be substantiated, several national organizations provide formulas for adequately staffing a shelter and field services and include the National Animal Control Association (nacanet.org), the Humane Society of the United States (animalsheltering.org) and the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (sawanetwork.org).

A true partnership between the AWM shelter and the HS will increase the life saving capacity. Having a non-profit organization focus on live outcome programs is a valuable asset for the AAMW and as such, should not be charged rent for the animals they are attempting to save. This would allow the HS to reallocate limited financial resources to save more lives. Decreasing the length of stay and number of animal care days will then in turn be a cost savings for the AAMW.

Potential Funding Source

- The majority of the recommendations in this section will result in a decreased length of stay and therefore be a cost savings for the AAMW. That cost savings will offset the $14,400 collected in rent annually from the HS.

Data

Status

The AAMW staff currently use a software system originally designed for the police department. Attempts to retrofit the software for the needs of the shelter have been unsuccessful. Staff may sign in a litter of five (5) but only the entry is counted as one and not the remaining four (4). Overall intake of all species is reportedly between 11,500 and 17,500 for the fiscal year 2012/2013. The true number of animals handled is unknown. Similarly, animals released to rescue groups or foster care have not been recorded at all. When statistics were requested for stray animals brought to the shelter by a Good Samaritan versus an animal control officer, staff said they would have to check each record individually since those numbers are entered under one code.

From a global perspective, with no shelter software in place to accurately track data, it is not possible to effectively manage the animal population or create realistic financial budget projections, let alone trust previously reported actuals. With respect to managing the operation on a daily basis, it is not possible to create useful reports such as the animals in need of spay/neuter or medical care, foster, rescue, owner contact and more. This information must be easily accessible in an effort to decrease the length of stay as much as possible. Similarly, knowing the intake types is essential to ensure appropriate staffing levels and how to allocate limited resources to impact high-risk populations and design animal housing.

The HS began using the PetPoint shelter software in October of 2012. Only those animals 'transferred' to the HS have cage cards generated by PetPoint. The balance of the shelter animals do not have cage cards so if a visitor is interested in adopting, they report the number of the run and building location to the staff to learn about the pet.

Recommendations-Highest Priority

Best Practices today in animal welfare include the use of shelter specific software. All the information regarding a pet entering the shelter must be entered into a record that generates a unique identifier for that pet in **real time**. That record should house all information pertaining to the pet to include description, intake type, sterilization status and any noticeable issues. The unique identifier (number) should be written on a band and placed around the pet's neck for the duration of their stay in the shelter. A cage card should be generated as well, that includes a flattering picture of the pet that must be taken on intake and pertinent information for a potential adopter or owner looking for their lost pet. The specifics of the cage card contents is flexible with the PetPoint software. The cage card and collar must stay with the pet throughout their stay at the shelter.

The pet's record must be updated as needed, in real time. This includes but is not limited to the location in the shelter, any owner contact and medical information that will allow for accurate communication between the staff and therefore public at all times. It is absolutely crucial that all staff be trained and held accountable for entering essential information into a pet's record to avoid any mistakes. In the

shelter environment, this could result in a mistaken transfer of ownership or at worst, a mistaken euthanasia, that occured recently at the shelter.

There are four (4) major software systems on the market today: Chameleon, PetPoint, Shelter Pro and Shelter Buddy. While all will serve the shelter in an equally efficient manner, consideration must also be paid to the cost of the software, design, security, ongoing maintenance fees and the integration of enforcement.

The HS has utilized PetPoint software since October of 2012. PetPoint is a web-based software offered at no cost when the shelter purchases the company's microchips and offers a free month of pet insurance to their adopters. The AAMW leader has researched these companies and determined the two best options are PetPoint and Shelter Pro. <u>It is this consultant's recommendation that the AAMW enter into an agreement with PetPoint.</u> With the implementation of any new software, there will be a learning curve for staff. Though PetPoint does offer free and ongoing training, a clear advantage in selecting that company is that the HS could be part of the training team that teaches the AAMW staff. This would provide for an easier transition. PetPoint software is used by over 2,000 shelters nationwide or 65% of the market.

Implementing shelter software would drastically improve and streamline the daily operation. Accurate tracking of categories of animals (dogs, cats, puppies, kittens and neonates), intake type, field vs at the shelter, sterilization status and the ability to generate any needed reports would allow for the analysis and impact of programs long term.

Funding Source

- There is potentially no cost for the implementation of PetPoint shelter software.
- Managing the shelter population effectively will create a cost savings when animal care days are decreased, ie., decreasing the length of stay to live outcome.

Surrender Prevention

Status

Currently, between the HS and AAMW staff, there are policies and programs in place in direct conflict with the philosophy that a certain percentage of surrenders can be prevented such as:

- In-shelter foster care
- The spay-a-mamma program that requires that kittens and puppies be surrendered to the shelter in order for the female dog or cat to be sterilized at no cost
- Offering an owner the option to pay $15 and leave their pet in the shelter for five (5) days and return for the pet if they are not adopted
- $15 Life Extension fee
- No options for those surrendering pets needing assistance

Recommendations

Historically, open admission animal shelters have admitted all strays and owner surrenders with no thought of alternatives. Shelters have accepted the task of placing homeless animals only to become overwhelmed with crowding, disease and high euthanasia rates. Today, that trend is changing. We now know that the majority of shelter pets are surrendered by low-income owners who would take advantage of services if they were financially feasible. Great strides are being made and proven with targeted spay/neuter programs, discussed at the end of this report.

In general, Surrender Prevention has two parts. The first and ideal is reaching those pet owners in the community who may surrender in the future, educating them and providing practical resources to proactively prevent relinquishment. For the purposes of this report, the focus will be at the point of surrender to the shelter but the Humane Society of the United States has developed a program called *Pets for Life* that is outlined in great detail on their website at www.animalsheltering.org.

The second is to have key staff in the shelter receiving office working with pet owners or Good Samaritans who want to keep or temporarily care for the pets, but need some sort of assistance. Having signs in the receiving office stating the euthanasia risk educates a pet owner about the gravity of their decision and is often enough to motivate them to search for other viable options. Partnerships are essential and options for assistance may include subsidized veterinary care, an assistance hotline, a food bank, low cost spay/neuter services, crisis foster care and more. Animal advocates are sure to support a program dedicated to preventing homelessness and this is an excellent program to be volunteer driven with some direction from AAMW and HS staff.

Surrender Prevention programs can be as varied and widespread as needed. Simply directing pet owners to a call back service or online assistance manned by volunteer behavior trainers, may be enough to keep a pet in their permanent home and out of the shelter. These services are paramount in every community dedicated to preventing pets from entering its shelters and should include rehoming assistance as an alternative to surrender.

Litters of neonatal kittens and puppies are often surrendered to the shelter with or without their mothers. Providing a kitten or puppy kit and teaching a Good Samaritan how to care for them until they are old enough for sterilization/adoption adds another dimension to the current foster program and prevents the euthanasia of those high-risk groups. Again, the Good Samaritan would be required to sign a legal document ensuring that they would surrender the kittens or puppies directly to the Texas Panhandle Petsavers foster program for sterilization/adoption.

Spay/Neuter programs targeted at specific groups for the public: low income pet owners, community cats, large breeds, pit bull type dogs and other breeds that are over represented in the shelter, are an essential key to decreasing shelter intake and will be discussed at the end of this report.

The HS and AAWM leadership must work together with their respective boards and the community as a whole to develop a safety net of services so options are available to prevent a shelter surrender. A simple questionnaire at intake could provide valuable information with regards to specific services needed in the Amarillo community. The question, 'What do you need to keep your pet?' could shed valuable light on the development of needed resources. At best, assisting a pet owner in re-homing their pet and preventing a shelter surrender while a new home is found would also be beneficial.

Potential Funding

- Volunteers, including veterinarians, can be recruited for large-scale community vaccine clinics. Vaccines (Bordetella, Rabies and Booster) and other hard costs can be underwritten by a private donor, fundraiser or absorbed into the current AAMW operational budget.
- A hotline for surrender prevention can be managed by volunteer trainers.
- Assistance for a surrender prevention program can be obtained with in-kind services, grants and private donations when marketed appropriately to funders.

Community Cat Diversion

Status

Though specific statistics are not currently available for the shelter, many thousands of cats enter the shelter each year and only a small percentage leave alive. Studies show that cats are at least seven (7) times more likely to find their way home spontaneously from the street vs reunification via a shelter. As per county ordinance, all strays, including feral cats must be held for seventy-two (72) hours. Holding feral cats in the shelter is highly stressful for the cat and the staff. Since these cats cannot be handled, it is dangerous and a liability for staff to attempt to handle them.

Key Facts:

- TZI estimates that approximately half of the stray cats admitted to the shelter would be eligible for a Community Cat Diversion Program
- A recent national Harris study found that 81% of those polled did not want community cats euthanized
- Complaints regarding community cats typically center on sexual behaviors such as yowling, spraying and fighting which are eliminated once the cats are sterilized
- Vaccinating this group of cats against rabies improves community immunity
- Sterilizing cats already living outside and reproducing will decrease the overall number of free roaming cats
- Studies show that cats are seven (7) times more likely to find their way home from the street vs an animal shelter
- Trap, neuter, euthanize has been attempted for decades in the United States and has not shown to be an effective method of controlling the community cat population

Recommendations

The TZI recommends returning outside cats back to their original neighborhoods following sterilization, rabies vaccination and ear tipping. A formal Community Cat Diversion program is the single most significant and quick way to decrease shelter intake and the euthanasia of cats. Key factors are the education of the intake staff and thus Good Samaritans, a unified message amongst animal welfare groups and the public. TZI recommends returning cats to their 'outside home' where they have a food source as evidenced by a healthy body weight. These may be feral cats that cannot be handled or friendly cats found outside.

For this program to be implemented, the county code would have to be amended to exempt cats from the seventy-two (72) hour hold if they were eligible for diversion. Community Cat Diversion programs are supported and promoted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Alley Cat Allies, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and the TZI. These programs decrease the intake of cats, saves lives, improves the care of the cats that do enter the shelter as well as

their chance for a live outcome, while diverting limited staff time that can be dedicated to save more canines. To clarify, not all cats are eligible for this program.

Eligible cats: ferals, visually healthy cats brought into the shelter in traps, cats found outside and who are of good body weight

Ineligible cats: declawed, sick, injured, inside only cats, kittens, cats whose owners are no longer available to care for them
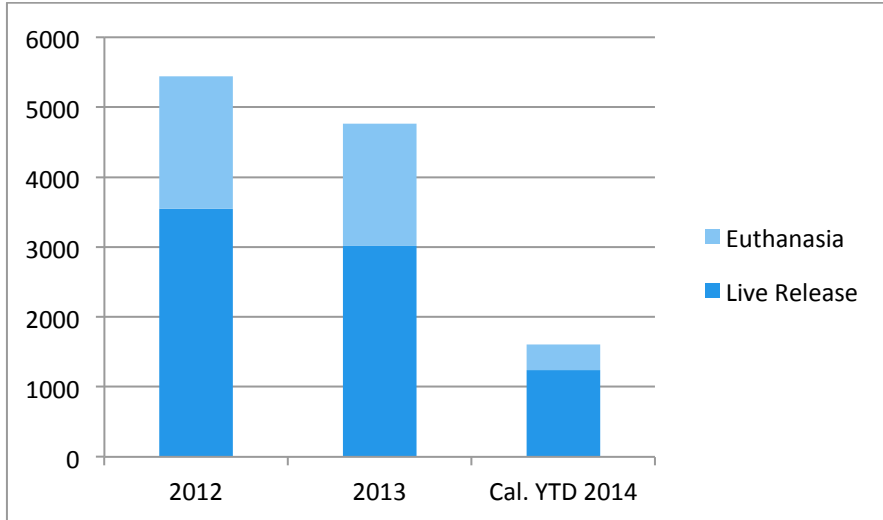
Community Cat Diversion programs are cost effective over time as they can ultimately decrease overall intake of cats that no longer have to be cared for, fed and ultimately euthanized in large numbers. Over time this program will decrease the overall number of free roaming cats, along with public health risks. There are many examples of successful community cat diversion programs.

Cat Intake and Outcome at Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services, Jacksonville, Florida
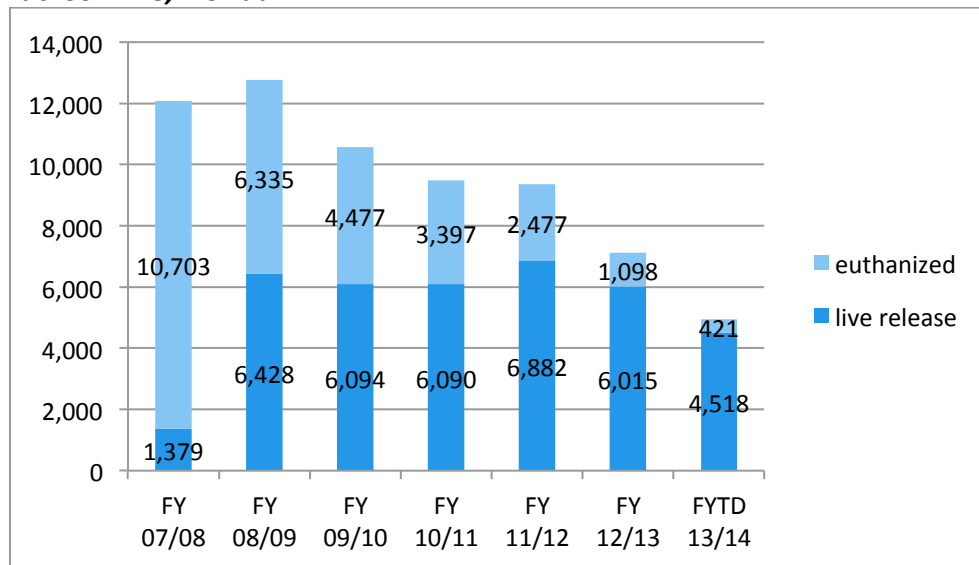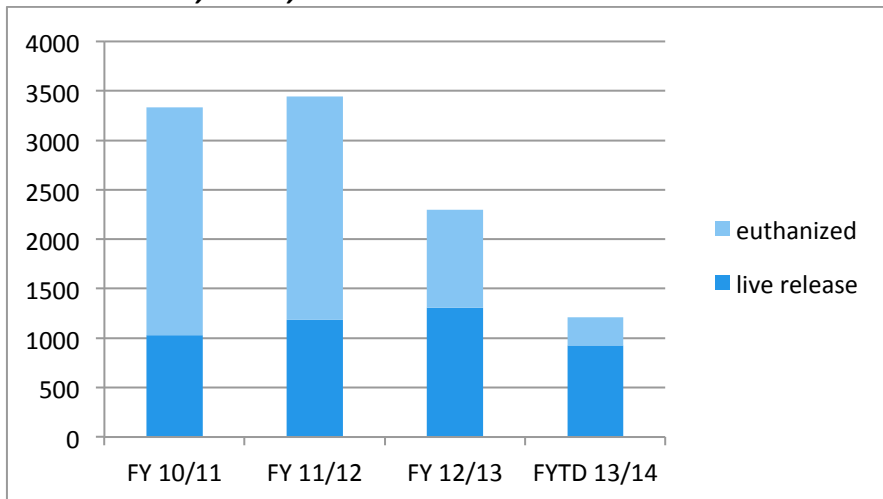

Bar graph shows the decrease in intake and euthanasia after a Feral Freedom (Community Cat Diversion) Program was introduced in 2008.

Cat Intake with Live Release and Euthanasia trends at Companion Animal Alliance, Baton Rouge, LA
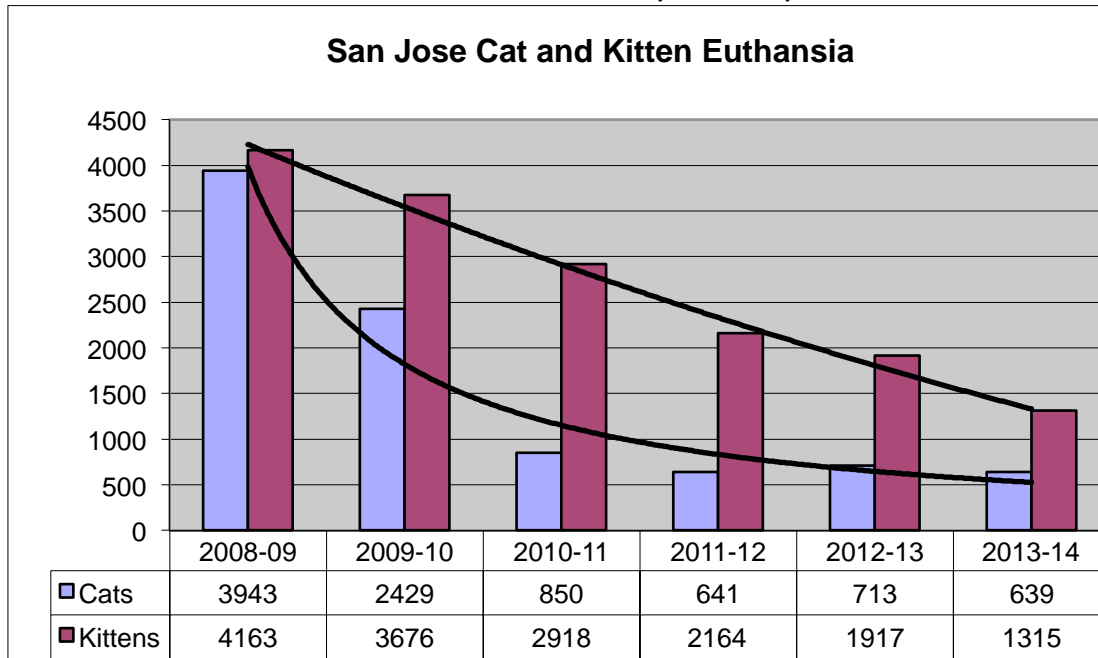

Bar graph shows decrease in cat intake and euthanasia after a pilot Community Cat Diversion program was implemented along with TNR programs targeted at high intake areas. Data shown Cal. YTD 2014 is from January 2014 through July 2014.

Cat Intake with Live Release and Euthanasia Trends at the City of Waco animal shelter, Waco, TX

Bar graphs show the decrease in cat intake and euthanasia after the implementation of a Community Cat Diversion program October 2013. FYTD 13/14 numbers are from October 1, 2013 through July 31, 2014.

Cat Euthanasia trends at San Jose Animal Control, San Jose, CA

San Jose Cat and Kitten Euthansia

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Cats	3943	2429	850	641	713	639
Kittens	4163	3676	2918	2164	1917	1315

Bar graphs show impact of Community Cat Diversion (or Feral Freedom) program, implemented in 2009.

Funding Source

- Community Cat Diversion programs work best supported by public-private partnerships.
  - automatic and ongoing government funding, such as revenue from dog and cat licensing
  - private funding through donations and grants

Population Management

Status

Animals may enter the shelter via animal control officers in the field, as owner surrenders through the HS, as owner surrenders or strays through the AAMW office. Currently, placement of dogs and puppies in the shelter is divided into separate buildings labeled as:

- Bite quarantine
- Pit bulls
- Puppies
- Stray male dogs
- Stray female dogs
- Tagged dogs
- Humane Society
- Humane Society/Medical Quarantine

If a pet is admitted to the shelter through AAMW, the HS may 'transfer' the pet under their care, enter the pet's information into a PetPoint record and physically move the pet into one of two buildings designated for the HS. Though two buildings are labeled as such, the general public can elect to adopt any pet in the shelter through the HS with the exception of bite quarantine. Several runs in the HS buildings are kept open in anticipation of owner surrenders.

Currently, when an intact pet is selected for adoption, they are scheduled for transport/surgery with a participating veterinarian. Depending on the availability of a surgery slot, a pet may be held in the shelter for days or as long as two weeks. The HS is currently having difficulty with private veterinary participation that is causing a backlog of variable lengths.

The AAMW kennel manager does visual rounds each day and at least twice a week creates a potential euthanasia list but no daily inventory is done. During the consultation week, the rescue and foster programs were transitioned to the HS so there was no system yet in place for communication among staff.

If a pet has a medical problem or clinical signs of disease, they may be euthanized or transported to a private veterinarian. In certain cases AAMW staff may treat a pet at the shelter under the veterinarian's care but no statistics were available for this category of animals.

Recommendations

As discussed above (see *Organizational Structure),* all animals entering the shelter should be treated as one population. Each should be signed into the same shelter software and placed in the appropriate enclosure with an identification band around their neck and a cage card with their picture. Since the

public can adopt a pet from any building (with the exception of bite quarantine), there is no reason to make a distinction between the HS and AAWM. This gives the public the impression that something is different, ie., wrong, with those animals not in a HS building. In addition:

- Bite Quarantine is the first building the public sees when they enter the adoption area through the HS door. A more customer friendly location for those animals would be at the north end of the shelter. Fencing surrounding the outside part of the kennels would have to be relocated to a building on the north end.

- Although TZI acknowledges there are extra challenges with adopting pit bull type dogs, separating them in one building further strengthens an already negative perception. Staff reports that many pit bull dogs entering the shelter are dog aggressive so housing those considered adoptable in their own run would be an appropriate approach.

- Currently, shelter veterinarians are divided with respect to the recommendations for housing puppies. Because adult dogs can carry and transmit an infectious disease, but have no clinical signs, they can infect puppies. Therefore, housing puppies in one area, protects them from any sentinel animals. In addition, runs for puppies should be cleaned first and before the adults or any sick shelter animals and housing them separately allows for this. Contrary to this, if a puppy is incubating Parvo virus or Distemper virus, the proximity of other puppies puts them at greater risk of becoming ill. New leadership should decide the best approach for the shelter and document if there is an increase in infectious diseases if changed.

- Male and female dogs should not be housed in the same run unless they were surrendered together and sterilized. Male and female dogs should be housed throughout the adoption area and once each shelter pet has an individual cage card and collar, the public can easily determine the sex. Limiting buildings to male or female limits the flexibility for housing choices leading to a run with too many dogs while others may remain empty.

- Buildings should be labeled A, B, C, etc. so when shelter software is in place, the kennel space can be easily identified for dogs by the letter of the building and the number 1-20.

- There is no need for a tagged section as those owners who have lost their dog should look for their dog in all the buildings. It is very common that dogs lose their collars with tags by the time they enter the shelter.

The number of animals handled at the shelter warrants a full time veterinarian. Since both an assistant director and animal welfare positions are currently approved in the budget, the recommendation is to combine the two job responsibilities. The HS currently spends a great deal of money at private

veterinarians and indicated that they would entertain helping to fund a shelter veterinarian as it would be a potential cost savings for the organization.

All efforts must be made to decrease the length of stay as much as possible to result in a live outcome. This can only happen with constant collaboration between the HS and AAMW staff. Daily rounds is a system designed to improve animal flow-through efficiency, decrease wasted animal care days, decrease length of stay, and provide early recognition of needs of individual animals. Rounds should be conducted 7 days a week, with trained staff assigned to stand in when the regular rounds team is not available. To be effective, daily rounds requires:

- A system to communicate decisions and follow-up on actions
- Prompt actions on decisions
- Clear lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability

The team physically walks through the shelter and asks for each animal:
Who are you?
How are you?
Are you where you should be?
Do you need something today?
Do you need something to be scheduled for later?

The idea of daily rounds can initially sound overwhelming and time consuming but in reality, rounds should take less than one hour per day. The proposed rounds team for the shelter should consist of the Rescue/Foster care coordinator (HS), Adoption advocate (HS), Kennel Supervisor (AAMW) and Veterinarian when hired.

During rounds, one person should be recording any action steps to live outcome needed and the tasks assigned to the appropriate staff to carry out and then update the information in the pet's record. Performing daily team rounds will ensure that highly adoptable or fast track animals are moved to live outcome as soon as possible.

Best Practice today includes pre-adoption sterilization of those fast track shelter pets so they are moved to live outcome as quickly as possible. The consultant appreciates the challenges in attempting to get the adopted shelter pets sterilized through private veterinarians but perhaps a concerted effort could be made to address the backlog and sterilize fast track animals in the near future, so there would be room for subsequent animals. Although TZI does not generally condone spay/neuter agreements and releasing pets unsterilized, that option is far better than holding a pet for days or weeks in the shelter pending the surgery. This must be viewed as a temporary solution only. All spay/neuter agreements must be followed up by staff and a fine issued for breach of the agreement by AAMW. The issuance of a citation will require an ordinance change.

Funding Source

- Cost of signage for buildings and relocating fencing surrounding bite quarantine kennel can be absorbed into the current AAMW operational budget.
- For the veterinarian, combine the currently budgeted assistant director and animal welfare position. Negotiate with the HS regarding partial funding for the position.

Facility

Overall, the facility is in good shape and designed appropriately for dogs. Cat housing is below the acceptable standard of care and needs to be addressed immediately (*see **Cat Housing and Husbandry***). From the parking lot, the dead animal depository is the first thing a visitor sees when they enter the parking lot from the north. Although one door is labeled as AAMW and the other the HS, a visitor would not know which door to enter through for the services they need.

When entering the adoption area from the HS office, the first thing the visitor sees is a large sign that says 'BITE OBSERVATION KEEP OUT'. There are no signs leading the public to cat adoptions.

This is the first thing a visitor sees when entering the adoption area through the HS office.

Keeping pit bulls in a separate building sends a message to the public that there is something different or wrong with the breed.

Recommendations

Both AAMW and the HS must attempt to provide the most welcoming and user friendly environment for visitors. A more appropriate sign for the dead animal depository may use the word 'deceased' instead. Signage should be clear and aesthetically pleasing next to each front door. A sign next to the AAMW door should read: '*Intake, Lost & Found and Reclaim*'. The sign next to the HS door should read: '*Adoption, Rescue and Foster*'.

The dogs in bite quarantine should be moved to the north end of the property. Signs should direct visitors back to the HS office and to the cat adoption area.

Funding Source

- See **Funding Source** under Population Management

Canine Housing and Husbandry

Status

Dogs and puppies entering the shelter do not receive any preventive care and are placed in the currently designated areas. The design of the dog runs is appropriate and in line with current standards of care especially in the warm weather. During the winter months, however, snow and ice accumulate in the outside runs and must be shoveled. Staff reports that the guillotine doors are kept open during the day and the heaters kept on inside the kennel buildings so dogs have a choice of being outside in the cold weather or inside where it is warmer.

Guillotine doors in dog runs are the key to proper sanitation as the dog can be kept on one side while staff cleans the opposite side. This decreases the risk of cross contamination, is safe for the staff and less stressful for the dogs. The access to the outside area and the choice between sun and shade helps limit the impact of airborne infectious diseases.

There are walls and floors of runs in several buildings warranting resurfacing and repainting. Cracks and uneven surfaces are excellent environments for infectious agents to flourish and must be addressed. Stationary food troughs are not cleaned thoroughly, some are rusting and during the consultation week food was seen placed on the floor in several outside sections of the runs. Many oversized rubber bowls used for water have jagged/damaged edges and cannot be disinfected.

Staff reports that the sanitation process has recently been changed/improved, however, kennel staff were not consistent with their cleaning protocols. One section of a HS building was designated for 'sick' animals, which included those ill from respiratory and non-respiratory diseases.

Currently, euthanasia is performed in an open area in the back part of the shelter.

Recommendations

The basic standard of care in shelter medicine today includes providing basic preventive care to each pet entering the shelter. For dogs and puppies this includes vaccinations against kennel cough, a booster against Parvo and Distemper viruses, broad spectrum deworming and a flea/tick treatment. While it is acknowledged that one vaccine on intake does not provide full or immediate protection, it does give the dog/puppy some initial protection that is crucial in the overwhelming shelter environment and helps to increase the population immunity.

Management reports that the cleaning process has recently changed, but there are important principles to consider. When questioning kennel staff about the cleaning process, a variety of answers were given. Disinfectants and detergents were not rinsed with water and run floors were often left to dry. These solutions, if not rinsed properly can be irritating to the skin.In addition, the food troughs and rubber

water bowls should be replaced with stainless steel bowls that can be thoroughly disinfected, rinsed and dried. Food should be placed in bowls only and not on the run floors as was noted in several runs.

Recommendations
Essential points for proper sanitation include:

1. Puppy areas should be cleaned first as they are the most susceptible population. This is easily accomplished when puppies are kept in one building but not practical if they are spread throughout the shelter.
2. Areas housing sick animals should be cleaned last.
3. Dogs/puppies in one bank of runs should be brought inside and the guillotine doors closed. Outside runs should be cleaned first so the dogs/puppies will be outside when the public arrives during adoption hours.
4. Any physical debris, such as feces, must be picked up and discarded in a waste can as opposed to being hosed down the drains. Staff should be provided with pooper-scoopers designed for picking up feces. The shovels currently being used are much heavier and over time can cause back issues for kennel staff.
5. The floor and half walls should be sprayed with a detergent and degreaser, such as the Nu-Quat currently being utilized. Staff must ensure that the mixture is of an appropriate concentration according to the label. The floor and half walls should be scrubbed with a long handled brush then detergent thoroughly rinsed with water then dried thoroughly.
6. Bleach, currently used as a disinfectant, is an appropriate FOR DOGS ONLY as long as it is used/stored correctly
   a. Bleach degrades in the presence of light and when mixed with water so must be stored in opaque containers
   b. The surface must be prepared appropriately (4 & 5) prior to the application of the bleach
   c. For daily use, a 1:32 dilution (1/2 cup of bleach per one gallon of water) is appropriate but must sit for 10 minutes before rinsing with water
   d. Kennel must then be rinsed and dried with a squeegee before the dog is allowed back into the run
   e. Bleach should be used along with detergent while laundering any towels.

Leadership explained that the city was in the process of resurfacing and fixing the cracks in the dog kennels. Consideration should be given to the installation of radiant floor heating in the outside dog runs that can be used in the winter months.

A goal of daily team rounds is to identify any potential infectious disease issues. Housing all 'sick' dogs in one section, however, leads to almost certain cross contamination of respiratory disease. At minimum, dogs with respiratory signs and those with clinical signs other than respiratory signs should

be kept separately. An appropriate solution would be to utilize the kennel currently used for the HS animals on the north side of the property across from the proposed bite quarantine placement.

All efforts for live outcome must be exhausted before the decision to euthanize a shelter pet. When euthanasia is performed, it must be in a quiet, calm environment in an enclosed room.

Canine Enrichment

Status

During the consultation week no beds or options were available for shelter dogs besides the choice to stay on the inside or outside section of the run. No toys were seen in the runs with the exception of one tennis ball in one run on August 21. Staff reports that Kuranda beds are in storage and used only during the winter months because the dogs chewed the beds. No dogs were seen being walked or playing in the outside visiting areas when the consultant was at the shelter.

Recommendation

Enrichment for dogs in shelters is crucial. The lack of choices for shelter animals creates a great deal of stress that leads to a weakened immune system, behavior issues, illness, decreased adoptability and a higher risk of euthanasia. The shelter is a challenging place for a dog so decreasing their length of stay to live outcome is paramount. Providing basic enrichment is an essential part of the plan to create a more comfortable environment for shelter dogs during their stay.

Attention must be paid to inter dog aggression and alpha dog behavior over toys and beds if more than one dog is housed in a run. Kuranda beds should be made available in all dog runs. If the bed becomes too warm in the outside part of the run, a towel can be placed on top of the bed during the warm weather. The company (www.kuranda.com) has a shelter donation program in the event that more beds are needed.

Sturdy toys that can be disinfected should be available for dogs as well. Interactive toys, such as Kongs with peanut butter in them, can provide much needed distractions for shelter dogs. Toys and beds must be carefully disinfected each day to avoid any cross contamination of pathogens.

Walking, exercising and establishing formal play groups for dogs are excellent volunteer jobs and should be developed with that program. Information regarding play groups is available in the resource section at the end of this report.

Feline Housing and Husbandry-Highest Priority

Status

Besides the implementation of shelter specific software, feline housing is the most pressing issue for the AAMW to address and should be considered an emergency need. The AAMW currently has very few acceptable units for the humane housing of cats based on the Association of Shelter Veterinary Guidelines for the Standard of Care. Feral cats are housed in very small single cages with no option to hide. Several cages have narrow perches but they are not large enough for a normal size cat body. All cats are removed from their cages daily for cleaning purposes. There is no signage on the shelter property guiding potential adopters to the cat room. Once there, the room is dark, unwelcoming and immediately next to dog runs. For a cat to enter or exit the cat holding and adoption room, they must be walked passed dog runs.

Poor cat housing is one of the greatest shortcomings in many shelters and has a substantial negative impact on health and quality of life. Cats stressed due to inappropriate housing have lower adoption rates and increased rates of upper respiratory infections.

Euthanasia is currently performed in the back area of the shelter. Though the space has doors, in order to regulate the temperature, they are kept open.


Cage banks in the cat holding and adoption room are far below the acceptable standard of care for housing cats.

Recommendations

Providing cats with enough space to make postural adjustments, e.g., to turn freely and to easily stand, sit, stretch, and move their head without touching the top of the enclosure; lie in a comfortable position with limbs extended; move about and assume a comfortable posture for feeding, drinking, urinating, and defecating is needed.

Additionally separation between food, resting and elimination areas should be maximized (minimal triangulated distance of 2 feet). Cats housed in single cages providing at least 11 square feet of floor

space have been shown to be less stressed than cats with 5.3 square feet of floor space and to have lower rates of upper respiratory infection. Less than 2 feet between these 3 areas is known to adversely impact a cat's food intake and activity.
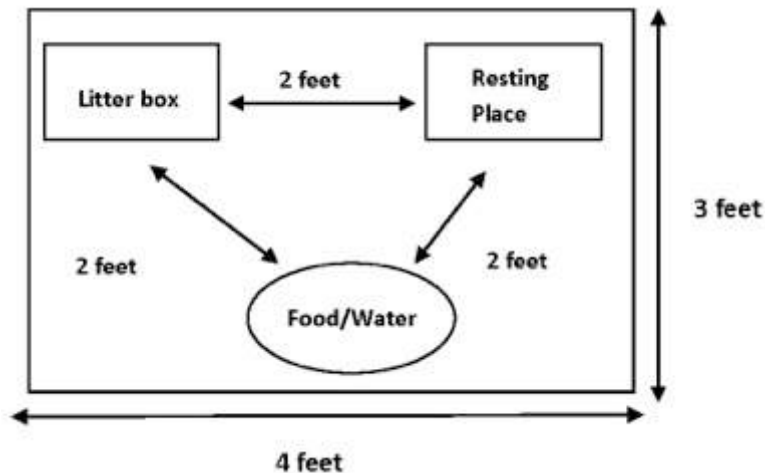
A schematic depicting the recommended minimal distances between litter box, resting place and food/water.

The break room and conference room spaces should be relocated to a modular or temporary trailer so that those areas can be used for cat hold and adoptions immediately. This area is isolated from the dog population which is a crucial measure in the attempt to create a humane shelter environment for cats. The current cat room can be used to house any cats showing signs of an upper respiratory infection, as those cats must be separated from the general population. A solid door must be installed between the current cat room and the dog runs so cats cannot hear the dogs barking.

As an emergency measure, current inappropriate cages can be retrofitted with a porthole that that can be open or closed. One cat or two small kittens can have one cage for their litter box and the other cage for their bed and food and move freely between the two. Since the installation of port-holes will decrease the number of enclosures by 50% until cat condos are purchased, large dog crates should be used to house adoptable cats.

Examples of cages with retrofitted portholes.

Cat spaces in shelters do not require the deep cleaning required for dogs. <u>Cats should not be removed from their cages, but rather kept in one cage with the port-hole closed while the opposite side is spot cleaned.</u> This means the food and water bowls are changed out, but no deep cleaning done unless there is physical debris in need of cleaning with a damp cloth. Any towels not soiled should stay in the cat's enclosure as adjusting to new items and smells is stressful for shelter cats. After the first cage is spot cleaned, the cat is then encouraged to switch sides through the porthole while the litter box is changed. Cat enclosures should be deep cleaned only between inhabitants and disinfectants should never be sprayed while a cat is in his enclosure.

<u>Feral cats must never be handled as it is dangerous to the staff and a liability for the city. Work should begin immediately to exempt feral cats and cats found outdoors from the seventy-two (72) hour stray hold so they may be sterilized, rabies vaccinated, ear tipped and returned to their respective neighborhoods (</u>see ***Community Cat Diversion*** section).

A variety of companies sell cat condos that are appropriate and in the best interest of the cat's welfare. The Mason Company (masonco.com), for example, has designed condos using the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Standards of Care. Condos should be purchased immediately.

All efforts must be exhausted before making the decision to euthanize a shelter cat. If euthanasia must be performed it should take place in a calm, quiet, enclosed room.

Funding Sources

- To retrofit current stainless cages, the cost of the inexpensive PVC piping can be absorbed through the current operational budget.
- The purchase of the appropriately designed cat condos should be viewed as an emergency measure and absorbed through the current operational budget as well. A plea to the public to fund cat condos would mostly likely be met with criticism as it is the city's responsibility to provide basic humane housing for shelter animals.

Live Release Programs

Adoptions
Status

AAMW is fortunate to have a long-time partnership with the HS. Though the relationship between the two organizations has been historically strained, according to both parties it has improved dramatically. Currently, there are one and a half buildings with dog runs reserved for the HS. The HS transfers dogs from other areas of the shelter to those runs and makes them available on their website. However, visitors can adopt any dog or puppy in the shelter with the exception of those in bite quarantine and the adoption is completed under the HS.

The HS may accept an owner surrendered pet and place the pet up for adoption for a period of five (5) days. After the five (5) days, the owner has the option to reclaim the pet or surrender the pet completely. If surrendered and not adopted after five (5) days, the HS 'transfers' the pet to AAMW. In addition, an owner can elect to pay a 'life extension' fee of $15.

When a pet is adopted, the HS will schedule an appointment at a participating veterinarian, as the schedule allows, for spay/neuter if needed, the first set of vaccines and a microchip. Pets may wait at the shelter for days to weeks for a spay/neuter appointment. The day the surgery is completed, the adopter is instructed to pick up their new pet at the private veterinarian. If the veterinarian deems the pet too young, a spay/neuter agreement is signed and the HS staff notified by the veterinarian. The HS then ensures the pet is sterilized at the appropriate time.

Adoption fees are $65 cats and kittens, $95 for dogs (pit bulls $125), and $110 for puppies that includes a mandatory Parvovirus test.

There are several outside fenced in grassy areas for an adopter to visit with a dog or puppy but no spaces designated for cats to visit with potential adopters.

Recommendations

HS and AAMW pets are separated throughout the shelter, which gives the impression that there is something wrong or different about pets under the umbrella of the AAMW. The shelter pets should be treated as one population with both the HS and AAMW staff working together to save their lives and the placement of pets should reflect that (see *Population Management* section).

The HS and AAMW should have the ultimate goal of sterilizing all animals available for adoption as soon as possible. For owner surrenders, this could potentially be the following day. For strays that could potentially be Day 4, after the 72 hour hold (note: it is recommended that cats eligible for the Community Cat Diversion program be exempt from the 72 hour hold). Having fast tracked animals ready-to-go in the adoption program will decrease their length of stay. In addition, if the pet is already

sterilized, the visitor prepared to adopt, can potentially take the pet home the same day and not make a second trip to a private veterinarian.

The concept of *Open Adoptions* is important in any life-saving shelter situation. This philosophy is based on the premise that a person coming to the shelter to adopt, has the intent to take a pet into their home. This is an opportunity to provide a sterilized, vaccinated pet and to educate that person/family about responsible pet ownership. Should an adoption organization deny an adopter, the person interested will likely find another avenue to adopt and may do so from a backyard breeder and not receive important pet ownership education. There is a chance that the pet will not be sterilized which will lead to more unwanted litters.

Part of the *Open Adoption* philosophy is to keep adoption fees low. Adoption fees should never be viewed as a revenue source and the current high adoption fees are in conflict with life saving efforts. More animals will be saved if adoption fees are low. Work done by the American Society for the Prevention for Animals are proving that fee-waived adoptions or low adoption fees do not correlate with irresponsible pet ownership and adopters bond with their shelter pets no differently than if they paid a high adoption fee (www.aspcapro.org). The AAMW and the HS should work together to ensure that adoption fees kept to a minimum.

All pets adopted from the shelter should be receiving preventive care on intake (see **Canine and Feline Housing and Husbandry**). Before release dogs over six (6) months of age should be tested for heartworm disease but testing puppies for Parvovirus is a waste of limited resources. Parvovirus can infect a puppy but during the initial seven (7) day incubation period when they do not yet have clinical signs, the test for Parvovirus will be negative. There is no test to determine who is incubating the disease during the incubation period so there is no medically valid reason to test the puppy before they are adopted.

Cats/kittens adopted from the shelter should be tested for Feline Immunodeficiency and Leukemia Viruses, as these are contagious between felines. The adoption must also include the initial deworming dose and information regarding the need to recheck with a private veterinarian for the balance of the dewormings and vaccinations when needed.

Rescue Foster Partnerships
Status

During the week of the consultation, the rescue and foster program responsibilities were transferred to the HS from the AAMW staff so a formal process for outreach was not yet established. There are a reported twenty-six (26) rescue groups that have transferred pets out of the shelter with some more active than others. While neither the HS or AAMW has their own foster volunteers, the HS works with the Texas Panhandle Petsavers (TPP) who do. Foster animals are released to and adopted through the TPP. Shelter pets sent to rescue or foster have not been accounted for so no statistics are available for those outcome categories.

In conversation with local animal welfare advocates and AAMW board members, there is a fear of infectious disease transmission from shelter pets in general, but more recently there has been a concern regarding the Distemper virus. Because of this, the staff reports that they think the number of animals sent to rescue or foster care has declined. Staff reports that no fees are charged to rescue or foster groups when animals are transferred.

Recommendations

The development of robust Rescue and Foster partnerships are a crucial piece of the puzzle to achieve a 90%+ save rate. Besides vaccinating all shelter pets on intake, the most significant impact on population immunity is a direct result of decreasing the length of stay. Once shelter specific software is in place, the true number of reclaims can be determined, although it is suspected that this percentage is low. The HS and AAMW should consider a foster-to-adopt program whereby rescue and foster groups can transfer any desired pet out of the shelter as soon as possible. If the pet is still under the mandatory stray hold with no identification, the status can remain 'foster' and if the owner found, the pet returned.

Staff reports that rescue groups and foster organizations do not pay to transfer a shelter pet. This policy should remain in place as the HS and AAMW should make every effort to remove barriers to live release.

Volunteer Program
Status

There is currently no volunteer program.

Recommendations

The HS and AAMW should work together to re-organize their current partnership and implement Best Practice recommendations made in this report. Shelter staff (HS and AAMW) should be educated about any new policies and held accountable for their work. Once the HS and AAMW staff is performing as one team, the volunteer program should be introduced.

Volunteer Programs must be operated through formal process so there is a clear understanding of the policies and procedures in the shelter. An orientation should include Standard Operating Procedures for volunteers, chain of command, job descriptions and training. It is essential that all staff understand the role of volunteers. Examples of some job descriptions include but are not limited to:

1. Surrender Prevention volunteers that develop resources to prevent shelter surrenders and a hotline to assist pet owner before they arrive at the shelter. Volunteer trainers would be a significant part of this group.
2. Counselors who assist potential adopters choose the right pet

3. <u>Bathers/Groomers</u>
4. <u>Dog Walkers/Play Group Volunteers</u>
5. <u>Community Vaccine Clinics</u>

Crucial Community Base Programs
Public~Private Partnerships

Subsidized Income Targeted Spay/Neuter
The animal welfare community must collaborate in an effort to focus limited resources to make the greatest impact with respect to decreasing shelter intake, increasing the live outcome and eliminating the euthanasia of adoptable/savable shelter animals. No other strategy has proven more effective that subsidized income targeted spay/neuter programs. Studies have directly linked spay/neuter subsidies for fixed income pet owners and decreased shelter intake (*Getting to Zero,* Peter Marsh). The tipping point occurs when five (5) subsidized surgeries are done per one thousand (1,000) residents in the area in question.

The city of Amarillo has approximately 200,000 residents. Subsidizing 1,000 surgeries for low income pet owners each year (5/1000 people), will decrease shelter intake over time. It is crucial that those using these services are qualified so funding is focused on the correct population. Removing barriers to services is imperative and providing transportation for surgery patients will ensure the goal number of surgeries is reached.

Other Targeted Spay/Neuter Groups
Animals that enter shelters with the highest risk of euthanasia include feral and other cats and large breed dogs. These groups should be included in a plan to subsidize spay/neuter. Cats reproduce at alarming rates and large breed dogs have large litters of puppies. Preventing the birth of these unwanted dogs and cats, will further reduce shelter intake and thus euthanasia.

Community Vaccination Clinics
Infectious diseases such as Parvo and Distemper Virus exist in a community because puppies are not vaccinated appropriately. Hosting subsidized vaccination clinics and charging pet owners a nominal fee will help to increase community immunity.

Potential Funding Sources

- Automatic dedicated funding such as that generated from a license fee for pet owners ensures ongoing revenue
- The HS and AAMW should pursue the wide variety of animal welfare grants available. At this time, no grants are being submitted by either organization.

Resources

Helpful Websites

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (aspcapro.org)
Association of Shelter Veterinarians (sheltervet.org)
Best Friends Animal Society (bestfriends.org)
Humane Society of the United States (animalsheltering.org)
National Animal Control Association (nacanet.org)
Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (sawanetwork.org).
The Target Zero Institute (targetzeroinstitute.org)

Helpful Books

Getting to Zero, Peter Marsh
Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters, Miller, DVM and Hurley, DVM
Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff, Miller, DVM

Enrichment

Simple Shelter Enrichment for Cats: http://ufsheltermedicine.com/files/2011/11/simple-shelter-enrichment-for-cats.pdf

Simple Shelter Enrichment for Dogs: http://ufsheltermedicine.com/files/2011/11/simple-shelter-enrichment-for-dogs.pdf

Organized Play Groups for Dogs, see centerforshelterdogs.org

Feline Housing

Cat Cage Modifications: Making Double Compartment Cat Cages using a PVC Portal:
http://www.sheltermedicine.com/shelter-health-portal/information-sheets/cat-cage-modifications-making-double-compartment-cat-cages-

Raised beds:
http://www.sheltermedicine.com/shelter-health-portal/information-sheets/building-an-elevated-bed-for-use-in-shelter-cat-housing

Kuranda beds:
http://kuranda.com/humane/pet-supplies/cat-bed