

AAF DATA TASK FORCE
NOVEMBER 1, 2008

The meeting began at 8:45 PM. Present were

Marie Wheatley, President, American Humane Association
Mallory Hudgins, Graduate Student CSU
Theresa Geary, Vice President for Operations, Dumb Friends League
David Wintz, Director of Operations, Larimer County Humane Society
Bob Rohde, President, Dumb Friends League
Joan Casey, Program Officer, Animal Assistance Foundation
David Gies, Executive Director, Animal Assistance Foundation
Julie Wolf, Statistician, OSI Pharmaceuticals
Sarah Timms, Volunteer
Kevin Morris, Consultant, Animal Assistance Foundation

Our purpose for meeting was to; 1) explore in detail the reasons that might explain trends identified in the charts that were presented and; 2) support, verify, or disclaim interpretations of data.

Kevin Morris began by reviewing the mechanics for creating the statistical analysis worksheets and subsequent charts. Two studies were presented. The first consists of PACFA filings from 104 shelters from across the state that have consistently reported from 2000 through 2007. This data was analyzed as a single statewide group and as Front Range and Rural subgroups. The second study combines CAFWA and PACFA filings from four major metro Denver shelters from 1989 through 2007. Four Topics comprising 1) dog intake and euthanasia; 2) cat intake and euthanasia; 3) dog and cat adoptions and 4) dog and cat transfers were presented.

Topic 1 Dog intake and euthanasia

The trend in dog intake has declined on a per capita basis across the state, but the number per 1000 population remains higher in rural counties. There has been a 45% decrease in the intake trend during the 18 years of that study. The trend for dog euthanasia is flat statewide on a per capita basis, but is decreasing in the rural communities. There has been a 76% decrease on a per capita basis in metro Denver that parallels the trend in intake.

- *What accounts for the decreasing dog intake per capita?* Over the last seven years steady, continuing and ongoing efforts to sterilize dogs has decreased supply. Between AAF, Summerlee and other organizations, it's estimated that approximately \$300 thousand is devoted to subsidizing spay/neuter programs throughout Colorado every year.
- *Why is the intake per capita so much higher in the rural communities than along the Front Range?* Rural communities are less regulated for pet ownership and breeding. Neighborhoods are less dense than in urban settings providing for larger yards, property and open space adjacent to homes and farm residences. Certain breeds, such as pit bulls, are forced out of urban areas because they are perceived as dangerous and regulated under laws prohibiting or discouraging their ownership. Awareness among city dwellers that homeowners insurance and underwriters do not cover liability for dangerous dog ownership. More animals are purposefully bred and randomly breeding in rural areas of Colorado... Education efforts about companion animal overpopulation remedies are not prevalent leading to a high number of canines thus more animals eventually making their way to animal shelters.
- *Given that there were no changes in the trends in transfer or returns-to-owner and a 12% decrease in the number of adoptions in the Rural subgroup, what accounts for the decrease in euthanasia on a per capita basis in the rural counties?* Data may be incomplete because much of the

PACFA data that is missing are small programs in rural locations that come and go. The reason the four urban shelters were selected, i.e., Dumb Friends League, Table Mountain, Aurora and Denver Municipal was because there were no anomalies in operations. By comparison, there used to be extreme transfers taking place in Adams County where one person was taking 100's of animals out of the shelter. Also, if all Dumb Friends League's transfers were included there would be a change in the data. The number of puppies is really coming down. Shelters do not see many puppies. Five or 10 years ago there were a lot of them. Spay/neuter education is making an impact. There is good awareness for what responsible pet ownership means. Larimer County has been forward thinking and their strong animal control presence has made a difference. Last year Dumb Friends League had 1800 puppies. 800 were transferred in. "It use to be we would have 150 puppies and euthanized 100 on the next day. Now puppies last forty-five minutes."

- Recommended to analyze newspapers, Craig's List, Feed Stores and count adds for free or puppies for sale - the "free to good homes" ads. When Petfinder.com came on line adoptions in New York City increase 40%.
- The number of incoming dogs is decreasing and the "quality of dogs" affects adoption. There are demographic changes, again population, moving from single family homes to condos.
- People are more willing to take on "sexy" dogs and kittens for different reasons. The Gustav kittens are an example.
- We aren't seeing a significant increase in relinquishment or strays due to foreclosures. We aren't seeing them in droves. The Iraq war also caused some relinquishment of pets when the owners were deployed so there are always going to be issues affecting relinquishment.
- There was a comment about equine mares; CSU is seeing more people wanting to relinquish them.
- *Was there an event that might account for the dips in the numbers of both dog and cat euthanasia that occurred in 2004? The "2004 dip phenomenon".* For DFL 2004 was one of the highest years for adoptions and the year the Buddy Center opened. That year the Buddy Center had 800 over the counter strays and 330 owner relinquished animals.
- In 2007, over the counter "owner relinquished" kittens was 1156. Over the counter strays were 1775, so there were more stray kittens than owned. This is consistent with Larimer County. People are reluctant to be honest about where the kittens came from. "Stray" may be a misnomer.
- The correlation between intake and euthanasia is causal. The more intake the more euthanasia.

Topic 2: Cat intake and euthanasia

The trends in cat intake have increased substantially (~24%) across the Front Range but not in the rural counties on a per capita basis. Two models fit the data for metro Denver cat intake per 1000 residents. In the first, there is a steady decline of 54% over the entire 18 years, while in the second, there is a decline of 55% during the first 11 years followed by an increase of 16% over the last 7 years. Cat euthanasia has increased statewide and in the Front Range on a per capita basis. It remains higher but unchanged in the rural communities. Again, there are two models for the trends in cat euthanasia in the metro Denver study that parallel the intake models. In the first, there is a steady decrease of 74%, while in the second, there is an initial decrease of 81% followed by an increase of 28%..

- Larimer County, cats are a continuing challenge. Daylight affects cats' breeding cycle. In Larimer County most kittens come from barns or are left behind—they use to be owned but are now strays. The straight trend line is not explaining the dip.
- *Why are the cat intake and euthanasia trends increasing in the Front Range and not the rural communities?*

The group talked about RTO and why the RTO rate should be figured from stray intake and not include relinquishments. The Buddy Center has a RTO of 90% for

strays. Boulder's RTO percent would be higher but some animals go to Longmont, confusing this data point. The 25% rate of RTO reported is not actually accurate. It can not be validated with what we know now. The new 2008 PACFA report year will segregate RTO data. However, the new form will not report "puppies" and "kittens" using instead old labels of "dog" and "cat" resulting in capturing both adult and juvenile data together.

- *Why do the rural shelters have much higher rates of cat euthanasia?* Cats are not valued. Less oversight of cats. More free roaming "hunter" cats causing more litters.
- *Which of the two models for cat intake and euthanasia trends in the Metro Denver Study best fits the anecdotal evidence?* The model showing the dip in trends is more descriptive than the single line.

Topic 3: Dog and cat adoption

The trends in dog adoption have decreased by 16% and 12% on a per capita basis in the statewide and metro Denver studies respectively. There have been no changes in the adoption of cats on a per capita basis in either study.

- *Why are dog adoptions per capita decreasing across the state? What has affected the increase in the trend in the rate of dog adoption in the Metro Denver area? Why are the trends in cat adoption per capita flat across the state? Is there a possible downward trend in the Metro Denver cat adoption rate starting in 2002?* Dog adoptions are decreasing across the state because spay/neuter programs are slowing the supply of animals. Transfers of dogs into the Metro Denver area increase because of demand. Shelters need younger dogs to bring people into their buildings. Puppies are loss leader advertising. "We use puppies to get people in and sell them on the idea of an adult animal." Also, lifestyle changes and an aging population have changed the market for dog adoptions. Cats and small dogs are more suitable for condo living.

Topic 4: Dog and cat transfers

Dog transfers per 1000 residents have increased both statewide and in metro Denver.

While the trend is unchanged in rural communities, the number remains higher than in the Front Range. Cat transfers per capita have increased 10-fold faster in rural communities than in the Front range (850% versus 88% increases respectively).

Why are the trends in dog and cat transfers in the Front Range increasing so dramatically? Why is the trend in cat transfers out of the rural communities increasing? Where are the Front Range Shelters transferring animals?

- About Dogs: Everything we expected has not been supported. It was thought that transfers would come from rural shelters transferring to the Front Range. This is all transfer-out not transfer-in. The opposite is happening. This might be a factor of larger shelters moving animals to other urban shelters. DFL transferred 400 dogs to All Breed Rescue and Boulder Humane.
- Rural areas transferred out 1500. The PACFA form counts animals "out" not animals "in." This may be rectified on next year's form. Life Line Puppy Rescue may skew the statistic in Denver. They move a lot of puppies. There is also a feeling that "I care more than you care" meaning rescues hold on to animals because they don't trust others to adopt out their inventory—"because I don't know who you are going to place the animals with".
- DFL transferred out 245 dogs with major behavior problems. DFL transferred in 519 dogs with behavior problems. Know that by relinquishing some, more can be saved. "Do you save one or do you save five?"
- About Cats: "I have no idea" was one answer to the questions about cat transfers. Adams County transfers out many. A couple of facilities make a big difference for transferring "in" and "out". Adams County and Brighton both transfer to Every Creature Counts.
- In other communities, notably New York City, PetFinder.com increased adoptions 40% (Theresa Geary). The DFL has experienced animals returned to owners

because people were checking Craig's list. Monitoring newspaper ads, feed lots, Craig's list, these are all resources that should be watched for "free puppy" ads and "puppies for sale".

- Sarah Timms offered comparisons to the United Kingdom where networking is emphasized. FabCat and Catprotection reach 50,000 adoptions per year in the UK through networking. And there is the RSPCA of course. Need a FabCat in the United States.
- Regarding branding, in Great Britain, the Blue Cross was also known as Our Dumb Friends League. Blue Cross helped war animals and was the name sake to the Dumb Friends League in Denver. Berlin, Germany has some of the highest pet ownership in the world and very few unwanted pets. Scandinavia doesn't even really have animal shelters.
- Noted: the importance of capturing data for extreme population growth in Colorado. Also, to note issues and factors of cultural diversity.

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