

# What's Happening to Long Beach's Shelter Animals?

A report on the effectiveness of Long Beach Animal Care Services and recommendations for change



**Stayin' Alive**  
LONG BEACH

[www.stayinalivelongbeach.org](http://www.stayinalivelongbeach.org)

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## **Stayin' Alive Long Beach**

**Long Beach, CA**

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# Executive Summary

Stayin' Alive Long Beach (SALB) is an initiative whose aim is to increase the adoption rate for healthy and treatable animals at Long Beach's Animal Care Services (ACS). In February, 2013, SALB undertook a study of the programs and services of ACS, the City agency charged with the control and care of stray and abandoned animals in Long Beach. This report presents an analysis of over 300 pages of data received, under the auspices of the California Public Records Act, from ACS during the period of February through September, 2013 and covers ACS operations from 2010 to 2012. The major findings of this report are given below.

**Long Beach Animal Care Services, by euthanizing more than 53% of cats and dogs in its shelter over the past three years, fails the public in its animal care role and routinely misleads the public in this regard.**

## 53% Euthanasia Rate

ACS currently underperforms in its animal care capacity.

- In 2012, ACS euthanized more than 53% of companion animals, putting to death more than 5,100 cats, kittens, dogs and puppies. Kittens, with a euthanasia rate of 78%, had the lowest save rate of all of the animals taken in by ACS.
- ACS has euthanized nearly 41,000 animals (companion and other animals) over the past 6 years.
- In 2012, the number of dogs ACS euthanized *increased* by 2.6%.
- In 2012, ACS placed only 13 companion animals in foster homes.
- ACS achieves an extremely low shelter adoption rate, adopting out a mere 3.3% of the companion animals it took in in 2012 (324 animals out of nearly 10,000 impounded). There is an obvious lack of a comprehensive adoption program – and indeed a lack of *any* coherent and sustained adoption program for ACS animals.
- This failure is due in part to ACS's overreliance on the adjacent spcaLA to do adoptions, which takes in only 28% of the animals at risk of euthanasia at ACS.
- ACS euthanizes 74% of the animals that are not taken in by the neighboring spcaLA, revealing a severe deficit in ACS's performance on adoptions.
- This adoption deficit at ACS results in the deaths of *unnecessarily* large numbers of companion animals at ACS every year.

## Reduction in Spay/Neuter Voucher Funding

ACS has steadily reduced its funding of spay/neuter in Long Beach, generally realized through a voucher program that subsidizes the cost of spay/neuter of the animals belonging to residents in the agency's jurisdiction.

- From 2010 to 2012, the agency decreased its funding of the spay/neuter voucher program by 77% to only \$24,788.

- During approximately the same period, ACS nearly doubled the amount of revenue from animal licensing, taking in more than \$1.2 million from that program alone.
- This massive shift in priorities indicates that the City of Long Beach has repositioned ACS in the role of revenue generator rather than as a provider of a public service.

### **Questionable Reporting Practices – Inflated Adoption Statistics**

Even more troubling is the fact that ACS engages in questionable reporting practices by inflating its adoption statistics when releasing numbers to the public. By including wildlife and animals transferred to known high-kill facilities, the agency engages in an ongoing practice of overstating the number of animals adopted and returned to owners. In 2012, ACS overstated its adoption/redemption numbers by nearly 300 percent, a practice that should be shocking to the taxpayers of Long Beach.

### **Lack of Programs Aimed at Decreasing Killing**

ACS lacks a number of the critical programs that have been proven to increase lifesaving rates upwards of 90% in other communities, such as Austin, Texas. Austin’s open-admission municipal shelter has achieved a save rate of more than 90% for two years in a row. The City of Austin has accomplished this by implementing proactive 21<sup>st</sup> century, evidence-based practices in animal sheltering **without increasing their budget**.

Currently, ACS implements very few of the programs that have been proven to save lives. A review of their programs reveals that ACS currently fails to but needs to implement:

- a coherent, comprehensive adoption program
- a foster home program
- a trap-neuter-release program for community cats
- a neonatal foster program for kittens and puppies
- increased cooperation with rescue organizations
- increased spay/neuter support for the residents of Long Beach and contracting cities
- reduced fees for redemption of animals at the shelter to increase returns to owner
- programs to reduce owner surrender of animals
- transparency in reporting numbers and accountability to the public, and
- **a large-scale volunteer program**, which is the engine with which such lifesaving programs are driven.

**This can be done without increasing ACS’s budget through 1) reallocation of resources from ineffective programs to lifesaving programs, 2) strategic planning and 3) leveraging the goodwill of Long Beach’s animal-loving public by declaring Long Beach a No Kill City.**

Long Beach is a city of animal-lovers, the vast majority of whom believe that ACS should be a protector and safe harbor for lost and homeless animals in Long Beach. This report reveals that ACS clearly falls far short of this goal and does so year after year. Much work must be done before Long Beach can be the “safest city for people and animals” that ACS claims it to be. It is time for ACS to work proactively and transparently to end the killing of adoptable and treatable animals in Long Beach. The goal of this report is to pave the way for this transformation to happen.

## What's Happening to Long Beach's Shelter Animals?

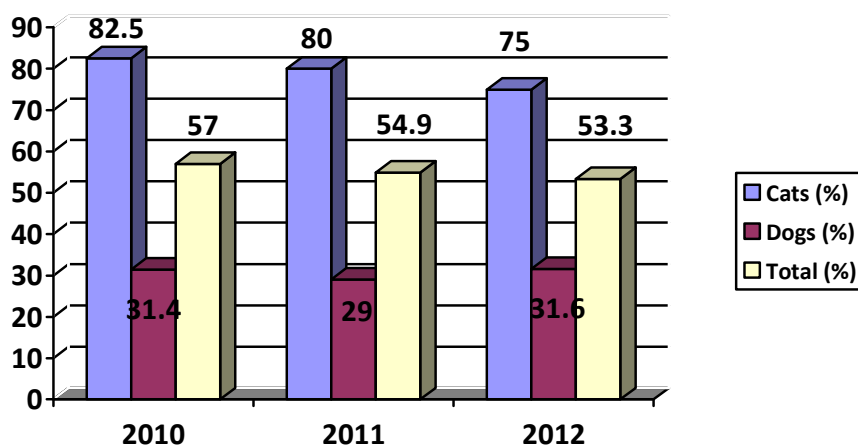
### A report on the effectiveness of Long Beach Animal Care Services and recommendations for change

Imagine for a moment that a government agency in your city produced these results: The agency met only 50% of the goals set for them by the public, implemented only the bare minimum of programs to meet those goals and "massaged" the statistics presented to the public to show that the goals were actually being met. What would your reaction be? Chances are you would think it's time for your city to make some changes in the way that agency operates.

That is the picture of Long Beach Animal Care Services, the city agency in Long Beach charged with managing the Long Beach animal shelter. In 2012, Long Beach Animal Care Services (ACS) euthanized over 53%<sup>1</sup> of all cats and dogs in its shelter: That is more than 5,000 animals<sup>2</sup> and includes a 75% euthanasia rate for cats and a 32% euthanasia rate for dogs. Kittens, at 78%, are the animals with the highest number of euthanasias at the Long Beach shelter. In a city like Long Beach, where large numbers of people consider themselves animal lovers, we should all be asking ourselves – *Can't we do better?*

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Percentage of dogs and cats euthanized at the Long Beach Shelter 2010-2012



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Source: Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act Request

There are compelling reasons to believe we **can** do better. The No Kill approach to sheltering, which advocates for the implementation of evidence-based public sheltering policy, provides us with the methods to save more than 90% of the companion animals in our shelters.

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Currently, more than 160 communities representing more than 500 cities across the US in states as diverse as Texas, Oregon, Nevada, Virginia, North Carolina, Iowa, Michigan and others, are saving 90% of their shelter animals by analyzing local challenges and implementing lifesaving programs designed to overcome them (Winograd, 2013; Houser, 2013). These programs are collectively known as the No Kill Equation.<sup>3</sup> When comprehensively implemented, the programs of the No Kill Equation present a model and starting point for progressive, 21<sup>st</sup> century sheltering practices that have been proven to increase the save rates at animal shelters, including open-admission<sup>4</sup> municipal shelters like the Long Beach shelter.

Stayin' Alive Long Beach, an initiative to improve the save rates of animals at the Long Beach animal shelter, has analyzed more than 300 pages of data on ACS programs and activities obtained through a series of public records requests made to Long Beach Animal Care Services under the California Public Records Act from February to September, 2013. This report presents the results of this analysis, followed by recommendations for changes in programs that will move the shelter toward a 90% save rate for shelter animals in Long Beach.

**The No Kill Equation “is a humane, sustainable, cost-effective model that works hand in hand with public health and safety, while fulfilling a fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers.” (Winograd, 2013)**

## **REPORT FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

**Finding 1. ACS has euthanized<sup>5</sup> more than 50% of all cats and dogs at the shelter for at least the past 3 years.**

In 2012, ACS euthanized 53% of the dogs, kittens and puppies that came into the shelter. In 2011, ACS euthanized 55% of these animals, and in 2010, they euthanized 57% of them. The open-admission municipal shelter in Austin, Texas, in contrast, has saved 90% of their animals for the second year in a row by implementing the No Kill Equation: progressive sheltering programs such as comprehensive adoption programs, an extensive foster program, a robust volunteer program and compassionate programs aimed at returning lost pets to their owners (City of Austin, 2013). As will be seen, ACS's failure to implement these programs has resulted in the deaths of more than half of the animals that enter the Long Beach shelter every year for the past 3 years – and perhaps longer.<sup>6</sup>

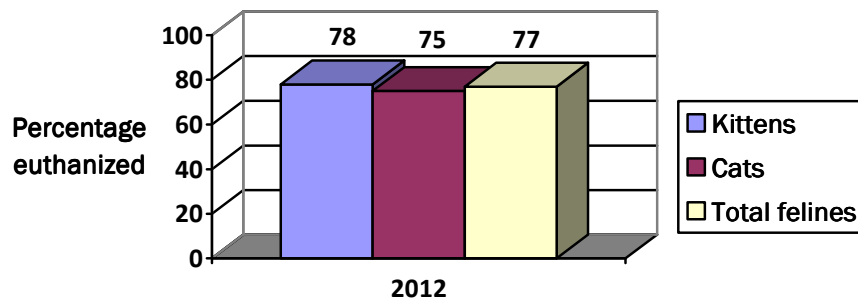
**Finding 2. In 2012, ACS euthanized 3 out of 4 cats and kittens that entered the shelter, making them the most frequently-euthanized companion animals at ACS.**

For individual species, the following results were found in 2012:

- Kittens were by far the largest number of animals euthanized, with 2,264 kittens euthanized– a euthanasia rate of 78%.

- 1,440 adult cats were euthanized, resulting in a 75% euthanasia rate.
  - 1,292 dogs were euthanized, yielding a euthanasia rate of 32%.
  - 126 puppies were euthanized, yielding a euthanasia rate of 18%.
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Feline euthanasia rates at Long Beach ACS



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Source: Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act Request

Kittens comprise the largest percentage of animals euthanized at the shelter by a large margin, so this group deserves a second look. ACS did not provide a formal, pre-existing written policy on the disposition of unweaned kittens at the shelter when asked. If they have no written policy, this is a troubling fact, given that ACS claims on its website that “clear policies and procedures are paramount” to its mission (ACS, 2013a).

However, in a response to Stayin' Alive Long Beach, ACS stated the following:

“Unweaned puppies and kittens are those animals that are under 8 weeks old/under 2 lbs that are not eating commercial pet food or that cannot sustain themselves overnight. These animals are brought to the attention of spcaLA<sup>7</sup> and their foster program. The unweaned animals not selected by the foster program are humanly (sic) euthanized (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13).

The situation improves only slightly for those kittens that are able to sustain themselves overnight. They are kenneled and may be held for adoption by ACS if spcaLA does not elect to take them. However, in spite of the fact that ACS takes in more than 2,000 kittens per year, the agency makes no attempt to place them into qualified foster homes. As will be seen, ACS does not currently operate a foster program, even for kittens that are eating on their own. Therefore, for those kittens that remain at ACS and are not subsequently accepted by spcaLA, the prospects are worse than grim. Indeed, this situation amounts to a virtual death sentence for any kitten that enters the Long Beach shelter, as evidenced by the fact that only 22% of kittens that enter ACS make it out alive.

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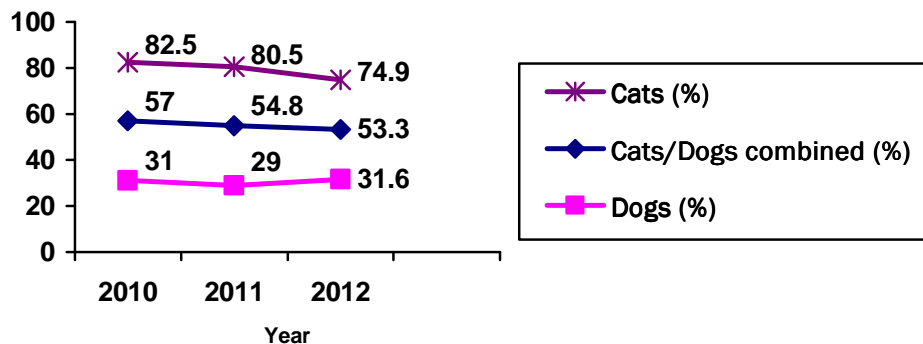
**Finding 3. The euthanasia rate for companion animals has not appreciably declined over the last 3 years.**

- The euthanasia rate for companion animals decreased by only 1.5% in the past year, from 54.8% in 2011 to 53.3% in 2012.
- The euthanasia rate for companion animals decreased by 2.2% from 2010 to 2011.

**ACS has euthanized nearly 41,000 animals over the past 6 years.**

At its 2013 Open House, ACS reported that it had reduced euthanasias by 2000 from 2007-2012 (Long Beach Report, 2013). ACS records show, however, that during the same period, ACS euthanized 40,679 companion and other animals at the Long Beach animal shelter (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13). Given the large number of animals ACS euthanized over that time period, a decline of 2,000 does not appear to be significant. Indeed, this statement appears to be an attempt to gloss over the agency’s poor performance in adoptions and show ACS in a positive light. In fact, cats are the only species whose euthanasia rates have noticeably declined over the past 3 years; however, a 77% feline euthanasia rate means that more than 3,700 cats and kittens were euthanized at the Long Beach shelter in 2012 alone. Clearly, this minimal decline has done little to offset the massive number of cats that continue to be euthanized by the Long Beach shelter *year after year*.

**Trends in euthanasia rates at Long Beach ACS**



Source: Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act Request



**Finding 4. The euthanasia rate for dogs actually *increased* from 2011-2012.**

Equally troubling is the *increase* in the euthanasia rate for dogs that has occurred at ACS over the past year. In 2012, the euthanasia rate for dogs increased by 2.6% – from 29% to 31.6%. Historically, dogs are much more likely to leave the Long Beach shelter alive than

**The euthanasia rate for dogs went up by 2.6% in 2012 – a potentially significant increase given weak trends in the reduction in euthanasias at ACS.**

any other type of animal. However, in the past year, the number of dogs euthanized at the shelter has increased. This increase is potentially significant in view of the slow rate of change in the euthanasia rate that is generally seen at the shelter. **A 2.6% increase in the number of dogs euthanized at the shelter in one year is a troubling reversal of what is already an extremely weak trend in improving save rates at the shelter.**

**Finding 5. ACS adopts out an extremely low number of animals on its own, reaching a shelter adoption rate of only 3.3% in 2012.**

- In 2012, only 324 out of the nearly 10,000 companion animals that went into the shelter were placed in homes by ACS. This represents a shelter adoption rate of only 3.3%. Compare this to Austin, Texas, where the open-admission city municipal shelter has achieved an adoption rate of 90% for two years running (City of Austin, 2013).
- Of these 324 companion animals, ACS adopted out 35 cats, 36 puppies, 41 kittens and 212 dogs.

**In 2012, only 324 out of the nearly 10,000 companion animals that went into the shelter were placed in homes by ACS. This represents a shelter adoption rate of only 3.3%.**

In a city with more than 450,000 inhabitants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), a shelter adoption rate of 3.3% is shockingly low and indicates a severe deficit in ACS's animal lifesaving efforts, specifically its adoption efforts, which should be among the primary functions of Animal Care Services in Long Beach.

Why is ACS adopting out animals in such low numbers? An answer may be found in the fact that **ACS simply does not operate a comprehensive adoption program.** A comprehensive approach to adoptions includes mobile adoptions, frequent off-site adoptions, ongoing and frequent creative marketing of animals, and public-friendly adoption hours – none of which are part of the ACS adoption program. An example: Currently, ACS is open for adoptions from 10 am – 5 pm Wednesday-Friday and 10:00 – 4:00 Saturday and Sunday (ACS, 2013b). More than 60% of these hours are between 9 and 5 on weekdays, effectively excluding potential adopters who work during those hours and cannot visit the shelter during those times.

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Furthermore, ACS does not use mobile adoption events (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13). Even more dismaying is the fact that ACS routinely sends staff to community adoption events, but does not take any animals to be shown for adoption (see Spotlight box on this page), in spite of the fact that such events are an ideal forum for showcasing adoptable animals. Moreover, bringing animals to community events could be done at very little cost to ACS through the recruitment and training of volunteers. ACS's record of pursuing adoptions for the animals in its shelter is clearly an area where ACS needs to improve performance.

**Spotlight on  
Long Beach Animal Care Services**

In 2012-2013, Stayin' Alive Long Beach observed that ACS attended at least three large adoption events organized by the Pet Post, a local pet-themed publication, in El Dorado Park. ACS did not bring a single animal to be adopted to any of these events and instead sent a lone staff member, who sat idly for much of the time at an information table. The ACS representative did not bring photos of animals available for adoption, nor did he/she bring a map or directions to the Long Beach shelter on any of the three occasions. Furthermore, when asked about low-cost spay/neuter in the area, ACS did not furnish any information about the many low-cost spay/neuter options available in Long Beach, instead referring people to a private rescue organization for that information. Showing animals for adoption and informing the public about spay/neuter are duties that fall squarely within the purview of ACS. To have a positive impact on adoption numbers, offsite adoptions must be done not once or twice, but consistently and frequently. Yet on multiple occasions ACS has passively allowed these opportunities to slip by. Ultimately, it is the shelter animals of Long Beach that pay the price.

**Finding 6. ACS's overreliance on spcaLA to be the primary provider of adoption programs for Long Beach shelter animals leads to large numbers of animal deaths every year.**

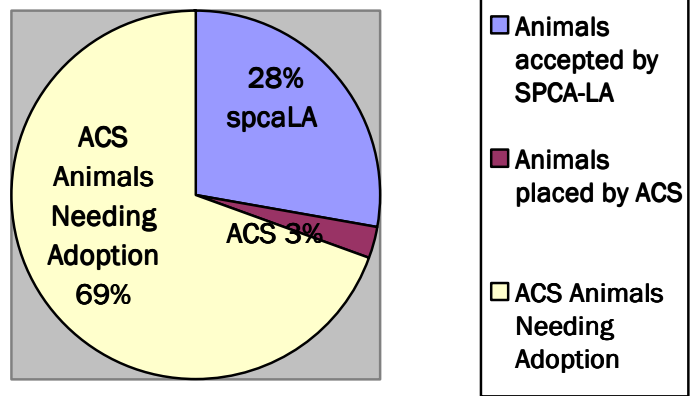
With a 53% euthanasia rate, why does ACS not prioritize adoptions? Although implementing a vigorous, comprehensive adoption program would save thousands of pets' lives at the Long Beach shelter every year, ACS instead relies on spcaLA to act as the adoption arm of the shelter. As a result, ACS routinely refers potential adopters of ACS animals to spcaLA, thereby reducing the chances that adoptable animals at ACS that are at risk of euthanasia will be adopted. A phone call to ACS in July 2013 backs this up: ACS's outgoing phone message refers potential adopters immediately to spcaLA. Furthermore, in response to a question about adoption procedures at the shelter, an ACS phone representative at first

referred exclusively to spcaLA animals and only mentioned ACS shelter animals when asked specifically for information on those animals.

Even more troubling, ACS management has stated in correspondence and in conversation with Stayin' Alive Long Beach that vigorously pursuing adoptions would constitute redundancy in services with spcaLA and would put ACS in competition with spcaLA.<sup>8</sup> This stance is called into serious question when the number of animals that spcaLA accepts from ACS is examined. In 2012, spcaLA accepted 28% of the animals that ACS took in, while ACS itself found homes for just above 3% of the animals that it took in, resulting in a combined save rate of 31%. These numbers indicate that ACS has an unmet need, in terms of adoptions, of approximately 69% for the animals that the agency takes in every year.

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**Long Beach ACS unmet need:  
The Adoption Deficit in 2012**



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Based on data obtained from Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act request

Furthermore, ACS's responses to Stayin' Alive Long Beach public records requests indicate that spcaLA has no formal agreement with, and therefore no accountability to, ACS in terms of the numbers and types of animals it accepts from ACS (ACS response to public records request, 7/22/13) and therefore cannot be equated with the adoption arm of the ACS shelter. Indeed, the agreement currently in effect between spcaLA and ACS explicitly states that *no such relationship between the two entities exists:*

“The relationship of the parties hereto is that of landlord and tenant, and the parties agree that nothing contained in this lease-back shall be deemed or construed as creating a partnership, joint venture, principal-agent, association or employer-employee relationship between them...”

(Lease agreement between ACS and spcaLA, p. 27, dated 9/28/98).

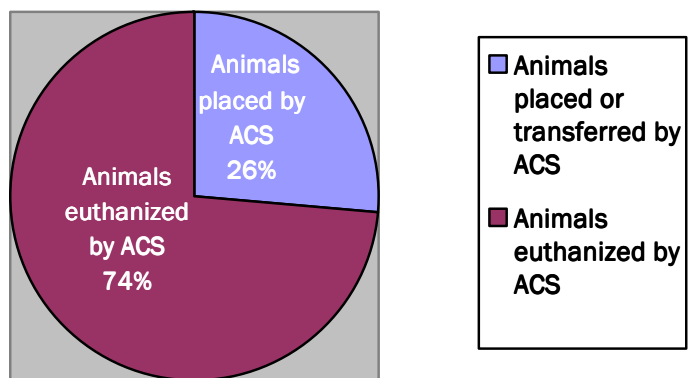
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This lack of accountability creates a crucial disconnect between ACS’s needs and the ways it goes about fulfilling those needs. **This disconnect means that relying on spcaLA to do adoptions not only for ACS but in its stead, is an inherently flawed sheltering practice that causes more than 50% of the animals in the Long Beach city shelter to be euthanized every year.**

What is worse, **ACS euthanizes 74% of those animals not selected by spcaLA.** This provides a painfully clear picture of ACS’s underperformance with regard to adoptions. This statistic reveals that ACS has abdicated its responsibility to find homes for animals and instead concentrates on activities not directly related to lifesaving (e.g., licensing enforcement) and euthanizes thousands of animals every year while they do it. By not taking a proactive role in adoptions, ACS is not only *not* avoiding redundancy in services; instead, it is condemning to death 74% of the animals that remain at the shelter after spcaLA has selected those it can save. With such a high euthanasia rate, Long Beach is anything but the “safest city for people and animals” that it claims to be.<sup>9</sup>

**The percentage of animals ACS euthanizes jumps to 74% when spcaLA animals are not factored in. This provides us with a clear picture of ACS’s weak adoption efforts and the need for ACS to comprehensively implement proactive, lifesaving programs.**

**Independent measure of ACS performance:  
ACS euthanasia/adoption rate after spcaLA**



Based on data obtained from Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act request

**Finding 7. ACS does not operate a foster program for ACS animals when doing so would increase cage space and decrease the number of animals ACS euthanizes.**

In 2012, an astonishingly low number of animals were placed in foster homes by ACS. That number was 13. This means that of the nearly 10,000 live companion animals that came into the Long Beach shelter, only 8 kittens and 5 puppies were transitioned into foster care. Because ACS has stated that it does not operate a foster program (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13), it is unclear exactly where these 13 animals were placed; however, what *is* clear is that ACS is not pursuing what has been proven to be an effective means of increasing both cage space at the shelter and time to find homes so that more animals' lives can be saved. Mirroring its policy on adoptions, **ACS currently refers all potential foster volunteers to spcaLA** (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13), with spcaLA having no accountability to ACS as to whether it accepts these volunteers or uses the volunteers' time productively. **With ACS placing less than 1 percent of its own animals in foster homes, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that ACS is truly taking a proactive approach to saving Long Beach's shelter animals.**

**Spotlight on  
Long Beach Animal Care Services**

The fact that spcaLA has no formal accountability to ACS impacts ACS financially in a way that ultimately has a negative impact on animals at the Long Beach shelter. As an example, ACS has furnished funds in the amount of \$9,200 to spcaLA for the purchase of an iPET remote viewing system to be installed in the cat adoption room of the spcaLA (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13). The system was purchased in early 2013 but as of May 2013, ACS reported that it had not yet been installed. Furthermore, ACS has stated that there is no written agreement regarding the iPET system or its timely installation or use by spcaLA. Such negligent financial practices are sure to have a deleterious effect on the ability of ACS to implement programs aimed to reduce euthanasia in its facility.

Indeed, now more than ever, ACS needs to channel its funds into programs that have been proven to save lives. It was just over a year ago that **a long-time ACS employee was charged with and pleaded guilty to embezzling more than \$250,000** from the shelter from 2009-2010 with additional funds taken over a period of 10 years (Gazette Newspapers, 8/29/12; Long Beach Press-Telegram, 8/12/12). The fact that it took a decade to bring such criminal activity to light indicates that ACS has for some time been less than vigilant in carrying out the mission entrusted to it by the public – that of caring for the stray and homeless animals of Long Beach. ACS may believe that taxpayers in Long Beach can afford to take such a hit to their bottom line; however, in the end, with a 53% euthanasia rate at the shelter, it is the shelter animals in Long Beach that come out the losers.

**Finding 8. ACS operates an extremely limited volunteer program, which negatively impacts its ability to implement lifesaving programs.**

The contributions of volunteers to increasing the save rates at animal shelters cannot be overstated. Volunteers are crucial to the implementation of lifesaving programs, such as off-site adoptions, mobile adoptions, marketing of animals, implementing Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs for community cats, organizing foster programs and raising public awareness of shelter animal needs. In spite of the great importance of volunteers both as a means of reducing euthanasia and reducing operating costs, **in 2012, ACS had only 28 volunteers working at the Long Beach shelter** (ACS response to public records request, 3/5/13). In a city of more than 450,000 people, this is a surprisingly small number. By contrast, Austin, Texas, a city of comparable size to Long Beach, has 350 active volunteers who have been instrumental in the city’s ability to reach a 90% save rate (City of Austin, 2012).

**Long Beach Animal Care Services has only 28 volunteers. By contrast, Austin, Texas, a city of comparable size to Long Beach, has 350 active volunteers who have been instrumental in the city’s ability to reach a 90% save rate.**

Furthermore, until very recently, ACS volunteers were only permitted to “walk dogs” and “read to the animals” (ACS response to public records request, 3/5/13)<sup>10</sup> – a very limited use of volunteer time given the variety of programs that volunteer hours could and need to be used for. ACS’s failure to aggressively recruit volunteers and use their time in a lifesaving capacity clearly impedes its ability to implement the many lifesaving programs needed to reduce its euthanasia rate.

**Finding 9. ACS uses questionable reporting practices when reporting shelter statistics to the public.**

ACS’s reporting practices obscure the grim fact that ACS euthanizes more than half of the companion animals entering the shelter and create in the minds of the public a misguided perception that all is well—a perception ACS does little to counteract and does much to foster. In the words of an ACS customer service representative during a recent phone inquiry into adoption procedures, “Everyone thinks we are (‘No Kill,’) but that’s not what we’re trying to do.” Indeed, it works to ACS’s advantage for the public to perceive the shelter as “No Kill” – it reduces ACS’s public accountability and thus the need to work at full capacity to implement lifesaving programs.

**“Everybody thinks we are (No Kill), but that’s not what we’re trying to do.”**  
**- ACS customer service representative, explaining whether animals are euthanized at the Long Beach shelter**

The way in which ACS reports shelter numbers, including euthanasia and live release rates, is key in promoting the public’s misguided perception that the Long Beach shelter is No Kill:

ACS includes two categories of non-adoptions in their adoption numbers (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13). This has the effect of artificially increasing their adoption rate.

- The first category of non-adoptions is **facility transfers**. In 2012, ACS transferred 3,048 companion animals to other facilities. Some of these facilities, such as Los Angeles County Animal Care and Control, Orange County Animal Care and the Southeast Area Animal Control Authority (SEAACA) are open-admission facilities that euthanize animals. In these facilities, no guarantee of live release exists. Indeed, what happens to these animals is unknown, yet ACS designates these transfers as “adoptions/redemptions.” And while transfers to spcaLA, ACS’s largest transfer partner, play an important role in saving animals at ACS, an understanding of the number of animals ACS adopts out under its own efforts is crucial to evaluating the effectiveness of ACS programs and their impact on the number of animals saved. **In fact, ACS euthanizes 74% of the remaining animals in its care after spcaLA has taken its pick, yet this fact is obscured by ACS’s numbers.** ACS’s lack of transparency in this regard misleads the public and creates the perception that Long Beach is doing all it can for its shelter animals, when the reality is very much the opposite.
- In addition to including transfers in their adoption numbers, ACS includes **wildlife** (e.g., racoons and opossums) that are returned to the wild in what it reports to the public as “adoptions/redemptions.” This characterization runs counter to what most members of the public would consider adoptions (placement of companion animals in homes) and redemptions (returning animals to their owners).

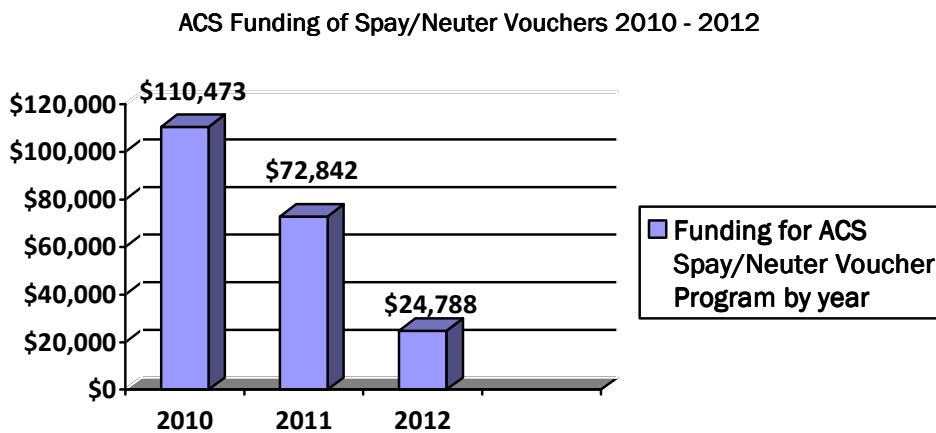
**ACS counts wildlife that are returned to the wild as “adoptions/redemptions (return to owner),” thus obscuring the sobering reality that 53% of the companion animals entering its doors are killed every year.**

- The practice of reporting wildlife and facility transfers as “adoptions/redemptions” obscures the true number of adoptions/redemptions of companion animals from the Long Beach shelter, **overstating them by nearly 300%.**

Transparency in government is a key value in democratic societies, yet ACS’s style of government is severely lacking in transparency. **The fact is that ACS, in not transparently reporting its numbers, knowingly perpetuates the public’s misguided belief that killing occurs at a much lower rate at the Long Beach shelter than it actually does,** and it is only when compelled by law to comply with public records requests that ACS releases this information. This lack of transparency reflects ACS’s lack of commitment to saving shelter animals in Long Beach and violates the public’s trust. Furthermore, the fact that the City permits ACS to obscure its true nature as a high-kill facility year after year gives the public cause to seriously question the City’s commitment to transparent government in Long Beach.

**Finding 10. ACS has steadily decreased funding for its spay/neuter voucher program over the past three years.**

Programs that make affordable spay/neuter available to the public are a key component of any effort to reduce the homeless animal population (Frank & Carlisle-Frank, 2007). ACS operates an affordable spay/neuter program for Long Beach residents that provides vouchers for discounts of between \$30 and \$100 on spay/neuters done by participating veterinary clinics. Although the program is immensely popular with the public, the amount of funding dedicated to this program has steadily declined over the past 3 years: In 2010, ACS spent \$110,473 on the voucher program, but by 2012, this number had decreased to \$24,788 (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13) – a decrease of more than 77%. Over the same time period, ACS increased the amount spent on its licensing efforts, spending nearly 17 times more on licensing (\$418, 666) than on spay/neuter in 2012 (ACS response to public records request, 8/30/13,) thus diverting funds from a program that directly impacts the number of animals that enter the shelter – spay/neuter – to an area that has been found to have no significant effects on reducing the number of animals that enter the shelter – animal licensing.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in doing so, it more than doubled its revenue, bringing in \$1.2 million in revenue over the same period that saw a drastic reduction in ACS's funding of spay/neuter – a particularly dismaying fact given that with such a large increase in revenue, we would expect the exact opposite: greater resources allocated to spay/neuter. This shift in priorities indicates that the City of Long Beach has repositioned ACS in the role of revenue generator rather than as a provider of public service.



Source: Long Beach Animal Care Services, 2013 via California Public Records Act Request



**Finding 11. ACS works with rescue organizations in an extremely limited capacity.**

According to ACS records, ACS transferred animals to 16 animal rescue organizations in 2012,<sup>12</sup> with the majority of those organizations receiving fewer than five animals over a period of 12 months. This resulted in only 104 animals – just over *one percent* of the animals that were taken in by the shelter – going to rescue organizations over the 12-month period. This number is disappointingly low given ACS's high euthanasia rate. Establishing productive, cooperative working relationships with a larger number of local rescue organizations would increase cage and kennel space at the shelter, and would substantially increase the shelter's save rate. Furthermore, establishing such relationships would reduce the amount of money spent by ACS on housing and feeding animals by transferring those costs to willing rescue groups, making this a prime area in which ACS could make improvements.

**Finding 12. ACS is currently lacking in programs that would significantly increase the save rate of Long Beach shelter animals if they were implemented.**

Perhaps the most significant result of our report, this finding also provides the greatest hope for increasing the save rate of shelter animals in Long Beach. ACS currently does not implement a number of 21<sup>st</sup> century programs that have been proven to dramatically increase the live release rate of companion animals at shelters across the nation. The good news is that ACS could easily implement these programs, and it is within the power of the citizens of Long Beach to ensure that they do so. These programs include a comprehensive adoption program, a large-scale foster program, a Trap-Neuter-Release program for community cats, a neonatal kitten foster program, increased outreach to rescue organizations and a large-scale volunteer recruitment effort. These lifesaving programs and others are the focus of the following section.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO INCREASE LIFESAVING AT THE LONG BEACH ANIMAL SHELTER

Long Beach is a city of animal-lovers, the vast majority of whom believe that Long Beach Animal Care Services should be a protector and safe harbor for lost and homeless animals in Long Beach. Yet with a municipal shelter euthanasia rate exceeding 53%, Long Beach has much work to do before it comes close to being the safest city for animals and people that it has claimed to be.

**A dramatic increase in the save rate at the Long Beach animal shelter is an eminently desirable and realizable goal.** What is needed is a fundamental shift in the way Long Beach approaches the sheltering of animals that moves from a reactive, animal-control dominated stance to a truly proactive stance that is focused on saving the lives of animals in the Long Beach shelter. Taking such a proactive stance requires strong shelter leadership to accept current challenges that the shelter faces in increasing the save rate of its animals and crafting programs that will specifically target and overcome those challenges. Stayin' Alive Long Beach has compiled a number of recommendations<sup>13</sup> designed to improve shelter operations and increase the save rate of animals at the Long Beach shelter. **Many of these recommendations can be implemented at little to no cost.** All that is required is the political will to do so.

**What is needed is a fundamental shift in the way Long Beach approaches sheltering that moves from a reactive, stance to a truly proactive stance focused on saving the lives of animals in the Long Beach shelter.**

### **Recommendation 1. Revise the mission of ACS to make life saving the number one priority.**

An essential step in reducing the euthanasia rate at the Long Beach shelter is to revise the mission of ACS to reflect the belief of the citizens of Long Beach that the shelter should help, and not hurt, homeless animals in Long Beach. A crucial part of this mission is to reduce the killing of lost and homeless pets by increasing live outcomes, reducing shelter intake and committing to a philosophy that considers euthanasia only for those animals that are irremediably suffering. As mentioned above, cities like Austin, Texas have increased their save rates to upwards of 90% as a result of implementing proactive, lifesaving programs. This process begins by prioritizing the implementation of lifesaving programs by making them the most essential part of the agency's mission and by setting a public goal of saving 90% of Long Beach's shelter animals.<sup>14</sup> Such an approach would bring ACS in alignment with the expectations of the citizens of Long Beach, who believe that a shelter should make every effort possible to place into homes – and not euthanize – the animals that are placed in its charge.

**Recommendation 2. End ACS's overreliance on spcaLA in the absence of accountability.**

For years, ACS has taken the stance that spcaLA should be the primary provider of adoption services for the city, and therefore does not place a high priority on implementing a vigorous adoption program. However, while spcaLA is clearly instrumental in decreasing the euthanasia rate at the Long Beach animal shelter, spcaLA took custody of only 28% of ACS animals that needed to be adopted out in 2012. This relatively low number has remained stable over the last three years, with spcaLA taking custody of only 28%, 28% and 26% of animals needing placement in 2012, 2011 and 2010, respectively.

Why does ACS continue to de-emphasize adoptions from ACS when it euthanizes 74% of animals not taken by spcaLA and 53% of the animals it takes in? Current attitudes held by ACS administration appear to be the cause. ACS reports that implementing a robust adoption program would constitute redundancy in services vis à vis spcaLA and would result in competition between the two agencies.<sup>15</sup> **Unfortunately, this kind of regressive thinking has had disastrous results for the shelter animals in Long Beach.** By shunting the duty of pursuing adoptions off onto spcaLA, an organization which is neither overseen by nor accountable to ACS, ACS abdicates its responsibility to the people and animals of Long Beach. ACS needs to stop referring adopters to spcaLA and start working to increase adoptions for ACS animals. By making adoptions a priority, ACS would vastly increase the save rate of Long Beach's shelter animals. Rather than provide redundant services, ACS would provide *complementary* services – indeed *urgent* services for the more than 5,000 companion animals killed at the Long Beach shelter every year.

**Recommendation 3. Implement a comprehensive ACS adoption program to increase lifesaving capacity.**

ACS must therefore implement a **comprehensive adoption program** that includes:

- **Public-friendly adoption hours.** ACS needs to maintain public-friendly adoption hours that can accommodate potential adopters who cannot come in to adopt during the 9-5 work day. **Daily, expanded adoption hours that include evening and weekend hours are an absolutely essential component of a shelter program that takes seriously its public commitment to decreasing its euthanasia rate.**
- **Off-site adoptions.** ACS could substantially increase its adoption rate by taking a two pronged approach to off-site adoptions.
  - **Organizing offsite adoption events for ACS animals.** First, ACS needs to be proactive in organizing offsite adoption events that are **held on an ongoing basis on multiple days of the week** and that exclusively feature ACS animals. These could be held in many of the city's parks at a minimal cost. Such events would dramatically increase the exposure of Long Beach shelter animals to potential adopters and increase public awareness of the shelter and its

mission to rehome homeless pets. These events could be worked by volunteers supervised by a small number of ACS staff.

- **Participating as an adoption organization in multiple-group adoption events.** ACS needs to maximize its participation in multiple-group adoption events that occur in the city and most particularly in those that ACS sponsors or otherwise attends. Organizing and participating in off-site events would allow ACS to showcase shelter animals and bring them to the attention of the animal-loving and animal-adopting public. Such a program is absolutely key to maximizing adoptions of Long Beach shelter animals and must be an essential part of a comprehensive adoption program implemented by Long Beach Animal Care Services.

- **Social networking of adoptable animals.** Social networking has proven to be of immeasurable use to shelters across the nation as a tool for connecting potential adopters and companion animals. Though it has a Facebook page, ACS does not currently maximize its ability to use social media as a tool to reduce the number of animals euthanized at the shelter. Rather than featuring animals in need of adoption, the majority of ACS posts highlight animals that have already been adopted or taken in by rescue groups, effectively excluding from public consideration those animals at greatest risk who are still housed in the shelter. **Of 74 postings on the ACS Facebook page in July 2013, only 3 of them featured currently adoptable ACS animals.**<sup>16</sup> ACS needs to leverage the enormous capacity of Facebook and other social media tools to decrease the number of animals they euthanize by consistently highlighting animals that need adoption rather than those that have already been placed into adoption or rescue.

- **Creative marketing of adoptable animals.** ACS does creative marketing on a limited basis at this time; however, this capacity could be greatly expanded at little or no cost to the agency. Such efforts include frequent adoption promotions that highlight the positive aspects of shelter animals such as a "Black Tie Classics" event to promote adoptions of black cats and dogs or a "Mother's Day" promotion to highlight cats or dogs that have recently given birth (See Appendix A for examples of such promotions). These promotions can vastly increase the number of animals adopted from ACS, thereby decreasing the cost of housing the animals and ultimately, increasing the numbers of animals saved from death at the shelter.

- **Reduced adoption fees for all animals, especially at-risk animals.** Reducing adoption fees for all animals, especially at-risk animals, would make it possible for more people to adopt while continuing to ensure that potential adopters would provide a suitable home for the animal. The current adoption fee for both cats and dogs can be as high as \$109 at the Long Beach shelter. Furthermore, the addition of a cat licensing requirement in recent years has increased the adoption fee for cats, an already at-risk population at the Long Beach shelter: 75% of cats and 78% of kittens were euthanized at shelter in 2012. The addition of even a small licensing fee to the cost one must pay in order to adopt a cat can have an impact on cat adoption rates. Additionally, research has shown that licenses are no more effective than ID tags in returning animals to their

owners (Lord, Wittum, Ferketich, Funk & Rajala-Schulz, 2007). An analysis of ACS records bear this out. Of the animals returned to their owners in 2012, 6.6% had microchips, whereas only 1% were licensed. Furthermore, 1.5% of animals returned to owner had simple ID tags, demonstrating that licensing is not as effective as other practices in returning animals to their owners.

- **Mobile adoptions on multiple days of the week.** ACS does not currently engage in mobile adoptions. This option requires a greater investment, necessitating the purchase of a mobile adoption van; however, funds for such an enterprise, which would increase ACS's ability to increase the exposure of animals to potential adopters, could be amassed over time through fundraising efforts targeting private donors. Though this goal may be realized over the longer term, it is nonetheless one which could make an important difference to the lifesaving capacity of ACS. By taking animals to the public on multiple days of the week and making it convenient for people to adopt, the shelter can realize a significant increase in its save rate. Over time, the amount invested in this program could be offset by the benefits gained from increasing public awareness of responsible pet ownership practices, which would benefit the shelter and the community both socially and economically.

#### **Recommendation 4. Implement a large-scale volunteer program to staff lifesaving programs.**

ACS needs to establish a large-scale volunteer program that ACS can develop directly to actively build capacity to help animals currently impounded by ACS.

A vigorous volunteer program is absolutely key in realizing a majority of the programs described in this report. Volunteers provide the staffing for adoption events, recruit foster homes, staff help lines, assist in TNR efforts, socialize animals in-shelter, provide humane education, do continuous outreach for volunteers and educate the public about the needs of animals at the Long Beach shelter. To increase its capacity to implement lifesaving programs, ACS needs to take a proactive stance to recruiting volunteers by taking the following actions:

- **Place a link to the ACS volunteer application directly on the front page** of the shelter's website that is easy for volunteers to find.
- **Advertise volunteer opportunities** with ACS frequently on **websites** such as volunteermatch.org.
- **Publicize ACS volunteer opportunities at local businesses:** pet stores, veterinarians' offices, coffee shops and animal-related businesses and events within Long Beach, using positive, upbeat flyers that highlight the rewards of working with the shelter.

- **Widen the scope and type of skills the shelter seeks in volunteers** by recruiting people who can help in marketing, such as photographers,<sup>17</sup> graphic artists and writers; people who can help with organizing volunteers: people with management skills and community organizing experience; people who can offer expertise in setting up Trap-Neuter-Release programs, neonatal feeding programs and pet helplines (i.e., rescue organizations). All of these people exist in Long Beach, and many of them are animal lovers who are willing and able to help the shelter reduce the euthanasia rate by lending their professional expertise to the task. However, the shelter must provide the leadership in establishing these programs and providing the infrastructure within which volunteers can implement them.
- Contact **local universities** and **community colleges** and ask for assistance in finding student service groups who might be interested in making the Long Beach shelter the focus of their service efforts. California State University Long Beach has a website that is *specifically* set up to connect students to volunteer opportunities in fields involving animals—other local animal organizations have reached out to students to help their groups in this way. ACS could do the same, thereby increasing its capacity to implement programs that result in saving more animals at the Long Beach shelter.

The residents of Long Beach love animals – tapping into their abilities and passion for ending the killing of sheltered animals is a powerful method for reducing the killing in the Long Beach shelter. ACS needs to commit to building a strong volunteer program as a way to implement lifesaving programs at the Long Beach shelter.

**Recommendation 5. Establish a large-scale foster program to increase cage space and increase the number of animals adopted from the shelter.**

A vibrant foster program is one that engages in *ongoing* foster family recruitment through social media, city events, soliciting donations of advertising space from local publications and other means. Such an effort aimed at recruiting foster homes could easily be accomplished through a small team of volunteers and would result in significant cost savings to the agency.

ACS needs to establish its own foster program for ACS animals. A large-scale foster program implemented by ACS to serve the needs of the shelter animals housed at ACS would substantially decrease the number of animals euthanized at the shelter every year. In addition, it would transfer a portion of the costs of caring for the animals to the foster home, which would free up additional financial resources, allowing ACS to implement a variety of other lifesaving programs. Foster families should also be encouraged to find homes for the animals they foster. These adoptions could still be processed through ACS, using all the current accountability measures (e.g., adoption application and contract) to ensure the animals' welfare.

Furthermore, ACS should establish a “Foster until Adoption” program for people who surrender a found pet to ACS, cannot adopt it, but would like to help find it a home.

These steps taken together are a robust starting point for establishing a strong foster program – and these are steps that ACS, as holder of the public trust regarding shelter animals, needs to take.

**Recommendation 6. Implement a kitten fostering program with neonatal fostering capacity.**

In 2012, ACS euthanized 2,264 kittens – 78% of all kittens that entered the shelter. Kittens comprise by far the largest percentage of animals of any species ACS euthanizes, representing 44% of the total number of companion animals put to death. In 2012, nearly 700 of the kittens ACS euthanized were weaned and could have been placed in foster homes directly, had ACS operated a foster program. Clearly, the shelter would see immediate benefits from implementing a foster program designed to place kittens that are able to eat on their own with rescue organizations and volunteer foster homes in the community.

For unweaned kittens, the addition of a Neonatal Fostering Program to a Kitten Fostering Program would serve to decrease the number of newborn kittens that are euthanized at the shelter. ACS could easily accomplish this by:

- Recruiting rescue organizations to hold neonatal fostering workshops at the shelter and act as consultants for interested members of the community, who could, in turn, foster neonatals, thereby building community capacity for volunteering for the shelter and decreasing the number of kittens euthanized.
- Recruiting more local rescue organizations to do neonatal fostering themselves. Recruiting rescue organizations to perform some of these functions under the auspices of the shelter not only will reduce the number of kittens ACS euthanizes, it will also transfer the costs of caring for the animals to willing rescue organizations and community foster homes, which will allow ACS to put funds toward other programs to increase its lifesaving capacity.

**Recommendation 7. Implement a Trap Neuter Release (TNR) program to decrease the number of community cats euthanized at the shelter.**

Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) has been found to be an effective method of controlling free-roaming cat populations (Levy, Gale & Gale, 2003). TNR is a program via which community cats are humanely trapped, sterilized to prevent reproduction and then released at the site where they were picked up. Currently, no proactive, shelter-directed TNR program exists at the Long Beach shelter, though such a program would vastly improve ACS's save rate. ACS currently recognizes the efforts of a small, community organization comprised of dedicated volunteers that does TNR in Long Beach but ACS does not direct the group or have agreements establishing accountability with the group (ACS response to public records request, 5/20/13). ACS's stance leaves a crucial element of any lifesaving shelter program

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– a TNR program – to the benevolent work of outside organizations with limited resources, rather than taking a proactive stance to promote and implement large-scale TNR under its agency in the community.

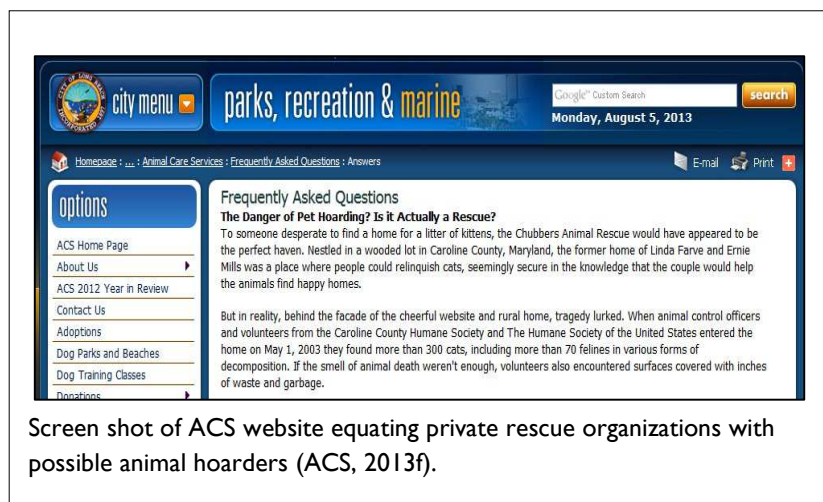
TNR programs are in line with the public's values regarding the humane treatment of cats. According to a study released by Harris Interactive and Alley Cat Allies, 81% of the American public believe that community cats should be allowed to live out their lives rather than be trapped and euthanized (Chu and Anderson, 2007). ACS needs to actively pursue a shelter-initiated and supported TNR program. The implementation of a TNR program would have saved 975<sup>18</sup> cats and kittens in Long Beach in 2012 alone – had one existed.

**Recommendation 8. Improve outreach to and relations with private rescue organizations.**

ACS must actively and continuously recruit animal rescue organizations to assist with placing animals into homes. This will save a significant number of animals and ACS could reduce costs spent on sheltering and euthanizing animals.

Of course, rescue organizations in Long Beach must be willing to work with ACS by accepting animals from the shelter. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of rescue organizations in Long Beach perceive that ACS takes a hostile stance toward rescue organizations.

This perception may be the result of increased regulations imposed on rescues by ACS in recent years, which require the following from rescue organizations: 501(c)(3) status, a Long Beach city business license, a background check, compliance with extensive reporting procedures for



Screen shot of ACS website equating private rescue organizations with possible animal hoarders (ACS, 2013f).

adoptions, and an animal transfer permit containing an inspection requirement allowing ACS to inspect premises where animals are held at any time and without notice (ACS, 2013c). Rescue organizations and their foster partners are also limited to the "four animals per household" ordinance (LBMC 51.21.210) that applies to all Long Beach residents. The purpose of such requirements is ostensibly to ensure the humane treatment of animals in the rescue organizations' care; however, rescue organizations that comply with these regulations may perceive ACS to be taking a punitive stance toward rescue organizations in



the absence of continued outreach and reassurance that ACS wishes to cooperate with rescues rather than merely regulate them.

The perception that ACS is unduly punitive with regard to rescue organizations may be reinforced by the way ACS chooses to portray rescue organizations in its outreach to the public, including an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) list on the ACS website that suggests that rescue organizations may be animal hoarders (see photo inset, p.22).

The requirement that rescue organizations and their foster partners comply with the four-animal-per-household limit in the city of Long Beach further limits rescue organizations' ability to do rescue work by placing a chokehold on those who are the most aptly placed and well-qualified to help the shelter reduce its euthanasia rate. This is particularly unfortunate in the case of cat rescue organizations—those dedicated to the animal population most urgently in need of intervention: kittens, with a 78% euthanasia rate.

Therefore, it is recommended that ACS do the following:

- **Improve outreach and communications.** Improve outreach and communications with local animal rescue organizations by continuously and actively reaching out to rescue organizations when animals are at risk of euthanasia through phone calls, e-mails and a 24-hour euthanasia list. ACS should also work to sustain this effort by continuously providing outreach to new rescue organizations to partner with. This will require a change in the culture and attitude at ACS to one that rejects an *a priori* view of rescue organizations as hoarders and recognizes the immense contributions made by rescue organizations in the city of Long Beach.
- **Waive fees.** Waive the fees that rescue organizations are charged to take an animal from ACS, given that such transfers reduce ACS's costs for sheltering, feeding and providing veterinary care for the animal.
- **Waive pet limits for rescue organizations.** Exempt private rescue organizations' foster homes from the four-animal-per-household limit with the clear understanding that such an exemption would *not* exempt those homes from noise and sanitation abatement laws, as well as cruelty, neglect, and other health and safety codes. The City of San Jose waives pet limits for animal rescue organizations that work with their city shelter as long as the animals are maintained in healthy, sanitary conditions.<sup>19</sup> The City of Long Beach should do the same.

Rescue organizations are among the most qualified entities to assist with lifesaving efforts. ACS has much to gain from working more cooperatively with these organizations, but such relationships must be promoted and nourished by ACS so that the community can work together to increase the save rate at the Long Beach shelter.

**Recommendation 9. Increase the number of high-volume low-cost spay/neuter surgeries.**

In 2012, ACS provided \$24,788 in city vouchers that residents used to reduce the cost of spay/neuter – the lowest amount dedicated to spay/neuter vouchers by ACS in the past 3 years. While the voucher program is a positive one that has proven popular with residents, there is much that ACS can and should do to increase the number of animals that are spayed and neutered in Long Beach. This includes:

- **Pursuing additional funding.** ACS should actively pursue additional funding for free/low-cost spay/neuter and for the voucher program through private donations.
- **Offering free spay/neuter clinics.** In the past year, ACS has funded a very small number of free spay/neuter clinics staffed and organized by a local group in the community, dedicating approximately \$10,000 to this effort in 2013 (ACS response to public records request, 7/9/13). ACS must make regular funding of free spay/neuter clinics organized by local groups a budget priority with the understanding that should the local group stop functioning, ACS will continue to fund, staff and operate frequent free spay/neuter clinics in Long Beach.
- **Offering mobile spay/neuter clinics.** ACS should make the purchase of a mobile spay/neuter clinic a budget priority. A mobile clinic could provide surgeries in areas of Long Beach that are currently underserved.
- **Establishing on-site spay/neuter capacity.** ACS should seek out funding for a low-cost spay/neuter surgical facility to be operated on the shelter premises.

**Recommendation 10. Increase public awareness and advocacy to gain support for shelter animals.**

The save rate of animals at ACS could be significantly increased if ACS were to increase the public's awareness of the animals kept at ACS and increase its public education and marketing efforts. A variety of programs could help ACS achieve this goal, the vast majority of which could be implemented by trained volunteers at little or no cost to the City. These programs include:

- **A public relations task force.** The creation of a multi-volunteer public-relations task force focused on promoting shelter needs, adoptable pets, and volunteer opportunities at the Long Beach shelter.
- **Public education materials.** The creation of materials that highlight the adoption and volunteer opportunities at the shelter, as well as the creation of an extensive file of public education materials that would be freely and regularly distributed to the community through city events and adoption events.

- **Outreach in languages other than English.** Long Beach is a diverse city. Outreach to *all* communities is crucial to increasing the save rate of animals in the Long Beach shelter. Such outreach would include website content offered in Spanish and translations of ACS public education materials (see above) into the many languages spoken in Long Beach. Translations could be done by volunteers recruited in the community.
- **Public education fairs.** The shelter should hold education fairs in all areas of the city on topics such as preventative care for animals, ways to address pet behavioral issues, and positive pet ownership practices.
- **Social media.** ACS needs to increase the visibility of ACS animals on the ACS website and social media. On ACS's website, the public is first directed to spcaLA animals. ACS needs to prioritize ACS animals on its webpage so that animals at risk of euthanasia have a greater chance of being adopted. On ACS's Facebook page, an extremely small percentage of postings highlight animals available for adoption through ACS, whereas a much larger percentage of postings focus on already-rescued or adopted animals. While highlighting success stories can be important, given a 53% euthanasia rate at the Long Beach shelter, it is clear that social media can and should be used more effectively by ACS to help place animals in homes and decrease the number of animals ACS euthanizes.

**Recommendation 11. Increase ACS's accountability and transparency to the public.**

The democratic ideals of our country place enormous value on the accountability and transparency of government. The principles of accountability and transparency apply to *all* levels of government, and no less to the City of Long Beach and ACS, to whom the public entrusts the welfare of its homeless animals. The City of Long Beach's website states that it is "committed to open and transparent government" (City of Long Beach, 2013.) If this is indeed true, the City of Long Beach must establish systems of accountability with regard to ACS so that the public is informed about what is happening to Long Beach's shelter animals. Doing so is crucial to gaining public support for the lifesaving programs the shelter implements and to maintaining the integrity in government the City of Long Beach values. ACS can begin this process by addressing two crucial areas:

- **Establish performance goals and strategic plans and make them publicly available.** To improve its performance, ACS must establish clear monthly and yearly performance goals with regard to lifesaving programs and create strategic plans to meet those goals. These goals and plans must be made publicly available through the ACS website. In addition, a year-end annual report detailing ACS's euthanasia numbers should be made available to the public through the ACS website. This would indicate whether ACS has been successful or not in meeting its goals and would outline changes in programs that need to be made to address areas needing improvement. These essential steps will improve the agency's accountability by requiring it to have clarity in its goals to save shelter animals' lives.

- **Practice transparency with numbers and procedures.** A growing number of cities across the nation, including Austin, Texas and Sacramento (City of Sacramento, 2013) have begun practicing transparency in numbers by posting them monthly on their websites. This increases their credibility with the public and wins public support for lifesaving programs and for the animals that the shelter serves. The City of Long Beach needs to do the same.

### **Recommendation 12. Establish a Citizens' Animal Advisory Commission.**

The City of Long Beach holds that “[d]emocracy can be realized when citizens are able to come together across neighborhood and economic lines to assist in making the community decisions that will shape all of their lives” (Long Beach City Clerk Department, 2013, p. 1). Accordingly, the citizens of Long Beach should have a forum for input on the state of the animals housed at the Long Beach shelter. It is therefore recommended that a Citizens' Animal Advisory Commission be established by an action of the Long Beach City Council. In accordance with principles of good government, this commission should be populated by a diverse group of community stakeholders, including private citizens, animal rescue organizations affiliated and not affiliated with the shelter, shelter volunteers, citizens supporting a No Kill community, and other concerned community members. This group will have the authority to act as part of a system of checks and balances to ensure that decisions made surrounding the Long Beach animal shelter reflect the values and priorities of the citizens of Long Beach.

### **Recommendation 13. Decrease owner surrenders and increase redemptions.**

A key component in decreasing the number of animals euthanized by ACS is decreasing owner surrenders of animals. Studies show that dogs and cats may be surrendered to a shelter because of perceived behavioral problems, and a number of studies have pointed out the utility of educating the public about how to address these problems (e.g. Scarlett, et al. 1999; Salman, et al., 2000). Personal issues experienced by the owner, such as difficulty finding pet-friendly housing and affordable veterinary care, may also lead to pet surrender. It is crucial, therefore, that ACS implement programs that help the public to solve behavioral issues and learn about animal-related resources to solve personal issues that can lead to pet surrender. **Many of these interventions can be done at very low cost.**

- **Implement an appointment system for owner surrenders.** The Humane Society of the United States has recently acknowledged that admitting animals into shelters only to kill them is inhumane, and the ASPCA and a coalition of other national humane groups have begun advocating for the implementation of appointment systems to drop off an animal at the shelter except if a shelter evaluation (done by phone) determines an imminent risk to the animal or community (HSUS, 2013; ASPCA Stakeholders Group, 2013). Combined with a strong component of education about alternatives to dropping off an animal at the

shelter, an appointment system would effectively reduce the number of animals ACS euthanizes, particularly cats.

- **Staff a telephone help line.** Create a telephone help line that people can call for advice regarding behavioral and owner-related issues that put animals at risk of being surrendered to the shelter. Such a help line can be staffed by a small number of knowledgeable volunteers recruited in the community (e.g., members of the veterinary community, rescue organizations and individuals trained by shelter staff).
- **Create web and print resources.** Compile a comprehensive library of web and print resources (e.g., pet-friendly rentals in Long Beach) to assist pet owners with behavioral and other challenges that lead to relinquishment, thereby increasing pet retention.
- **Counseling owners who surrender.** At the shelter itself, intake staff should counsel residents surrendering an animal to the shelter as to the animal's likelihood of being euthanized and educate them about other options that exist in the community in terms of relinquishment (e.g., tips on rehoming the animal themselves and contact information for local rescue organizations)<sup>20</sup> and resources in the community that might help them avoid relinquishment (e.g., animal food banks, low-cost veterinary clinics, landlords that offer pet-friendly housing).
- **Reduce redemption fees.** Currently, it can cost between \$154 and \$259<sup>21</sup> for pet owners to redeem a lost pet that has been turned in to ACS. Such large redemption fees can be a significant stumbling block for owners wishing to retrieve their pets once the animal has been turned in to the shelter. Owners who cannot afford the fees required by ACS to redeem their pet face the very real possibility that their pet will be euthanized. With a euthanasia rate exceeding 53%, there is little justification for such policies. ACS should significantly reduce the fees required to redeem an animal from impound at the shelter, and, rather than put in place punitive financial measures to motivate responsibility with pets, launch public education campaigns to educate the public about ways to avoid losing their pets in the first place (e.g., the importance of good fencing, keeping animals inside at night or on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, etc.). While ACS may experience some decrease in revenue by not imposing excessive fines on people who have lost their pets, these potential losses could be partially offset by the decrease in the cost of sheltering a lost animal and euthanizing it.

**Recommendation 14. Take proactive steps to implement locally-responsive lifesaving programs.**

Other shelters in the US that have implemented lifesaving programs have thought outside of the box to find solutions to their problems. For example, Austin, Texas, in addition to implementing many of the programs outlined in this report, implemented two simple programs in response to their local context. ACS could easily implement these programs at no extra cost:

- **Call Before Killing (CBK) policy:** This allows an owner or person in the community who surrenders an animal and wants to be the last resort to prevent the animal from being killed to put a "Call Before Killing" hold on the animal.
- **24-Hour Kill List Hold:** ACS should create a euthanasia list 24 hours prior to the animals' final day and circulate the list to rescue organizations.

ACS must develop the capacity to tailor its responses to the problem of homeless animals to the local context. This means that shelter leadership must be aware of and regularly analyze shelter data, note problematic patterns that arise from the data and, most importantly, create solutions that respond to the problems identified. This requires more than simply following a list of recommendations: it means taking a proactive stance to lifesaving and taking the initiative to find new ways to approach old problems. In short, it requires putting into place, at a minimum, the programs of the No Kill Equation and seeking out ways to continually improve practices with the goal of reaching a 90% save rate (see Appendix B for a full list of the programs that make up the No Kill Equation).

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### **Good plan, but how do we pay for all of this?**

These recommendations have the potential to transform the way Long Beach does animal sheltering and could make Long Beach a leader in the nation in the municipal sheltering of animals. That sounds great, but won't doing this all cost a lot of money? The answer is no. The City of Austin did not increase the budget or funding for Austin Animal Services when it made the transition to No Kill. Austin's successful transition was accomplished by re-allocating resources from ineffective programs to effective, lifesaving programs, by forging community partnerships and by mobilizing a large group of dedicated volunteers to provide the staffing for these programs.

Most of the recommendations made in this report can be done at very low to no cost by volunteers – fostering animals, staffing adoption events, improving social networking, increasing outreach to rescue organizations, answering telephone help lines, improving web resources, counseling owners who wish to surrender, recruiting more volunteers – all of these programs are very low cost to implement and can become no cost with ACS's commitment to making volunteers a crucial part of the equation. **Implemented comprehensively by volunteers, these programs can vastly increase the number of animals saved at the shelter at virtually no additional cost.**

### **The Role of Volunteers**

Volunteers are the life force of a shelter, providing the staffing for many if not most of the programs discussed in this report; however, the public must be mobilized to want to work at the shelter. A 2011 study commissioned by PetSmart Charities found that 32% of the public find their city shelter "sad" or "depressing." How does Austin, Texas consistently attract hundreds of hard-working volunteers to their shelter month after month? They committed to

a No Kill course of action – they committed to saving all healthy and treatable animals that came to their shelter. In other words, they made it their mission to put the programs in place that would save more than 90% of the animals in their community. And they did it – in just 11 months. For the past two years, they have maintained a 90% save rate, reaching a total live outcome rate of 93% in August, 2013. Declaring No Kill is a crucial part of the equation – it transforms the way people in the community perceive the shelter – they no longer find it sad and depressing – and it motivates them to work harder to solve what is truly a community problem. The importance of the shelter's commitment to a No Kill mission cannot be overstated.

### **Why this report and why now?**

This report was prepared by members of Stayin' Alive Long Beach, an organization dedicated to increasing the save rate at Long Beach Animal Care Services by advocating for the implementation of the No Kill Equation (see Appendix B). It has as its root a request in spring of 2012 made by Stayin' Alive Long Beach to ACS, asking ACS to participate in Just One Day, a nation-wide event in which both city and private shelters pledge not to euthanize animals for "just one day" and instead engage in additional efforts to find homes. It is a day on which both public and private shelters can explore alternatives and experiment with the No Kill Equation to see how local solutions to the problem of homeless pets can be implemented. In 2012, ACS declined to participate in the event.

In 2013, Stayin' Alive Long Beach submitted an online petition containing more than 500 signatures asking for ACS to pledge to halt euthanasias for Just One Day on June 11, 2013. SALB also met with the Manager of ACS to discuss the elements of the No Kill Equation. As they had the year before, ACS declined to participate in the event and sent an e-mail to Stayin' Alive Long Beach stating "we feel that we already have several of the programs in place that the 'No-Kill' philosophy endorses" (E-mail from ACS management to SALB dated June 11, 2013).

As this report demonstrates using information released from ACS itself, ACS has no foster program, no comprehensive adoption program, no safety net for neonatal animals, no TNR program, limited outreach to rescues, and an extremely small volunteer program. In addition, it has radically decreased funding to the spay/neuter voucher program over the past three years and engages in questionable reporting practices to the public that inflate the agency's actual save rate. ACS also artfully gave lip service but ultimately no results to a coalition of animal welfare groups in Long Beach that attempted to bring similar changes to ACS some years ago. ACS has a long record of resisting positive change that would improve its lifesaving capacity. Given these facts, there seems to be ample room to doubt ACS's credibility and sincerity with respect to its commitment to the animal-loving public in Long Beach and to Long Beach's shelter animals.

In the final analysis, the one and only responsible criterion for evaluating the performance of any animal shelter is the number of animals that leave the shelter through the front door. Over the course of Stayin' Alive Long Beach's examination of ACS's records, we have seen

ACS make some small improvements in its programs, which the agency has assiduously promoted on its website (ACS, 2013e). However, the agency's continued resistance to putting into place *comprehensive* lifesaving programs on an *ongoing* basis is the number one reason why ACS euthanizes more than 53% of shelter animals. It is up to the citizens of Long Beach to be the voice for the voiceless – the more than 5,000 companion animals euthanized at the Long Beach shelter every year – and demand that ACS put in place 21<sup>st</sup> century lifesaving programs that have been proven to increase save rates across the nation.

### **Finally...**

The problem of abandoned and homeless animals in Long Beach is not going to go away. However, programs currently exist that have increased save rates to 90% in over 160 communities across the nation (Houser, 2013). The city of Long Beach, where residents have an abiding love of animals, is extremely well-positioned to leverage the public goodwill to achieve significant, sustainable, positive changes in the way animals are sheltered in Long Beach *if elected officials will take the initiative to do so*. This report outlines a small part of the work that must be done by City and ACS officials to change the landscape for shelter animals in Long Beach. It is not unreasonable for concerned citizens to insist that change happen, that it happen in a transparent and principled way and that such work must involve a true and real commitment by Long Beach Animal Services to work proactively and transparently to end the killing of healthy and treatable animals at the Long Beach animal shelter. The goal of this report has been to pave the way for this transformation to happen.

### **About Stayin' Alive Long Beach**

Stayin' Alive Long Beach is an initiative that works to promote an end to the unnecessary killing of healthy and treatable animals in the Long Beach Animal Care Services shelter. We accomplish this by advocating for the implementation of the No Kill Equation: responsible, humane, cost-effective policies and programs that will reduce the shelter population and increase adoption rates. It is our goal to see Long Beach Animal Care Services comprehensively implement these policies of responsible municipal sheltering to make Long Beach a safer place for animals and for humans. This new model of sheltering, based on innovative, non-lethal programs and services, has proven effective in progressive cities across the nation, leading to save rates of 90% and above. Stayin' Alive Long Beach works to create a similar benefit to the people and the animals of Long Beach, CA. Ultimately, Stayin' Alive Long Beach has as its mission to make Long Beach a No Kill city. For more information about the No Kill movement in Long Beach, please visit our website at [www.stayinalivelongbeach.org](http://www.stayinalivelongbeach.org).



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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Live release and euthanasia rates were calculated using Chameleon records furnished by ACS. Chameleon is a software case management system used by animal shelters in tracking their intakes and outcomes. Calculated rates were verified using methods established by the Asilomar Accords, an industry standard for the calculation of such rates.

<sup>2</sup> Long Beach Animal Care Services euthanized 5,897 animals if what shelter records call "other" animals are counted. These include 775 ferrets, snakes, reptiles, fish, turtles, birds and unspecified species of wildlife. The omission of rabbits from the list provided by ACS is unusual, but may be attributed to administrative error. The focus of this report is on cats, kittens, dogs and puppies; however, the large number of deaths of other animals at ACS is also cause for concern.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for an overview of the No Kill Equation.

<sup>4</sup> Open-admission shelters are those shelters which accept all animals from the community, regardless of breed, health condition, age, adoptability or other considerations.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of the word "euthanasia" is "the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy." In deference to current use, the words "euthanized" and "euthanasia" are used throughout this report; however, because the majority of animals put to death by ACS are indeed healthy or savable animals, we point out that the term "euthanasia" is wholly inaccurate in this context.

<sup>6</sup> Data prior to 2010 were not analyzed for this report.

<sup>7</sup> spcaLA operates a shelter next door to ACS, and the two shelters maintain a landlord-lessee relationship.

<sup>8</sup> SALB-ACS meeting, 5/24/13; E-mail from ACS management to SALB, 6/11/13.

<sup>9</sup> Over the past 7 months as SALB has conducted this research, ACS has backed down on its claim to be the safest large city for animals and people and now says on its website that its goal is to *become* the safest large city for animals (ACS, 2013a). We look forward to seeing ACS establish true transparency in the future as to the actual disposition of shelter animals in Long Beach.

<sup>10</sup> SALB received this response about volunteers on March 5, 2013. On April 18, SALB re-submitted this question and on May 20 received a much different answer from ACS – in the space of a less than three months, the shelter had apparently increased the number and types of tasks volunteers were permitted to do to include "socializing, introducing to potential adopters, grooming, exercising, training, photographing and online networking." This represents a small improvement; however, the number of volunteers recruited to accomplish these tasks needs to increase, and off-site adoptions and other activities must be added to the list of tasks they are permitted to perform.

<sup>11</sup> A 2007 study of methods used to return lost dogs to their owners found that animal licenses had no greater effect on assuring the return of a lost dog to his/her owners than a simple personal ID tag (Lord, L., Wittum, T., Ferketich, A., Funk, J. and Rajala-Schulz, P., 2007).

<sup>12</sup> This number does not include spcaLA.

<sup>13</sup> Many of these recommendations are based on the No Kill Equation; however, the list has been modified to tailor the recommendations to the specific local context. The No Kill Equation provides guidelines for the minimum response of a shelter to the community which it serves. Much more can

and should be done beyond the guidelines provided by the No Kill Equation to remedy the problem of homeless animals in Long Beach.

<sup>14</sup> Austin has also committed to a No Kill policy, meaning it only euthanizes animals that are irremediably suffering. This codifies its commitment to pursuing the No Kill Equation and has no doubt played a key role in garnering the immense public support for the shelter that has allowed it to reach a 90% save rate for two consecutive years.

<sup>15</sup> SALB-ACS meeting, 5/24/13; E-mail from ACS management to SALB, June 11, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Page accessed on July 27, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> In the past year, a professional photographer has begun working with ACS; however, more such volunteers are needed, as numerous animals on the shelter's Pet Harbor site still appear in unflattering photos taken upon intake, when the animals are fearful and photograph poorly.

<sup>18</sup> ACS euthanized 975 cats deemed feral in 2012 (ACS response to public records request, 3/5/13).

<sup>19</sup> Remark made by Jon Cicirelli, Director, San Jose Animal Care & Services, California Sheltering Report Stakeholder's Listening Tour, September 19, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> ACS currently features a majority of non-local purebred animal rescue organizations on their website as resources for people considering relinquishing their pets (ACS, 2013d). The justification for this is unclear, as people who seek to relinquish a pet are not likely to consult an out-of-area rescue organization for help, and breed rescue organizations do not specialize in the rehoming of non-purebred animals.

<sup>21</sup> These numbers are based on amounts provided by ACS in response to a public records request (5/20/13) and include an impound fee of \$37, vaccinations and deworming fees of up to \$40, licensing fees of up to \$90, an unaltered citation fee of \$35, a microchipping fee of \$25, board and keep fees of \$18 per day and "any other medical expenses incurred at the shelter," making an upper limit of \$259 a modest estimate, as board and keep and veterinary fees could potentially increase this number significantly. Such fees are prohibitive for large numbers of Long Beach's citizens and the imposition of such fees very likely increases the number of animals ACS euthanizes.

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Appendix A: Creative Marketing of Companion Animals: Examples

Nevada Humane Society

### All Dressed Up and No Where to Go!


September 17-27



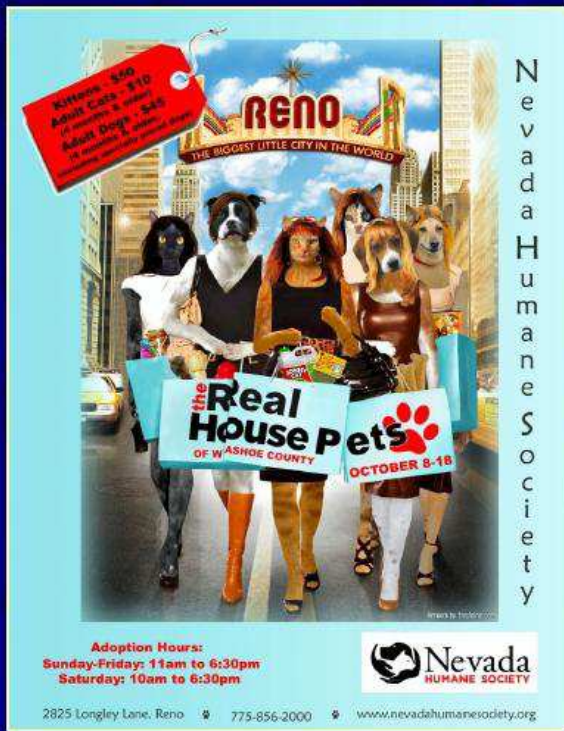
**Adoption Fees:**  
\$30 Kittens  
\$10 Adult Cats (4 months and older)  
\$40 Adult Dogs (4 months and older, excluding specially priced dogs)

Come see our beautiful black and black and white combination dogs and cats. They are dressed to the nines and awaiting that special date to go to their new homes.


**Adoption Hours:**  
Sunday-Friday: 11am-6:30pm  
Saturday: 10am-6:30pm



2825 Longley Lane, Reno • 775-856-2000 • www.nevadahumane.org



**Adoption Hours:**  
Sunday-Friday: 11am to 6:30pm  
Saturday: 10am to 6:30pm



2825 Longley Lane, Reno • 775-856-2000 • www.nevadahumane.org

Nevada Humane Society

**Appendix B: The No Kill Equation** (Winograd, 2009, p.1)

The mandatory programs and services of the No Kill Equation include:

**I. Feral Cat TNR Program**

Many communities throughout the United States are embracing Trap-Neuter-Release programs (TNR) to improve animal welfare, reduce death rates, and meet obligations to public welfare.

**II. High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay/Neuter**

Low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter will quickly lead to fewer animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives.

**III. Rescue Groups**

An adoption or transfer to a rescue group frees up scarce cage and kennel space, reduces expenses for feeding, cleaning, killing, and improves a community's rate of lifesaving. In an environment of millions of dogs and cats killed in shelters annually, rare is the circumstance in which a rescue group should be denied an animal.

**IV. Foster Care**

Volunteer foster care is crucial to No Kill. Without it, saving lives is compromised. It is a low cost, and often no cost, way of increasing a shelter's capacity, improving public relations, increasing a shelter's public image, rehabilitating sick and injured or behaviorally challenged animals, and saving lives.

**V. Comprehensive Adoption Programs**

Adoptions are vital to an agency's lifesaving mission. The quantity and quality of shelter adoptions is in shelter management's hands, making lifesaving a direct function of shelter policies and practice. If shelters better promoted their animals and had adoption programs responsive to the needs of the community, including public access hours for working people, offsite adoptions, adoption incentives, and effective marketing, they could increase the number of homes available and replace killing with adoptions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, shelters can adopt their way out of killing.

**VI. Pet Retention**

While some of the reasons animals are surrendered to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if shelters are willing to work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving animals requires communities to develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. And the more a community sees its shelters as a place to turn for advice and assistance, the easier this job will be.

**VII. Medical and Behavior Programs**

In order to meet its commitment to a lifesaving guarantee for all savable animals, shelters need to keep animals happy and healthy and keep animals moving through the system. To do this, shelters must put in place comprehensive vaccination, handling, cleaning,

socialization, and care policies before animals get sick and rehabilitative efforts for those who come in sick, injured, unweaned, or traumatized.

### **VIII. Public Relations/Community Involvement**

Increasing adoptions, maximizing donations, recruiting volunteers and partnering with community agencies comes down to one thing: increasing the shelter's public exposure. And that means consistent marketing and public relations. Public relations and marketing are the foundation of all a shelter's activities and their success. To do all these things well, the shelter must be in the public eye.

### **IX. Volunteers**

Volunteers are a dedicated "army of compassion" and the backbone of a successful No Kill effort. There is never enough staff, never enough dollars to hire more staff, and always more needs than paid human resources. That is where volunteers make the difference between success and failure and, for the animals, life and death.

### **X. Proactive Redemptions**

One of the most overlooked areas for reducing killing in animal control shelters are lost animal reclaims. Primarily shifting from passive to a more proactive approach—has proven to have a significant impact on lifesaving and allow shelters to return a large percentage of lost animals to their families.

### **XI. A Compassionate Director**

The final element of the No Kill Equation is the most important of all, without which all other elements are thwarted—a hard working, compassionate animal control or shelter director not content to continue killing, while regurgitate tired clichés or hiding behind the myth of "too many animals, not enough homes."