

Animal Farm Foundation (Stacey Coleman and Bernice Clifford) and No Kill Advocacy Center (Nathan Winograd)
Observations and Recommendations

Introduction: AFF and NKAC visited Austin Animal Center on January 18 and 19, 2016. They visited Austin Animal Center and had the opportunity to meet with the Animal Services Advisory Commission, shelter staff (management, animal protection officers, outreach), city leadership and community partners. Through touring the facility, observing operations during AAC open hours, and meeting with staff, they made a series of observations and recommendations.

Observations of Shelter Operations:

Adoption process

- Adoption process is long, confusing and cumbersome, often requiring several waits in the call-in line.
- There are not an adequate number of people (staff or volunteers) in kennel areas to assist customers.
- The adoption counselors are too removed from animal areas.
- The Q-less, call-in phone line is too much like a DMV or Tax Administration office. Too impersonal. Waits too long.
- Cats and dogs waiting longer than necessary. Not available for visits or adoption until after the stray hold.

Animal Care

- The length of stay for behaviorally and medically sound medium and large shelter dogs is longer than it should be.
- Dogs seemed bored in their kennels – not trying to engage with people.
- Stray and especially quarantine kennels are constructed to support mental and physical well-being of dogs over the long term so enrichment and exercise especially important.
- Glass front kennels – hard for dogs to engage the public. Can't smell.
- Kennel cards do not have enough or the right information.
- More play areas for each kennel area are needed.
- Keeping small dogs in cat kennels is not ideal.

Recommendations:

Adoption process

- Move customer service adoption counselors to the kennel areas. Assign each staff member to an area (small dogs, cats and kittens, medium and large dogs 1, 2 and 3) and have staff do meet

and greets and complete adoptions IN each area. (We've already started this with cat and kitten adoptions on weekends).

- Get rid of the Q-less call in adoption line and only use the call-in system for one or two processes not related to adoptions (reclaiming strays and pick-ups).
- Assign a caretaker to each kennel area and have that caretaker assigned to that area each day. Caretakers will clean and also provide enrichment and exercise.
- Improve kennel cards – change language and layout of cards.

Animal Care

- Construct a pen to correspond to each medium and large dog kennel area, so dogs have a closer play yard just for their kennel. Would require construction of play yard for 200s, 300s and 500s.
- Create sniff holes in each of the glass front kennels so dogs can sniff and replace frosted glass with clear glass so dogs can see.
- Assign teams of staff (enrichment and care and adoptions staff) to each area each day to ensure animals get consistent, daily care, exercise and enrichment
- Put animals in the lobby areas – small animals in one and cats in another. Consider other animals in lobby animal.
- Consider rethinking location of housing for cats and small dogs (currently small dogs are housed in kennels originally constructed for housing cats and kittens).

Implementation

The recommendations made by these organizations are consistent with those made by Dr. Marder and Bernice Clifford as well as the ASPCA. We will be moving forward on many of these changes, including concentrating customer service staff members in the kennel areas instead of in the lobby and modifying kennel cards. The shelter is going to be closed for adoptions on February 17 for customer service staff training to prepare for multiple operational changes and improvements.