

Darcie Barnes, DVM, MPVM



232 Willow Drive • Solvang, CA 93463 • Phone: 805 448-3649 •
E-Mail: darciedb@aol.com

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Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
c/o Clerk of the Board
105 E. Anapamu Street
Room 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors:

My name is Darcie Barnes and I am the only veterinarian currently serving on the Animal Services Oversight Team. I worked full time from July 1993 until February 2014 in Santa Barbara County humane societies and animal shelters. I was Director of Veterinary Services at Santa Barbara Humane Society for 12 years, was the first full time veterinarian at the new Santa Maria Shelter for 3 years, and worked as the sole veterinarian at Santa Ynez Valley Humane Society for 6 years. For 4 years, I worked one day a week at Animal Services in Santa Maria, and am currently working on an “as needed basis” for Animal Services. When I was employed full time at the Santa Maria Shelter I regularly rotated between Santa Maria, Lompoc and also had intermittent duties at the Santa Barbara Shelter both with the dogs and at ASAP.

Since my practice has been exclusively in animal shelters and humane societies, my training and expertise is also in this area. In addition to my veterinary role, I have been involved in nearly every aspect of sheltering during my career: administration, shelter management, operations, volunteer management, and training.

I have also volunteered. I am a former Board member for the Santa Ynez Valley Humane Society (10 years) and am a current Board member for ResQcats (about 7 years).

When I began working at the Santa Barbara Humane Society in 1993, Santa Barbara County Animals Services had been drifting for some time. There was a new Director nearly every year and only one of them had real animal experience. In my opinion, the public and animals of Santa Barbara County were poorly served by the constant change.



During that time at the Santa Barbara shelter volunteer groups provided some shelter staffing, stability and donated funds for the animals in need. In fact, for quite a few years, the volunteer groups (ASAP, DAWG and BUNS) were the dominant force at the Santa Barbara shelter because of their commitment, experience and continual presence. Ultimately the County went to MOU's with the groups to further define their role. This system continued for some years until the MOU's were discarded and the current system came into being. I was an interested observer through all the changes.

As an outsider working at the Santa Barbara Humane Society, I believed conflicts between the Animal Services volunteer groups and the Animal Services staff arose because no clear chain of command was ever established. The volunteer groups were extremely protective of their role and resented anyone (new directors) trying to assume control over the operation of the Santa Barbara Shelter. The volunteer groups often took their complaints directly to the public and the Board of Supervisors rather than work within the Animal Services structure, and, according to BUNS and DAWG, often worked behind the scenes to oust Animal Services Directors. Animal Services staff sometimes felt attacked by some volunteers and unheard by an administration that seemed to preferentially support the volunteer groups who provided essential funding.

In the meantime, the Lompoc and Santa Maria Shelters continued to operate without the influx of funds and volunteers seen in Santa Barbara and this added discontent to the relationships between the shelters. What was particularly resented was the perception that wonderful animals that could have been saved with additional funds and volunteers in North County were euthanized rather than being transferred to Santa Barbara where the resources were greater.

When Jan Glick was hired to be Director of Animal Services, many of us from the animal welfare field outside of Animal Services were extremely glad. She had animal welfare experience, she had management experience and she had the passion for protecting and helping animals combined with a desire to protect the public, and was well thought of in the animal welfare community. She was also educated, active and up-to-date in her field and committed to improving animal services and incorporating volunteer groups.

In my opinion Jan has done an excellent job of improving and growing Animal Services given her particular challenges. In particular, she has created a much more professional and up-to-date organization. There have been tremendous improvements in Animal Services overall since she became Director, especially in North County.



Nonetheless, although the situation with ASAP and BUNS improved considerably with Jan in charge (although there were still conflicts) and both organizations were appreciated, valued and relied upon, there has continued to be ongoing friction with the Santa Barbara dog volunteer groups both inside and outside the shelter. Although I am not an accountant, I believe the relationship with the dog groups has likely cost the County thousands of dollars in staff time directly related to the conflicts and thousands of dollars related to the gossip, ill-will, staff stress, turnover and distraction that the conflict has created. It has also created an undeserved picture in the local public eye of how well Animal Services is doing. In the larger animal welfare world, Santa Barbara County Animal Services is known as a good shelter that has some of the most contentious dog volunteers ever.

When I learned that AHA was going to review Animal Services, I was quite happy. All shelters benefit from outside review because no shelter has been able to keep up with the changes in our field and an objective opinion is always valuable. During the last 25 years, driven by the veterinary, shelter and animal advocacy communities, animal sheltering has changed profoundly for the better. We live in one of the areas where changes began happening soonest. Nationally, shelters from the Northeast and West Coasts were among the first areas to start putting new ideas into practice and I was interested to see how AHA thought we were doing.

Some shelter reviews by AHA and other consultants are scathing and occasionally have resulted in immediate shelter closures until problems are resolved. The SB County Animal Services review wasn't one of those. Overall, I thought the report was positive. AHA pointed out many areas where SB County is doing things right and many areas where improvements should and could be made.

I was (and am) grateful and pleased to be included on the Animal Oversight Team. I hoped I could be more objective than some and thought I could represent the animal welfare community at large, while still having specific knowledge about Santa Barbara County Animal Services.

I think the Oversight Team process has been very productive, and many areas have been addressed, but we still have to cover some of the touchiest subjects. We started with the easier topics to make rapid progress early on and to give us time to develop trust, cooperation and open communication among ourselves. The improved relationships are a work in progress but I think real progress has been made and a sense of community created as we work toward the goals you set for us.

With one exception, I have been particularly impressed with the willingness and adaptability of the staff and volunteer groups to commit themselves to improve Animal Services and the relationships



between the groups. Although not everyone agrees every time, we can usually come to consensus and move forward. Although tweaking is still needed, I am particularly pleased that Animal Services will be formalizing the relationships between BUNS, ASAP, and the Animal Care Foundation. This should simplify and expedite communications and benefit the animals and people of Santa Barbara County.

The situation with DAWG seems to be taking a different course. I have found Shirley Jansen's (DAWG) participation on the Oversight Team to be generally inflexible, accusatory and demeaning toward Animal Services and the staff. Although she has some good ideas and experience and I think it was important to include DAWG in the current AHA Oversight Team, I believe her views are so fixed and self-righteous as to be obstructive and her attacks on Animal Services and the staff to be as intolerable as they were when DAWG was partially controlling the Santa Barbara shelter in the 90's. I don't see much growth on DAWG's part between now and the past.

In conclusion, I think the Oversight Team has made, and continues to make, positive progress. There is still a gap between creation and implementation as ideas are translated into reality. It takes more time than I like for the changes to be created, implemented and absorbed at all levels by the entire Animal Service organization, but I think we are getting there. I hope you think we are getting there, too.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in the process and feel free to contact me if you think that would be helpful.

Sincerely,

Darcie Barnes, DVM, MPVM