

County Animal Services partner programs are popping up everywhere



Since the opening of Miami-Dade Animal Services' Pet Adoption and Protection Center introduced us to the stylish design of its healthy housing and medical facilities. Now meet the MDAS programs available to our community.

Historically, the lack of program funding has had an impact on the save rate of homeless animals under MDAS care. As additional funding became available, starting in 2011, the save rate for dogs and cats grew, from 51 percent to 90 percent in 2015.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the most successful animal program funded by the county. Animal Services records show that from 2011 to 2015, TNR saved 22,578 community cats from being euthanized by allowing them to remain in their neighborhoods after being sterilized, ending their reproduction cycles. The free service includes vaccinations and ear tips for easy identification of neutered animals.

"In 2012, before the Pets' Trust vote, the county adopted a no-kill resolution sponsored by Commissioner Diaz," says Alex Muñoz, MDAS director. "That same year, we started TNR, which is the only way to become no-kill with cats. We now educate people that feral cats can't be adopted and that neutering is a better option. We went from 11,000 cats killed in 2010 to 1500 euthanized in 2015."

Animal Life Savers

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
October 2016

Only sick or injured cats are euthanized today, says Muñoz, adding, “The big focus for us now is to expand TNR and public surgeries.”

Off-site clinics are popping up. The county allocated funding in 2015 for the Miami-Dade County Community Spay/Neuter Clinic in Cutler Bay, which is in partnership with the Humane Society of Greater Miami. It provides free and low-cost public surgeries.

Located in Homestead in a retrofitted trailer, the first county/municipality spay/neuter collaboration opened in March 2016. According to Muñoz, a third clinic is planned for Liberty City, in partnership with the ASPCA. The future facility will be run for ten years by the ASPCA, offering free services to local residents.

MDAS says partnering with 100 nonprofit rescue groups has saved 20,251 animals -- mostly dogs -- from 2012 to 2015. In e-mail exchanges with Cristina Butler of A Way for a Stray rescue, she explains the process: “MDAS sends out 15 e-mails a day for dogs in need of rescue: severe medical cases, dogs that have been at the shelter too long, and dogs that aren’t doing well in the shelter environment.”

Butler points out that the MDAS Support of Urgent Needs program (SUN) -- which is partly funded by ASPCA grants -- offers stipends to rescue organizations when these fostered dogs are eventually adopted.

Rescue partners are also contacted through the Surrender Prevention Program, which encourages families surrendering pets to agree to have them fostered, instead of checking into the shelter. Neonatal kittens are included in these rescue group blasts.

Surrender Prevention was created with two ASPCA grants; one grant paid for a counselor and one grant paid for supplies. Young puppies are also part of the program since they’re most susceptible to disease.

Orphaned newborn kittens need special care: bottle feeding, heating pads, formula, and 24/7 attention. The MDAS two-year-old Kitten Cuddlers program gives training and supplies to those

Animal Life Savers

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
October 2016

willing to foster neonates.

Fostering frees up kennel space for other animals, says Muñoz. “Trained volunteers in the foster program are given supplies and come in to see our veterinarians.

“We really like to foster our heartworm-positive dogs,” he adds. “Treating them takes time and money, and requires repeated vet visits -- while living in houses, rather than shelter cages.”

Most of them don't come back to the shelter, says Muñoz, “because once you foster these dogs, you fall in love. You're not letting them come back to the shelter.”

A new program just getting started is Pet Retention, which aims to help families with sick or injured animals who can't afford medical treatment.

The Transport Program has seen 4648 dogs transported to other shelters from 2012 to 2015. In June, MDAS and the ASPCA transport team worked together to move shelter dogs to the Bucks County Humane Society in Pennsylvania. The *Miami Herald* reported in 2015 that local nonprofit Dogs on the Move had made 135 trips in its van, transporting 3500 dogs to other shelters.

MDAS's Hope Express Trailer, paid for in part by the ASPCA, is used to transport to out-of-state partners. This 28-foot, air-conditioned mobile unit has 24 animal compartments that can convert to 56. It opens up as a display vehicle for adoption events throughout Miami-Dade, such as at Wynwood Art Walk and the Betsy Hotel in Miami Beach.

Weekly MDAS off-site adoption events occur at PetSmart locations in Coral Gables, Dadeland, and West Flagler, and at the Petco Adoption Center located inside the South Miami Petco on S. Dixie Highway.

Periodic discount promotions also help shelter animals get adopted. The second annual “Clear

Animal Life Savers

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
October 2016

the Shelters” event held July 2 involved 400 shelters nationwide. Adoption fees were waived, and 193 MDAS pets found homes.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com