

Santa Barbara County Public Health: Doggy Day Trip Program

Expanded Foster Program to Include Doggy Day Trips: Engaging the Community to Find Solutions to Increased Animal Shelter Intakes

Overview: The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department’s Animal Services has expanded its Foster Program to include a Doggy Day Trip option to reduce shelter census and workload by engaging the community in fostering and short-term dog outings.

Challenge: Santa Barbara County has experienced a continued increase of animals entering the shelter system over the past five years, particularly dogs (increase of 10% since FY 2019-20 to 2,563 dogs entering the shelter in FY 23-24), primarily due to an influx of stray pets post-Covid-19 pandemic. This surge has led to the potential for overcrowded kennels, increased stress for animals, and higher workloads for staff. Overcrowding also exacerbates the spread of diseases and behavioral issues, further complicating adoption efforts and decreasing staff and volunteer morale.

Dogs Entering Shelter by Fiscal Year

	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24
Total	2,349	1,799	2,045	2,295	2,563
Born	18	11	18	25	27
Confiscated	165	127	184	178	165
Disaster	20	0	6	13	5
Owner Surrender	347	322	216	180	192
Returned	113	72	85	78	70
Stray	1,682	1,241	1,534	1,819	2,103
Transfer	4	26	2	2	1

Solution: To address these challenges, Santa Barbara County Animal Services sought to expand our existing Foster Program to include a Doggy Day Trip option. The Foster Program encourages community members to temporarily house shelter animals, providing them with a reprieve from the stressful shelter environment. The Doggy Day Trip Program allows members of the public to take dogs out for day-long excursions, giving the dogs much-needed breaks from the shelter and increasing their visibility in the community. These programs leverage social media and local partnerships to recruit participants and spread awareness.



Innovation: Santa Barbara County’s approach was innovative in its dual focus on long-term and short-term community engagement. By creating flexible options for involvement, the county made it easier for individuals

and groups to participate according to their capacity. Whether it's for a few hours or a few weeks, anyone could help. Partnerships with local Starbucks teams and VTC Enterprises, a local non-profit organization supporting individuals with disabilities, helped us extend our reach along with the use of social media to share success stories and the positive impact on both animals and team members. These initiatives not only provided immediate relief to the shelter but also fostered a deeper connection between the community and the shelter animals.

Results: The Foster Program and Doggy Day Trip Program significantly reduced the shelter population and workload by providing over 3,000 care days in foster homes versus days otherwise in the shelter. In the last fiscal year, over 2,100 homes participated in fostering for a variety of reasons including our Doggy Day Trip Program which facilitated 2,412 outings for these dogs and puppies needing a home. These efforts led to a marked improvement in animal behavior and health, and helped us increase dog adoptions to over 2,500 from 2,187 in the prior year, and our canine live release rate to 96% from 94%. Additionally, the programs boosted volunteer engagement with dog related volunteer hours increasing 36% from the prior fiscal year, contributing to a more vibrant and supportive community network.

Replicability: These programs offer a replicable model for other California counties facing similar overcrowding challenges. By decreasing barriers to involvement and leveraging social media for recruitment and awareness, other shelters can achieve similar increases in engagement leading to reductions in population and workload. The flexibility and accessibility of the new Doggy Day Trip Program make them adaptable to a variety of settings and resources.

Animals Fostered Out Between 7/1/2023 and 6/30/2024

Total Foster Parents: 2,113

	Dogs	Puppies	Cats	Kittens	Rabbits	OTHER	Total
Foster Reason	3,647	290	108	988	212	33	5,278
NONE	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
ADOPT	480	116	37	121	78	9	841
DAY TRIP	2,381	31	6	5	0	0	2,423
HOSPICE	8	0	1	1	1	1	12
MEDICAL	51	23	28	74	52	16	244
NEONATE	1	50	23	701	61	0	836
OVERNIGHT	231	12	0	2	0	0	245
SAFETY NET	5	1	0	0	2	0	8
SHELT BRK	379	21	7	24	11	2	444
TO PLACE	110	36	6	60	7	5	224

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