

Humane Society's intake problem

Written by By Boderra Joe Sun Correspondent
Friday, 20 October 2017 09:12



Scores of unwanted pets brought in daily

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Dog and cat lovers, your attention please.

Love of both animals, and their adorable litters of puppies and kittens, has resulted in the obvious pet overpopulation problem plaguing McKinley County and the Navajo Nation, where an estimated 250,000 unwanted dogs roam.

No entity here locally has been able to euthanize its way out of the problem.

But, there is a solution to this madness.

And it begins with pet owners spaying and neutering their pets. It's a problem that the public can't see from the outside of an animal shelter, but it's the never-ending faucet that doesn't shut off for shelter workers dealing with the scores of unwanted cats and dogs, and some exotic animals too, such as pigs, ferrets, birds, etcetera coming through the shelter's door.

The Gallup McKinley County Humane Society takes in over 500 dogs and cats per month, according to their website. Most of the dogs and cats are strays, and the fortunate ones are adopted or transported out of the area.

Humane Society Director Kris Gruda, who has volunteered at the shelter for some years, has worked hard with other volunteers to transport animals to larger cities as to increase their chances for adoption.

As for deciding what animal gets euthanized, well, it all depends on their condition.

"For animals that are suffering from wounds, diseases, sickness, that are not curable or treatable, we have no choice but to euthanize them," she said. "It all depends on their condition."

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Gruda first started out volunteering for the shelter as a foster, and began the transport program seven years ago.

“The transport program is key with saving animals in the area because we simply don’t have enough room for all of the 500 animals we get a month,” she said. “The only way to save them from being euthanized is to send them out to other areas that don’t have much animals.”

Animals are transported to rescues and shelters in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and other parts of New Mexico.

One rescue that has forged a bond with the Humane Society is Rez Dawg Rescue, based out Paonia, Colo.

THE REZ DAWG CONNECTION

Founder and Executive Director of Rez Dawg Rescue, Angela Cerci, said her nonprofit transports scores of animals out of the area every other week. Gruda alone conducts up to five transports per week in her effort to save as many shelter animals as possible.

Cerci, who has lived in the area prior to moving to Colorado, has made it her mission to transfer, spay/neuter, and adopt out unwanted dogs and cats from the Gallup shelter. To date, this year alone, Rez Dawg has transported more than 1,100 dogs out of the Gallup area. Some go to Rez Dawg foster homes and others to no-kill rescues and shelters.

“I started Rez Dawg out of the need that I saw for both the Gallup shelter and the surrounding areas,” she said.

Back in 2010, Cerci was a teacher on the Navajo Nation. This is where she first witnessed the crisis of strays – strays that eventually showed up on her doorstep.

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"Within the first three months, I had 25 or so animals that I picked up personally on my own," she said. "And that's excluding Gallup."

Wanting to continue to make a difference, she began volunteering her time at the Humane Society, where she learned about the true magnitude of the problem – the countless strays that bombard the shelter daily.

"We are constantly in crisis mode," she said. "The shelter is always full and we are constantly trying to save lives by transporting and spaying and neutering."

Since launching 2012, the transport program has become the cornerstone of Rez Dawg. With the help of volunteers, Cerci arranges the transports and helps find foster homes and rescues that will take the dogs and cats.

"It's a lot of work," she said. "But it's not just about the work. It's about making sure the animals are safe."

Cerci lauds Gruda and the team of shelter workers and volunteers she has gotten to know over the years.

While moving dogs and cats out of the shelter tops the list of priorities, so does creating more access to free or affordable spay and neuter programs for Gallup and the surrounding area.

"There are so many animals," she said. "There's a dire need for spay and neuter services and transport services in New Mexico."

UNDERSTANDING SPAY & NEUTER

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Gruda emphasized the importance of spaying and neutering pets as it cuts down on the countless litters of unwanted animals in the community.

"I would like to tell everyone how important it is to spay and neuter your animals," she said. "There's so many homeless animals out there and already, it's hard to catch up. If we can stop it now, we can see a difference down the road."

The cost to spay or neuter a dog at the shelter is \$65. Luckily, for cat owners, the Humane Society partnered with the Zimmer Foundation's "For the Love of Cats" program, which offers free spay and neuter for pet cats.

Humane Society volunteer Sena Fitzpatrick has been involved with the organization for numerous years. Her energy and commitment that she provides for the animals hasn't gone unnoticed. Since the lifesaving spay and neuter programs kicked in, she witnessed a lot of positive changes.

"There is a much greater awareness of the plight of the animals on the reservation," she said. "More folks are getting their rez pets 'fixed,' which is very encouraging."

As for vaccinations, the shelter provides a combination vaccine to protect dogs and cats from common diseases.

ANIMAL CONTROL

The Humane Society has four trained animal control officers on staff that patrol the city of Gallup and McKinley County.

ACOs receive calls to pick-up strays and respond to any animal-related calls.

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Cosy Balok, who heads animal control at the shelter, said in 2016, there were 270 dead animals that were picked up by the officers. Mainly dogs and cats, according to the Humane Society's statistic reports.

"From January to September of 2017, our officers picked up 950 strays," she said. "So, it would help a lot if people brought in their animals to get spayed and neutered."

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The Humane Society statistic reports stated within the last five years, from 2012 – 2016:

20,544 dogs, puppies, cats and kittens were received

7,253 dogs and cats were spayed and neutered

From January to September 2017:

3,799 were stray dogs and cats

1,150 were spayed and neutered

2,979 transferred/adopted

304 euthanized-unadoptable

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38 died in the shelter due to sickness and diseases

That is a lot of mouths to feed. Medicine to provide. Rooms to occupy.

Betsy Vigil, administrative assistant at the Humane Society, whom provided the statistic reports, suggests that pet owners in the surrounding areas, especially the Navajo Nation, to bring in their dogs or cats to get spayed and neutered.

"We would like people to bring in their animals to get spayed and neutered as soon as they can to keep from overpopulating," she said.

BUDGET

The Humane Society's annual budget is nearly \$250,000 annually. The city-county contract is \$175,000, with the rest being tapped from donations and grants.

Fitzpatrick stated that funds cover pet food, vaccinations, medications, cleaning supplies and paying the shelter and kennel staff.

"We are always working to find more funds to cover the transfer program and expand spay and neuter services," she said.

EQUINES

Even though cats and dogs are overpopulating the area, so are unwanted horses, donkeys and mules. The Humane Society operates a small equine rescue taking them in, roughly 25-30

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annually.

Fitzpatrick stated that they work with the New Mexico Livestock Board, as equines are categorized as livestock.

"Though most horses are companion animals and pets by most people, horses are working animals as well," she said.

According to the statistical reports, from January to September 2017:

37 stray livestock received

9 transferred/adopted

2 euthanized-unadoptable

For more information, contact Gallup McKinley Humane Society, 1315 Hamilton Rd. Call: (505) 863-2616. Email: humanesocietymc@gmail.com

***By Boderra Joe
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