

Manatee County Animal Services

December 10-11, 2018

Thank you for inviting the University of Florida Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program to visit Manatee County Animal Services (MCAS) last week. All of the staff were very welcoming to us and very patient in answering our questions. We commend the staff for their clear commitment and concern for the animals in their care and their openness in sharing their daily routines and ideas with us, as well as their eagerness to learn about new practices and skills.

We have identified many strengths and practices that shelter staff are doing well. The shelter facility provides a well-ventilated environment important to infection control and having a cat-exclusive adoption center provides the separation of species that is so critical in reducing stress and illness. Large, grassy areas are available for play yards, dog walking, and two large outdoor catios. MCAS has an impressive and dedicated volunteer base. The Executive Director is forward-thinking and embraces change, and the shelter has an excellent software program to collect data. Your recently hired full-time shelter veterinarian has training in High Quality High Volume Spay Neuter (HQHVSN) and has written protocols for medical conditions.

During our visit, we also identified opportunities for shelter operations improvement and more life-saving strategies. The following bulleted report contains prioritized recommendations for key areas of focus for the organization.

We are inspired by the dedication of the shelter staff to care of the animals, eagerness to incorporate practices to increase animal health and placement in homes, and the desire to be a model shelter. We look forward to continuing our collaborative partnership in support of your life-saving mission.

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Maddie's Fund

STATISTICS AND RECORDKEEPING

Recordkeeping and statistics are vital to every sheltering organization. Analyzing data allows the organization to more accurately create a budget, identify areas of need, create model programs and justify staffing and resource requests. It is a way to measure your success, determine program efficacy and identify where change is needed. Grant funders look at data to determine the legitimacy of the organization and to maximize the impact of their donor dollars. MCAS is commended for using Chameleon which is considered a leading animal welfare software on the market.

The use of technology provides opportunities not possible through any other means of communication and MCAS should capitalize on every avenue. Technology provides the most powerful platform to manage the daily operation and analyze trends to create appropriate budget allocations and modify programming in line with intended goals.

MCAS has achieved a save rate in the mid 80% range during the past 5 years, which is commendable. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will allow the staff to work smarter, and not harder, to achieve more life-saving.

Year	Dog Intake	Dog LRR	Cat Intake	Cat LRR	Combined LRR
2017	1,933	88.41%	1,538	84.98%	86.89%
2018* (through 12/4/18)	1,793	88.18%	1,597	82.22%	85.37%

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

The historic intake bias of admitting all animals has now been challenged, so that finite shelter space is reserved for those with no other options. With community minded enforcement, targeted spay-neuter community programs, Safety Net and Return to Field programs, shelter intake will productively and drastically decrease. The ultimate goal is to use the shelter as the last resort and not the first option to assist a constituent. Encouraging the public to leave animals at the shelter should be replaced with conversations, links to alternatives, and partnering opportunities.

Managed Admission/Safety Net

MCAS provides animal enforcement for the county as well as sheltering of pets brought in through animal control and those surrendered by the public. Unfortunately, MCAS has adapted a culture of eliminating barriers for intake but creating many self-imposed, life-threatening barriers to live outcome. This has resulted in a shelter that is chronically overcrowded and in crisis but viewed as 'normal' by staff. With the current shelter hours and enforcement shifts, there are 124 hours per week available for animals to enter the shelter but only 47 hours for animals to leave the shelter through live outcome (adoption, transfer, return to owner, return to field).

Leadership must re-examine the role of the shelter facility and reserve the finite shelter space for animals that are victims of cruelty, neglect or abandonment, enforcement/court cases and pets with no alternative placements. Leadership is applauded for implementing an appointment system for owner surrenders; however, this needs to be matched with resources and services to help citizens either keep their pets or find them a new home outside of the shelter system.

In 2 recent ASPCA studies, up to 80% of owners interviewed did not want to relinquish their pets to a shelter but did not have access to the temporary help they needed (aspcapro.org). Effective Safety Net programs focus on helping owners keep their pets or place their pets via other avenues, thus bypassing the shelter. In Brevard County, Florida, the sheriff's office took over animal control and established a Safety Net program. In the first year of this program, 80% of the potential owner surrenders (dogs and cats) were assisted without entering the shelter. *This was accomplished with no increase in staff or budget.*

A formal Safety Net program should be the first initiative that shelter leadership implements. For one, it engages a community who is eager to help but uneducated about how they can make a difference. Second, it educates pet owners who have mistakenly been led to believe that a shelter has all the resources to rehome their pet. Lastly, it reserves shelter space for the public shelter to provide for the services they were intended, namely animal and public safety.

This is an area of focus for national animal welfare funders who recognize that this proactive investment is best for pets and people, so all grant opportunities should be explored.

Recommendations:

- Analyze hours of operation to ensure that there are as many or more hours available for live outcome as there are for intake
- Discontinue intake on the weekends and only allow for live outcome opportunities
- Train staff/volunteers in Safety Net/surrender mitigation strategies
 - During the initial phone call, the staff identifies the issue and schedules an appointment for a minimum of 14 days later (or longer if appointment slots are full.) This gives the staff and owner time to work on a resolution. They also educate the owner regarding the risks of entering a shelter, such as exposure to infectious diseases and euthanasia, so they understand both parties want what is best for the pet.
 - Consider telling owners that their appointments are tentative and dependent upon availability of space in the shelter
 - UF MSMP consultants can connect you with other shelters who have implemented this program so staff can understand the process, ask questions and obtain copies of scripts and protocols
- Sign up with either Home2Home or Adopt-a-Pet Rehome. These are sites where pet owners who need to rehome their pets can connect with potential adopters directly thus bypassing the shelter. Once a program has been decided upon, this information should be available on the MCAS website and recommended for those calling on the phone.

Daily Population Rounds

Daily Population Rounds are a means of assessing animals in the shelter and ensuring that there is a plan of action for each. Ideally, rounds would be conducted with the team consisting of the shelter manager, the staff veterinarian, and the rescue/foster coordinator. Population Rounds should be conducted 7 days a week with trained staff to stand in when the regular participants are not available. While this initially sounds overwhelming and time consuming, once this system is in place, Population Rounds should take no more than 20 minutes. The key is to identify high level needs that are addressed at a later time.

To be effective, Population Rounds requires:

- A system to communicate decisions and follow up on action steps
- Prompt actions on decisions

- Clear lines of authority, responsibility and accountability

Recommendations:

- During Population Rounds the staff 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 scheduled for later, such as spay/neuter?
 - What could we do today that increases your chance of a live outcome?
- Use Chameleon software to generate reports for pets who need medical care, rescue, foster, surgery and pets in the shelter longer than 10 days who may need enhanced marketing.

Minimize Length of Stay

Even the nicest shelters are stressful places for animals and long lengths of stay lead to negative impacts on physical and behavioral health. Every effort should be made for each animal to have as short a length of stay as possible. This includes animals in the intake building who often wait weeks/months after their stray hold is up before there is space available in the adoption building to move up. There needs to be a sense of urgency among the adoption staff for animals to move quickly to live outcome in order to make room for those waiting in intake.

Recommendations:

- Update ordinances to reduce stray hold (see additional information under Enforcement)
 - Reduce dog stray hold to 3 days to live outcome
 - Remove stray hold for cats, kittens and puppies
 - UF MSMP consultants can connect county attorney and leadership team with animal welfare attorneys who are experts in this area
- Reduce adoption fees
 - Fee waived or as close to free for cats is considered best practice
 - Under \$35 for dogs
 - Offer specials and promotions regularly to generate excitement within the community
- Increase visibility on social media outlets for adoptable pets
 - Capitalize on social media presence using paid ads as well as advertising on other outlets (tv, radio, newspaper, digital billboards)
 - Create a “Pet of the Week” feature. Select a dog or cat to promote with cute photos along with a short, appealing statement about something that is special about the pet

Capacity for Care

MCAS is currently over capacity in the number of animals they can properly house and appropriately care for. Operating over capacity for care not only negatively impacts the animals, but also their caregivers. When the recommended lifesaving programs are put in place, this issue will resolve itself as there will be fewer animals entering the shelter and an increase in live outcome in a shorter period of time.

MEDICAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Shelter Medicine is a new area of veterinary specialization that combines elements of individual animal care and population level care, disease control, sterilization, and animal welfare, all under the direction of a shelter veterinarian. The veterinarian should have sufficient protected time available for daily observation of every animal in the shelter, animal examinations, surgery, and medical procedures. The veterinarian should have additional protected time for protocol development, staff training, systematic reviews, and professional development.

Your shelter veterinarian is a member of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians and is familiar with the Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*. She performs medical and behavioral rounds, has created written medical protocols, and demonstrated concern for the animals in her care. She also expressed an interest in the on-line coursework offered in shelter medicine through UF and in Fear Free principles.

Recommendations:

- Vaccinate all dogs and cats more than 4 weeks old **immediately on admission to the shelter**. During our visit, we were told that sometimes this did not occur due to staffing (only 1 medical team member available to do intake). Given the incidence of parvo, panleukopenia, and distemper experienced by shelters in the area, it is imperative that this be remedied as soon as possible.
 - All dogs and cats must be vaccinated, including pregnant and nursing animals, animals with mild disease, injured animals, and cruelty cases. No animal should be excluded because the risk for exposure to lethal pathogens such as distemper virus, parvovirus, and panleukopenia virus is too high.
 - Animals that are too sick or severely injured to vaccinate should not stay in the shelter, but rather be transferred to a veterinary hospital for appropriate care.
 - Pregnant and nursing animals should be vaccinated to reduce risk for acquiring disease in the shelter. If the mom gets infected while in the shelter, then her offspring will get infected too.
 - The best option for pregnant animals is to vaccinate and schedule spay surgery as soon as possible to prevent birth.
 - The safest option for nursing animals is to vaccinate and transfer mom and litter to foster care.
 - These recommendations are supported by the following industry guidelines for vaccination of dogs and cats in shelters:
 - 2010 ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters
[<http://www.sheltervet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>]
 - 2017 AAHA Canine Vaccination Guidelines
[https://www.aaha.org/guidelines/canine_vaccination_guidelines.aspx]
 - 2013 AAFP Feline Vaccination Guidelines
[<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1098612X13500429>]

- 2015 World Small Animal Veterinary Association Vaccination Guidelines [http://www.wsava.org/WSAVA/media/PDF_old/WSAVA-Vaccination-Guidelines-2015-Full-Version.pdf]
 - It is not necessary to include Chlamydia with the FVRCP vaccine and is likely adding cost.
- Chameleon should be utilized for:
 - reporting of animals with health concerns to the veterinarian for examination and treatment
 - creating a daily treatment and recheck list
 - creating a list of animals needing revaccination, repeat deworming, monthly weights, and monthly topical parasiticides
 - maintaining an electronic copy of all protocols, to allow ready access and facilitate updating
 - entering of all medical notes, diagnostics, and treatments in real time
 - having all information readily available to all staff members will improve communication and make it more likely that animals will be discharged from the shelter with appropriate medications and recommendations for follow-up
- Animals undergoing lengthy treatments/recovering from surgery should be sent to foster, not held at the shelter. They may also be offered as foster-to-adopt, as is done with your heartworm positive dogs.
- Daily medical rounds would be enhanced by entering data into an iPad or laptop in real time.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

The *Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs* defines high quality-high volume spay-neuter (HQHVSN) services as efficient surgical initiatives that meet or exceed veterinary medical standards of care in providing accessible, targeted sterilization of large numbers of cats and dogs to reduce their overpopulation and subsequent euthanasia. The ASV supports continued development of HQHVSN services to provide the necessary capacity to serve existing cat and dog populations. Application of these veterinary medical guidelines for spay-neuter programs will enhance the quality of patient care, reduce risks, and improve patient outcomes in all settings where surgical sterilization is performed.

Your staff veterinarian has been trained and has experience in HQHVSN practice, and the medical team has 1 veterinary technician and 2 veterinary assistants, but proficiency is greatly diminished by having only 1 surgery table available.

Recommendations:

- Review the *Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs* and ensure that the recommendations are followed.
 - Be sure that all equipment with direct patient contact is cleaned and disinfected between patients.
 - Each patient should be prepped on its own towel/bedding.
- Utilize Chameleon to create a list of animals needing sterilization.
- Utilize Chameleon to create the daily surgery list.

HOUSING

Proper housing and enrichment reduce stress and the spread of infectious disease and improves the overall welfare of the cats in shelter care. In addition, cats are comforted by options to hide or perch. We now know that cat housing less than 11 square feet per cat for individual enclosures, and less than 18 square feet per cat in group housing, results in higher levels of upper respiratory infections because it increases stress levels.

Removing cats from their enclosures for daily cleaning is not only unnecessary but greatly enhances their stress level as well. Cats are comforted by familiar items and smells. Best practices today include spot cleaning cats while they stay in their enclosure. Cages or condos with portals that open and close provide the ideal housing as the cat can stay on one side while the opposite side is cleaned. Litter boxes should be cleaned daily (each cat should have their own scoop) and the cat provided with clean food/water bowls. Alternatively, clay litter and disposable litter boxes may be used and the entire litter box discarded daily. Any other items, such as toys and bedding should remain with the cat during their stay and only changed if soiled. When the cat leaves the enclosure, it can then be disinfected, with care taken so neighboring cats are not disturbed.

Best practice shelter design for dogs includes two sided runs separated by a guillotine door. This design is the most efficient for proper sanitation because dogs can be kept on one side while the opposite side is being cleaned. The shelter is fortunate to have outside play areas and a dedicated team of volunteer dog walkers, so that dogs housed in single runs/cages can get exercise while their enclosure is sanitized. In addition, having a run with an inside and outside section gives the dog options and more space.

All dogs and some cats were housed at the shelter location at 305 25th St W in Palmetto. An additional downtown cat adoption facility is located at 1002 Manatee Ave. W., Bradenton.

- Small dogs: during our visit, small dogs were housed in wire crates outside of the Cat Impound room. These crates are of insufficient size for the dogs' physical and mental wellbeing. Additionally, noise from these dogs was easily heard in the Cat Impound room, which would likely contribute to stress and leading to upper respiratory infection (URI). These crates were in a busy location that might be considered a fire hazard as well as creating a stressful area for cats to traverse on their way to the Cat Impound room. Lastly, this same area is used to process new dogs for medical intake which is both stressful to the dogs having blood drawn and vaccines administered in front of caged dogs, but also a safety risk for the staff having to perform the procedures.
- Dog runs: all other dog housing in the Palmetto facility was in double-sided runs. Best practice shelter design for dogs includes two sided runs separated by a guillotine door. This design is the most efficient for proper sanitation because dogs can be kept on one side while the opposite side is being cleaned. In addition, having a run with an inside and outside section gives the dog options and more space. Unfortunately, the guillotine doors at MCAS were closed and each side of the run housed a different dog. This meant that some dogs were constantly housed outdoors and exposed to temperature extremes. Even those runs with outdoor access were dark, making it difficult to easily see the dogs. With rare exception, the drains at the back of each run were uncovered.

- Cat Impound: most of the cat cages in this room were of insufficient size, although a few were portalized. One cat was housed in a humane trap, rather than being placed into a cage with a feral cat den (the den was available, and this would have provided more humane housing for the cat if surgery or release was not imminent.) Another cat that would have benefited from a feral den was not provided one because the cage she was housed in was too small. This creates a safety risk for staff when trying to clean or remove cat from small cage. Staff reports that there are only 5 feral dens in their inventory. It was reported to the UF MSMP consultants that the cats in this room were not fed on a consistent schedule, which would lead to stress. In addition there was no enrichment available for cats in the impound room.
- Outdoor catios: two outdoor catios were present at the Palmetto facility, providing group housing for a few community cats waiting for relocation opportunities. When a true Return To Field program is implemented, there will be less of a need for cats to be housed in these catios on a regular basis as they will be returned to their original outdoor homes. In the future these catios might be better repurposed to house cats from hoarding cases or cats that arrive with URI symptoms.
- Real life Room: the concept is certainly laudable, however, upholstered furniture cannot be disinfected and it holds odors.

Downtown cat adoption center: most of the housing here was group-housing with multiple, small pods, although a few portalized individual cages were available. These cages had lots of enrichment and the cats appeared healthy. Unfortunately, there was a bad odor in this facility, which could certainly dissuade adopters. It is our understanding that a new facility for cat adoptions is under construction that will have better ventilation.

Recommendations:

- Remove wire crates (housing small dogs) that are outside of Cat Impound room.
 - These dogs should be housed in double-sided dog runs.
- Aggressively promote adoption and rescue of dogs so that remaining dogs can be housed in a run with access to both sides.
- Remove upholstered furniture and rugs from Real life Room and replace with materials that can be readily disinfected (chairs and benches made from PVC can be covered with soft blankets/fleece that can be laundered when soiled.)
- Portalize stainless steel cages in the cat impound room. Prefabricated portals can be purchased through ShorLine <http://www.shor-line.com/index.php/products/detail/2521.html>
- Feed canned food on a consistent schedule. Dry food should be available at all times.
- Purchase additional feral cat dens to have available for shy or fractious cats
- Group housing should be 6 cats maximum. Due to their increased vulnerability, litters of kittens should not be co-mingled in group rooms. Group rooms need an appropriate number of food/water stations and litterboxes.
- Review sanitation in cat adoption center and frequency of litter box cleaning/disposal.

SANITATION

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians 2010 Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters states that proper cleaning and disinfection not only reduces disease transmission to both animals and people, but it also provides a more comfortable environment for the animals. Additionally, a clean, odor-free shelter creates a more positive image to the public. MCAS is using Rescue, which is an excellent disinfectant that is effective against parvovirus, calicivirus, panleukopenia, and ringworm.

Recommendations

- Gloves should be worn during cleaning and handling animals, with a glove change between enclosures. Alternatively, hands may be washed between animals.
 - Gloves should be readily visible and available in each housing area
 - Hand soap and paper towels should be visible and readily available at each sink
- Rescue® should be used at the proper concentration and contact time as directed by your veterinarian.
- Implement the spot cleaning method for individually housed cats that are remaining in the cage.
 - This is made easier when the cages are portalized so the cat has one side for the litterbox and the other side for food, water and bedding.
 - Do not remove bedding, bowls, or toys unless they are soiled. Familiar smells decrease anxiety and stress in cats – stripping all of the items from the cage removes these sources of comfort.
 - Unless visibly dirty, there is no need to use Rescue in each occupied cage on a daily basis as long as the same animal remains in the enclosure.
 - Review the Spot Cleaning For Cat Kennels video by ASPCApro. [<https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/video-how-spot-clean-cat-kennels>]
 - If a cage cannot be spot cleaned, place each cat or litter of kittens in their own assigned crate or carrier while the cage is cleaned. Cats should not share crates or carriers as this promotes spread of disease. Disinfection of crates or carriers between cats is required. Cleaning is more efficient and takes less time when each cat has its own dedicated carrier.
 - Disinfect vacated cages using the following steps before placing a new cat in the cage.
- Clean litter boxes separately from food/water bowls and toys.
 - Litter boxes can be contaminated with intestinal pathogens such as panleukopenia virus and coccidia. They should never be mixed with bowls and toys for cleaning.
 - Bowls and toys should be cleaned and disinfected first.
 - The sink/tub should be disinfected with bleach after cleaning litter boxes.
- Leashes are an often-overlooked source of disease transmission. Each dog should have a dedicated leash which can be disinfected at the end of the day.

LIFE-SAVING STRATEGIES

A review of MCAS' 2017 statistics reveals a total Live Release Rate of 87% (88% for dogs and 85% for cats). Live Release Rate is determined by dividing the number of live outcomes (adoptions, transfers, return to owner, TNR) by the live intake for that species. While MCAS is commended for the work they are doing, there is still room for growth in the shelter's life-saving capacity in order to reach the nationally accepted standard of 90%+. In order to increase life-saving capacity, the shelter must prioritize proactive strategies to shorten the length of stay for each animal without compromising their health. The longer an animal stays in the shelter, the more likely they will be exposed to a disease or develop a behavior concern that adversely affects their opportunity to be adopted. The goal is to reduce length of stay by removing any barriers to rapid release on the day of adoption.

Adoptions

The adoption process should be welcoming and user friendly. Conversational adoptions, without judgement, are now considered the standard and best way to make permanent placements in appropriate homes. Staff should be trained to counsel potential adopters in the interest of making the right match and any policy in place should be with that in mind. This approach is known as "open adoptions".

THE ADOPTERS WELCOME GUIDELINES BY THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES SHOULD BE
REQUIRED READING FOR ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Adoption fees are not correlated to a proper placement and should not be viewed as an attempt to recoup money spent for the care of a shelter pet. Low and fee waived adoptions are correlated with lower lengths of stay and are now considered Best Practice.

Recommendations:

- Implement a fee waived adoption special for all cats and dogs immediately (regardless of how long they have been at the shelter) to get current capacity at a manageable level
- Reduce adoption fees to effectively compete with other sources of pet acquisition, especially cats. For example, most people acquire their pet cats at no cost from the neighborhood or from friends.
- Create frequent adoption specials and campaigns with reduced or waived fees and advertise their occurrence through multiple media outlets, including social media.
- Reduce barriers to adoption by embracing the HSUS Adopters Welcome principles that embrace potential adopters, encourages them to adopt, and helps them and their pets succeed. <https://www.animalsheltering.org/programs/adopters-welcome>
- Create a concise, one-page adoption application form and invest more time in a conversation with the adopter about proper pet care.
- Provide handouts with tips for helping the pet adjust to their new home and describing the care they need. (shelter has info on wall, but does not pull it together for adopters)

Return to Owner

Every effort should be made to return lost pets to their owners as quickly as possible. In 2017, MCAS field officers returned 11% of dogs to their owners without having to bring them to the shelter.

Recommendations:

- Ensure animal control officers are scanning pets in the field for microchips with universal scanners and trying to give a 'free ride home' in the field before returning to shelter.
- Remove barriers to reclaim pets by offering a financial incentive to spay/neuter, microchip, rabies vaccinate and license their pet for a low fee (current reduced fee of \$145 can still be a barrier to some pet owners; leadership should have the ability to waive or reduce those as needed).

Transfer Program

Transfers have decreased by 50% since 2014. In 2017, 1,125 animals were transferred compared to 2,255 in 2014. UF MSMP consultants were encouraged to learn that a new Transfer Coordinator has recently been appointed. Transfer programs with reputable partners allow an animal to be viewed by a new audience. Transfers should be considered for all available animals regardless of how long they have been at the shelter.

Recommendations:

- Enhance transfer program with other nonprofit organizations.
- Have newly appointed Transfer Coordinator contact all current, former and new potential transfer partners to let them know of MCAS' need. Reestablish relationships which may have waned in recent years.
- Host an open house for transfer partners so they can see firsthand the urgency at the shelter as well as the quality of highly adoptable animals on hand
- Encourage rescue partners to transfer any and all pets they think they can place quickly on a first come/first serve basis at no charge. This will decrease the overall length of stay and therefore cost of care for shelter pets at MCAS

Good Samaritan & Foster Care Ambassadors

UF MSMP consultants were happy to learn that a foster care program is currently being developed by the newly appointed Foster Coordinator. A 2015 Maddie's Fund survey showed that shelters increased the probability of engaging Good Samaritans as foster volunteers when provided resources such as food, crates, spay/neuter and vaccines. That approach is also cost effective as it prevents the shelter intake.

Leadership should develop this program so staff answering the phones or intake staff have the tools to educate these Good Samaritans. Organizations like Alley Cat Allies already have the *Wait Until 8* program that encourages Good Samaritans to wait at least until puppies and kittens are old enough for spay-neuter and that program can easily be adapted at MCAS. Orphan Kitten Handbooks are available free of charge at kittenlady.org where educational videos can also be found.

Good Samaritan foster care combined with a traditional foster care program eases the burden of care on shelter staff and volunteers, not to mention reduces exposure to infectious disease, with the most vulnerable population. This program should include avenues to find permanent placements after their fosterlings are sterilized to avoid a second shelter intake. Examples include networking opportunities like offsite adoptions, a special Facebook page and adoption events. This successful program is now standard practice in progressive shelters.

All shelter resources including funding and staff/volunteer time must be used wisely. One way to increase efficiency is to streamline communication with foster care ambassadors by using a closed Facebook group or Maddie's Pet Assistant app. Once set up, foster care ambassadors can be alerted about shelter pets in need in real time, get standard medical advice as well as appointment reminders for vaccines and spay-neuter.

Recommendations:

- Create foster program with newly appointed Foster Coordinator.
- Trust that most people are good and eliminate barriers to acceptance into the foster program.
- Ask Good Samaritans to foster at the time of intake.
 - Provide Good Samaritans with food, supplies, and schedule return for vaccines and spay-neuter.
- Order Wait Until 8 brochures from Alley Cat Allies and advise Good Samaritans to leave young kittens with their mothers.
- Order Orphan Kitten Handbooks from kittelandy.org and have available for Good Samaritans who bring in underage kittens.
- Encourage foster volunteers to find permanent placement.
- Waive adoption fees for fosters.
- If unable to find permanent placement, coordinate with adoption event or offsite event to avoid shelter intake.

Expand the Existing Community Cat Management Program/Return to Field

Return to Field (RTF) is defined as the sterilization, ear tip and rabies vaccination of a cat, 'found' outside, friendly or feral, brought to the shelter by a Good Samaritan, of good body weight with a healthy coat that is returned to their home location the day after surgery. This is distinguished from TNR which is a program for cats that are not at risk of entering the shelter. Ordinance revisions to eliminate the stray hold period are recommended so cats enter day 1, have surgery day 2 and are returned day 3. *MCAS currently has a RTF program in place but only for select outdoor cats identified as 'feral'.*

RTF is considered standard Best Practice today and the enormous amount of associated data is conclusive. In a 2018 Million Cat Challenge survey of 131 shelters that decreased euthanasia *more* than 50% between 2012 and 2017, Managed Intake and RTF ranked as the overwhelming reasons. Also, in a 2014 study, Dr. Julie Levy, part of the University of Florida assessment team, reported that shelters that did not implement RTF had a per capita intake 3.5-fold higher and per capita euthanasia was 17.5 fold higher. From a cost standpoint, decreasing intake can provide opportunities to reallocate resources.

RTF only benefits the community:

- Stops the exponential reproduction of participating cats and their associated nuisance behaviors when intact
- Increases community immunity against rabies
- Eliminates complaint calls
- Prevents or stabilizes cat colonies
- Decreases impact on wildlife (fewer cats, less predation)

Likewise, when implemented correctly, this program only benefits the shelter that will:

- Decrease cat intake at MCAS year 1 by an estimated 800 cats ($\pm 60\%$ of stray intake)

- Provide more space for cats that do enter the shelter so less risk of infectious disease
- Drastically reduce adoption competition
- Return 100% of the eligible cats home (considered the RTO program for cats)
- Provide more resources, staff, volunteers, space, etc. for dogs
- Less stress on staff, dogs and cats
- Result in a 90%+ live release rate

At the Greenville County shelter, when offered the surgery at no cost, 50% of the Good Samaritans picked up the cats and returned them home after surgery. *In year 1, cat intake and euthanasia were reduced by 2,000 cats that were instead sterilized and returned home.* In a cost analysis, that program proved to be **budget neutral**.

In 2017, 1,344 'stray' cats entered the MCAS shelter system. The majority would have been eligible for the RTF program and could have been returned to their outdoor home after sterilization; however, only 342 were returned through the existing program. Returning all of the eligible outdoor cats would have reduced overcrowding, exposure to infectious disease, the cost of caring for sick cats, taking up adoption homes from cats who truly needed it and allowed staff to utilize their time in other lifesaving ways. Leadership is strongly encouraged to expand the RTF program to include all healthy outdoor cats including friendly ones. Ideally the Board of County Commissioners would waive the current stray hold for felines while the ordinance is in the process of being revised. All cats 'found' outside with good body weight and large enough for spay-neuter are eligible for the RTF program.

Recommendations:

- Contact spay/neuter partner to discuss increasing spay/neuter capacity
- Contact spay/neuter partner to discuss having ACOs and the public drop RTF cats off directly at the clinic
- Ask Good Samaritans bringing in outdoor cats to go directly to spay/neuter partner clinic once arrangements have been made
- Contact RTF partner to discuss increasing capacity on returning cats to ensure a smooth transition
- Create RTF brochure to hand out at time of release and to have available at all partner locations and with enforcement as they come across (samples attached)

Targeted Low Income Spay-Neuter Program

Part of the plan to productively reduce shelter intake is providing accessible services for target groups. Studies show that most animals entering shelters are intact and from low-income households. Therefore, by providing low-income pet owners subsidized spay-neuter services, intake at the public shelter decreases (*Getting to Zero*, Peter Marsh). In general, the tipping point is 5 subsidized surgeries per 1,000 residents.

IN MANATEE COUNTY WITH 385,000 RESIDENTS AND POVERTY RATE OF ONLY 12.6%, A MINIMUM OF 1,925 SURGERIES MUST BE SUBSIDIZED ANNUALLY SPLIT EVENLY BETWEEN DOGS AND CATS FOR QUALIFIED LOW-INCOME PET OWNERS IN ORDER TO DECREASE SHELTER INTAKE.

The owner must be income qualified which should be simple and streamlined in an effort to remove all barriers to services with as few steps as possible. When scheduling the appointment with the service provider, the client would be instructed to bring proof of qualification. Pet owners on government

assistance automatically qualify and can simply show their Medicaid, Food Stamp, WIC, Section 8 or SSI documentation.

For those in need but not on government assistance, qualification may be done based on income if they earn less than 250% of the poverty level (2018 Federal Poverty Level Chart can be found online). For those individuals, copies of their W2's, previous year tax returns, current paystubs or other income verifying documentation can be used.

Spay-neuter for targeted groups that include low-income pet owners, community cats, large breed dogs and pets living in high intake areas should be highly subsidized, as close to free as possible and maxed at \$20 all inclusive (surgery, rabies vaccine, county license). Targeted spay-neuter programs are proving the direct inverse correlation between the number of targeted surgeries in the community and shelter intake/euthanasia.

UF MSMP consultants were happy to learn that \$60,000 in funding is already set aside annually for a targeted spay/neuter program and that surgeries are being performed at ARC and the Humane Society of Manatee County. Unfortunately it does not appear that citizens are aware of this opportunity and funds are left unspent at the end of the year. In order to reach the level of surgeries needed annually to achieve a productive decrease in shelter intake, additional funding will need to be identified going forward. There are many grants available to municipal shelters for targeted spay/neuter. Funders especially look for collaboration with partnering agencies and participation in the Shelter Animals Count database, so Manatee County is already set up for success in that regard.

Recommendations:

- MCAS should analyze the number of targeted low income surgeries being performed annually as well as the breakdown of species
- MCAS should track high intake areas of dogs and cats and target those particular zip codes with direct mail postcards or flyers advertising this free program.
- MCAS should proactively apply for grants to assist in funding this program
- Shelter leadership should also meet with current HQHVSN partners and local veterinarians in an effort to build spay-neuter partnerships whereby veterinarians agree to a reimbursement program. Working with veterinarians in the development of such as program will yield the greatest participation rate.

ENFORCEMENT

MCAS currently has 10 enforcement positions including 1 supervisor and 1 dispatch. 1 field position is currently vacant. Officers are available from 8am to 7pm, 7 days per week and handle emergency calls after hours.

In the interest of delivering public and animal safety protection, MCAS must ensure that each task performed by an ACO is in line with intended goals. Those tasks not directly providing protection (such as picking up healthy community cats for admission to the shelter) should be reconsidered.

Recommendations:

- Adjust ACO hours to Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm or 9am to 6pm with emergency calls only handled after hours and on weekends. This will allow officers to respond quicker to public and

animal safety calls without being spread thin. Having officers intake non-emergency animals after hours and on the weekends when shelter staff has left caused a bottleneck in providing proper medical intake procedures.

- Discontinuing having officers pick up healthy outdoor cats from the public and have them only respond to those sick, injured or rabies suspect animals. In 2017, officers picked up 746 cats in the field. Alternatively, have officers continue to pick up the healthy outdoor cats and deliver directly to the spay/neuter partner, bypassing the shelter and eliminating added delays that contribute to an increased Length of Stay.
- Recommend MCAS team review Best Friends Animal Society's recently published *Humane Animal Control* manual that should be used as a vital reference to supplement this assessment report (sent to Chief Brown via email).
- Have staff review the following webinar on Proactive Community Animal Control by Todd Stosuy: <https://vimeo.com/84792681>
- Ordinance revisions (see below)

Ordinance Revisions

Laws and ordinances have been developed with the core goals of community and animal safety, with the best of intentions. However, with the advancement of the animal welfare industry, scientific studies, dependable data and successful programs nationwide, there is a wide disparity between these outdated ordinances, key performance Indicators and intended goals.

The county codes directly affect shelter intake and outcome and as such, MCAS leadership must be educated about and make recommendations for commissioners to create Best Practice ordinances. The UF MSMP assessment team collaborates with attorneys working at national animal welfare organizations and the following recommendations reflect the collective recommendations from these organizations. UF MSMP consultants are happy to connect leadership team and county attorney/officials with attorneys from the national animal welfare organizations for further discussion on recommended ordinance revisions.

Proposed Revisions

Establish 3-Day Stray Hold to Live Outcome (dogs over 5 months)

Length of stay in a shelter is correlated with negative consequences that include overcrowding, infectious disease, higher costs of care, euthanasia, and compassion fatigue of staff/volunteers. As per county ordinance, there is currently a 5-day stray hold for all stray pets.

In 2017 the return to owner rate for dogs at MCAS was estimated to be somewhere between 28%-36%. The true return to owner rate for stray dogs could not be determined at the time of the assessment since the number of dogs returned to their owners as a result of an enforcement process versus reclaimed as stray were not separated. Nationally, the majority of owners typically reclaim their dogs within 72 hours, therefore a 3-day stray hold to live outcome is appropriate and considered the standard stray hold period for dogs over 5 months. MCAS is encouraged to review records of these reclaimed stray dogs to determine how many days after intake they were reclaimed by their owners.

Eliminate Stray Hold for Live Outcome (puppies and kittens under 5 months)

Puppies and kittens are not part of the pool of pets reclaimed as strays, are the most adoptable, and the most susceptible to infectious diseases at the shelter. By eliminating the stray hold period, puppies and kittens can be rehomed or transferred to a rescue partner without delay.

Eliminate Stray Hold for Community Cats

An estimated 50% of cat owners allow their cats access to the outside and only a small percentage are in the feral category that live exclusively outside. Admitting cats to the shelter, friendly or feral, and holding them for a stray hold period has resulted in a three percent (3%) return to owner rate at MCAS in 2017, below the national estimates of 5%. *A clear 97% of the time, even a 5-day stray hold fails.* Studies also show that cats are 7 to 13 times more likely to find their way home from the street or find a new home when compared to admission to a shelter (Lord and Owen 2007). In other words, these cats were not in need of intervention and should not have been brought into the shelter system since they were never lost.

Spending staff time and financial resources transporting cats to the shelter, and housing/caring for them did nothing to prevent the population explosion or protection against rabies for the cats left behind. There is no evidence this process has led to decreasing numbers of community cats or shelter intake and in fact, cat intake has only slightly declined at MCAS in the past few years. Trap and euthanize has never been shown to decrease shelter intake or decrease numbers of community cats.

Revisions are needed to eliminate the stray hold period for cats as we now have overwhelming data showing that holding cats in the shelter does not result in a substantial reunification rate and impedes the return of cats to their owners. Many shelters with the same 3% reunification rate as MCAS changed their approach to community cats and are now seeing dramatic decreases in intake, complaints, as well as a significant decrease in euthanasia.

Return to Field (RTF) and trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs are established in nearly every community in the United States and have been in place for decades (see **Return to Field**). Concurrently, as per a recent Centers for Disease Control report, the incidence of rabies in cats has been decreasing (Birhane 2015). An RTF program yields only positive results that include drastic reduction in complaint calls and shelter intake, increased community immunity against rabies and a cost-effective program that provides sustainable resolution.

Define Community Cat as:

Any unowned free roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area who is/are known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats that are ear tipped are sterilized and have received at least one vaccination against rabies. Community cats are exempt from any licensing, stray, abandonment and at-large provisions directed towards owned animals. A community cat may also be defined as a cat 'found' outside that is brought to an animal shelter and not yet sterilized/ear tipped.

Define Community Cat Caregiver as:

A person who provides care, including food, shelter or medical care to a community cat, while not being considered the owner, custodian, harborer, controller or keeper of a community cat or to have care or charge of a community cat. Caregivers must make every effort to minimize the impact on local wildlife, feed the proper quantity of food for the number of cats in appropriate food containers, discard food containers daily and feed only on their property or with the permission of another landowner (city, state or federal public property). Community cat caregivers shall not be deemed to own, have custody, care or control of community cats. Community cat caregivers may redeem community cats from the shelter without proof of ownership and are exempt from any charges and/or fees.

Define Return to Field:

Sterilizing, ear tipping and vaccinating a cat large enough for spay-neuter that is found outside and returning him to his original location as opposed to admitting to a shelter.

Define Ear Tipping:

The removal of a ¼ inch tip of the ear of a community cat, performed while the cat is under anesthesia, in compliance with any applicable federal or state law, and under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. An ear tip is the universal identification that the community cat is sterilized and lawfully vaccinated against rabies at least once. Caregivers must make every effort to booster the rabies vaccination as per the manufacturer instructions.

Define Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR):

The process of humanely trapping, sterilizing, vaccinating against rabies and ear tipping community cats and returning them to their original location.

Eligible community cats should be exempt from:

- Any stray hold
- Running at large and/or leash law
- Licensing
- Abandonment (as this program entails returning the cats where they are already cared for)

Establish Provision for Owners Reclaiming their Stray Dog

Currently, when an owner reclaims a dog that was at large but not part of an enforcement case, they are required to pay boarding fees, fines and a possible citation. This has no doubt resulted in unclaimed dogs that the department then had to house, care for or find an alternative placement for. The Best Practice standard today is to help constituents become responsible pet owners. Keeping the pet with the original owner is beneficial for the pet and the shelter.

In lieu of fees and fines, the owner should be offered sterilization, rabies vaccination and microchip at a reduced fee as a financial incentive to encourage compliance. Pet owners should not be cited for an intact pet but instead offered access to services.