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Human Animal Support Services (HASS) in Austin: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does HASS recommend closing intake (refusing animals into the shelter's care) in Austin?
 - a. It is important to differentiate COVID-19 recommendations from HASS recommendations. COVID-19 requires limited intake due to real or possible lack of staffing and human access to the shelter. HASS recommends **being open to the animals who need shelter and helping the ones who don't have a dire need navigate the same resources they would get in the shelter, out of the shelter**. HASS recommends dedicating staff and volunteers to provide needs-assessments to animals and people to determine the pathway they require to be kept safe. The pathway could be to be taken into the shelter, fostered in the community, or directly connecting them with a rescue partner. There is so much that can be done to build robust community programs to prevent animals and people from being in unsafe situations, but simple things like **performing a transparent and individualized needs assessment by a trained individual could be instituted immediately**.
2. Does HASS mean sick and injured dogs and cats will be turned out on the streets?
 - a. **No**. All incoming pets or calls about pets will be given a needs assessment to determine the pathway that they need: shelter, foster, or remain in the home and receive care.
3. Why is Austin Animal Center taking in so few animals?
 - a. We can't answer for the city but like every other major city in America, they have to prioritize people. COVID-19 is a life and death risk for people, and the city has to do everything it can to limit exposure. City staff have been split into shifts so there are fewer people at the shelter at a time. With fewer people, there have to be fewer animals onsite to offer care. **Driving intake while not having enough people onsite would be irresponsible and could lead to euthanasia** if AAC staff cannot keep up or if they push so many to APA! that we cannot keep up either. It is imperative that the city develop processes and procedures to handle what used to be "intake" in a different way than they ever have before.

4. Austin Animal Center already does so many progressive programs including neighborhood programming. They probably don't need to do much differently to become aligned with HASS, right?
 - a. Even though they have done a lot for the No Kill movement, they would need to reimagine a lot. The communities in the HASS project are also all very progressive and achieving incredible results; *but all the innovation in sheltering is based on the old pound model and institutional foundation which means it is unstable, inequitable, and institution-based.* Morphing into a truly community-based organization will require a complete reworking of the organizational chart, facility usage, and community engagement. **HASS is about working with every neighborhood through comprehensive and Diversity Equity Inclusiveness (DEI) sensitive surveying and communications,** reworking how medical care is dispersed to a decentralized population, building foster staff to be as or more important and complex as onsite care, as well as stationing staff in neighborhoods rather than in the shelter as a home base. **HASS is bringing together the brightest minds in and out of the animal industry to work through significant barriers to implementation of a truly community-based model because no shelter, including Austin, has been able to overcome the challenges that exist.** It is a mistake to say "we already do all of that."
5. Is HASS important enough of an issue to address right now during COVID-19? Why?
 - a. Yes. It is important to address urgently for three reasons.
 - i. COVID-19 is making semi-permanent changes to the way shelters can operate, because it is impossible to have large groups of animals in *ONLY* one place because they cannot rely on large groups of people to care for them. It is likely that "typical" intake will be diminished until a COVID-19 vaccine for humans is created. This point is a problem regardless of what happens with HASS. That means that **in order to effectively serve animals during COVID-19, programs need to adapt to a decentralized method.** Otherwise, animals and people are left unsupported and unsafe.
 - ii. The top 3 reasons that people turn their pets into the shelter are "can't afford", financial hardship, and housing. There are more people currently unemployed than during the Great Depression and that number is expected to increase. Stimulus packages will end and evictions are proceeding now that protection acts are ending. We should expect a huge wave of animals to need help receiving care or being rehomed. Even if **AAC was open for regular business, it should expect a 2-3 fold increase in intake. With the pre-COVID-19 model of sheltering, we should expect that to translate to a much higher kill rate. Changes in the model are needed to handle the surge.**
 - iii. AAC, and every other government-funded shelter in America, is built upon the model of rounding up every stray animal, bringing them to a remote

facility, holding them for 3 days to see if an owner can access or afford to get them out, and then “dispose” of them. This model was created in the late 1800s to try to end the pandemic of Rabies. **While in Austin, we are fortunate that disposal from the streets/shelter now is a live release, we are still using the basic framework that was built 120 years ago even though Rabies got a vaccine 70 years ago.** This model is based on inequity, separation of pets from people, extermination, and a lack of science. We have a disruption in the usual “rat race” of sheltering, and we should use this disruption to reimagine how our communities can be served. We know that 95% of people view their pets as family members. **Our community deserves a model that promotes the love between people and their pets in every neighborhood.**

6. Does this mean APA! isn't helping the city shelter by pulling animals anymore?
 - a. **No. APA! has always been a gap filler for the city shelter.** We serve them by pulling animals that are at risk of death for medical, behavioral, or space needs. While the AAC numbers have been drastically reduced during the pandemic, we have continued to pull the animals that the city needs help with, and we plan to continue that trend. Even during the pandemic, when we have been able to help so many shelters who did not empty their kennels into foster homes, AAC continues to be the single partner we pull the most animals from.
7. Is HASS detrimental to underserved areas of Austin?
 - a. **No. HASS actually is the opposite of that. HASS is about creating programs in every neighborhood that residents will actually use.** It is about moving services that once existed in the 4 walls of AAC out into the community so that they are more effective **because they are more accessible.** This can only be done through robust community engagement which is being planned and implemented by a very large working group of national leaders in the HASS project for the HASS pilot cities. Animal welfare has never communicated with people in this comprehensive way. It should be very enlightening to gain a much better understanding of where animals and people have assets and needs that are under the radar.
8. Is HASS asking community members to do the city's job?
 - a. **No. HASS is based on the city job being decentralized, not decreased.** The city shelter becomes more intertwined with the neighborhoods so that the “job” is less reactive and more proactive. There are community members who want to help animals and HASS believes that empowering those people while supporting them is an integral piece of a long term neighborhood-based solution; and it means taking animals to the shelter if an animal needs that.
9. Doesn't HASS mean lost pets won't be at the shelter so the owner can't find them?
 - a. **21st century technology allows us to work more efficiently and not solely rely on in-person interactions.** The system has to be reimaged and rebuilt to

make it virtually impossible for an owner not to find their pet, regardless of where it is temporarily housed.

10. If the shelter has less intake, doesn't that mean they don't need their budget money?
 - a. Not if the HASS model is employed. If intake is down and Animal Services is not reimagined so that it can provide services directly to people where they live, then an argument can be made for a smaller budget. A smaller budget would almost definitely cause the community to take on an unfair burden. **If the HASS model is employed, resources are reallocated to new programs out in the community so that there is not an increase in cost.**
11. Why would we want to do HASS in Austin when we have the highest Live Release Rate in the country?
 - a. In addition to the reasons cited above, **it is important to remember that all animal shelters are institutions.** In social services, almost all institutions that were created to "dispose" of the unwanted, such as orphanages, mental asylums, poorhouses, to name a few, have become obsolete because they are problematic at their foundation and therefore were unfixable. For animals, the problematic core is all too obvious in everyone's frustration with length of stay for needier animals, spread of disease in unvaccinated animals, mental deterioration from environmental stress, a general inability to provide care at the same level as in a home, and the ease at which killing could be restarted.
12. How are volunteers involved if there are fewer needed at the shelter?
 - a. **One of the essential elements of the HASS project calls for volunteers at every level of programming.** As the programs become cemented, the opportunities will become apparent. APA! Is working on a volunteer committee to flesh out how to use volunteers in this decentralized world, but APA! cannot lead HASS for the city of Austin since it is a government-funded shelter program.
13. Why isn't the city of Austin a HASS Pilot?
 - a. City management has a lot on its plate. This has not been a priority as of yet but we believe it should be if we want a better, more equitable and more humane community. That HASS pilot shelters will be working together to implement change and truly "pilot" together. The longer Austin is not part of the pilot cities, the further Austin gets behind.
14. Where can I learn more about HASS?
 - a. <https://americanpetsalive.org/human-animal-support-services>