

2013

No More Homeless Pets® National Conference
Playbook



No-Kill Community:
What Worked, What Didn't,
What's Next

Austin, Texas



**SAVE
THEM
ALL™**

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Dr. Ellen Jefferson

Community: Austin, Texas

Key participants in helping the community to become no-kill:

- One municipal shelter: Austin Animal Center
- One major rescue partner: Austin Pets Alive!

Introduction

When Austin Pets Alive (APA) was founded in 1997, it was an effort to accomplish a no-kill millennium for Austin by the year 2001. By working directly with Town Lake Animal Center, the city's municipal shelter, as well as successfully lobbying the Austin City Council, a volunteer program was developed, the budget doubled, and customer service hours increased for the shelter. Prior to APA, the live outcome from the city shelter was only about 15 percent, though after their initial efforts it increased to about 50 percent. Although the no-kill millennium was not reached, the organization had accomplished a lot. APA helped people keep their pets, promoted spay/neuter, and published the No-Kill Handbill e-newsletter. In 2001, APA reduced in size.

In 2008, Dr. Ellen Jefferson approached APA to suggest reviving efforts to make Austin a no-kill community. She became the executive director of the organization, and since that point, APA has grown from an all-volunteer group with a roughly \$5,000 annual budget to a primarily volunteer organization (there are about 35 paid staff) with an approximate \$1.5 million annual budget.

While initially an advocacy organization, APA shifted its focus to determining why animals are euthanized at the city shelter. Very little information existed about what exactly these animals needed to be adopted rather than killed, so APA took a novel approach to finding out.

After Town Lake Animal Center selects which animals will be available for their adoption program and other organizations pull animals out of the shelter, APA selects from passed-over cats and dogs who are scheduled to be killed for space. By choosing those specific animals, APA has been able to develop programs that address the issues that landed them on the euthanasia list. Those animals are then put into the APA adoption program if the reason they were to be killed was truly a lack of space and they are adoptable otherwise. Or they are provided the care or treatment necessary for them to be made available for adoption. After reaching the goal of 90 percent live outcomes at Town Lake Animal Center, APA began to pull animals from other shelters in the Texas Hill Country area. The cats and dogs are housed in the APA headquarters building, which was leased in September 2010, or in their extensive foster care network homes.

Though APA does not euthanize for space, it should not solely be considered a no-kill shelter. Their mission is to make Austin no-kill, thus their programs are different than what might be utilized at a no-kill shelter, as their intent is to create a safety net for every animal, regardless of the problem the animals are facing, to prevent them from dying in any shelter in the city.

In February 2011, 92 percent of the animals in Town Lake Animal Center were saved — an accomplishment that exceeds the 90 percent measurement that signifies no-kill. Since then, with the exception of March and April with 89 percent, there has been a 90+ percent live outcome rate out of Town Lake through July 2011. And much of that success is due to APA's efforts, having taken over 9,500 cats and dogs into their program and found homes for 8,100 since June 2008.



Bottle baby program

Town Lake Animal Center, like most municipal shelters, does not have the capability to provide around-the-clock care for neonatal (unweaned) kittens, which resulted in immediate death for the 1,200+ kittens who entered that shelter annually. APA, in response, created a ward specifically set up to house and care for these kittens that is modeled after a wildlife center's care program for baby animals. APA's ward is a safety net to get the kittens immediately out of the shelter, but the ultimate goal is to get the kittens into foster homes. Before APA had a building, the nursery operations occurred in a renovated Airstream trailer.

Depending on the age and number of kittens in the population at any given time, shifts are scheduled every two to four hours to feed and care for them. Sometimes there are up to 30 kittens in the ward, in which case multiple volunteers are needed. Since round-the-clock care is provided seven days a week, a lock box is used to avoid the need to distribute keys.

The schedule of volunteers is tracked in an online calendar. If assistance is needed, a Yahoo! group communication is sent to the bottle baby volunteers. Each kitten has a log that gives very specific

information on feeding time, the amount to be fed, weight before and after being fed, amount eaten, if the kitten is going to the bathroom, etc., and volunteers make notes about any concerns for the next shift to review.

APA estimates about 1,200 kittens come into Town Lake Animal Center annually. APA began their program in September 2009 and were able to pull about 200 kittens in the first four months. In 2010, they pulled around 800 kittens. In 2011, the organization is on track to pull them all, which is anticipated to be around 1,200. With a roughly 85 percent save rate of kittens who would have otherwise been killed, this is considered APA's crown jewel program.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Very volunteer-friendly program:** Volunteers get to work with animals in a very hands-on way and enjoy the experience. They are directly responsible for the lives of the kittens and take that responsibility seriously.
- **People have opportunity to help kittens without fostering:** Many people are unable to bring animals into their home to foster. This program gives volunteers an alternative way to help.
- **Volunteers can help for short time periods:** Even if volunteers only have a few hours to offer per week, this is a great way for them to get involved.
- **Volunteers "own" the program:** Volunteers are responsible for every aspect of the program, including feeding the kittens, cleaning, ensuring disease control, filling out the charts correctly, making pleas for additional foster homes, and overseeing population management to prevent too many kittens in the limited amount of space. Since this program is so hands-on, the volunteers get a feeling of ownership, which helps them to be invested in the program's success.
- **Marketing what to do if kittens are found:** APA has an informational area on their website to instruct the public on what to do if they find kittens. People want to help and do the right thing, so facts and resources can help prevent them from bringing found kittens to Town Lake Animal Center in the first place and instead wait for the mom to potentially return or learn how to care for orphaned kittens themselves.
- **Putting kittens on antibiotics and flea and worm treatment immediately:** Kittens generally experience a bacterial imbalance due to the transition from mom's milk to formula, so as soon as the kittens are taken into the program, they start on antibiotics. Flea and worm treatment are also administered.
- **Nursing mom program:** This year, APA instituted a program to save adult female lactating cats or those who are very far along in a pregnancy. They pull the lactating cats from Town Lake Animal Center prior to their entering the shelter (to prevent exposure to shelter disease) and put a litter of kittens with each until weaned. This program has been successful because it helps to save the kittens less than two weeks of age who have the highest mortality rate without their mom. However, there are not enough nursing moms to go around.
- **Proper training:** All bottle baby volunteers receive basic training and are required to shadow experienced team members at least twice before signing up for solo shifts. This extra guidance helps reduce the number of mistakes that spread disease and result in lifesaving errors.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Spread of disease:** The kittens are very fragile and tend to get sick, which creates difficulties. It's unnatural for kittens to be separated from their mother when they are so young, so they often develop diarrhea and upper respiratory infections. It's hard to control diseases. Currently, volunteers put on different smocks and wash their hands or use gloves between each litter to help prevent the spread of disease. However, these strategies are not always successful. (Note: A licensed vet is required to prescribe medications necessary for treatment.)
- **Death rate:** Despite all efforts to save the kittens, there is still about a 15 percent death rate, and the loss is emotionally difficult for volunteers.
- **High level of stress:** If all shifts are not covered, the responsibility generally goes to a small core

group of volunteer feeders who are always willing to step up. This causes a high level of stress among these few valued volunteers, sometimes resulting in burnout. Constant recruiting of new volunteers is necessary.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Additional staff:** APA would like to be able to hire a cleaning crew every day, as this is not a job relished by the volunteers and their time is best served helping the kittens. APA would also like to be able to hire a second paid full-time staff member to ensure all shifts are covered every day.
- **Helping other cities:** APA would like for every city to have a bottle baby program so that no kittens are ever in jeopardy at a shelter just because they are still nursing and have no mother.



Parvo program

The parvo program started by accident when APA saved some puppies who were sick when the organization first started receiving animals from Town Lake Animal Center. Since euthanasia wasn't an option once in the APA program, the parvo program was created to save the sick puppies. The program allowed APA to save all the puppies with parvo at Town Lake Animal Center from that point onward.

APA puts the ill puppies or adult dogs in an isolated area, administering either subcutaneous or IV treatment for parvo. Treatment is replicable as it's the same thing over and over. The canines generally recover and test negative for parvo within three to 10 days depending on the severity of the disease and then go through a decontamination procedure. They have their nails clipped, are completely scrubbed down twice, and then put back into the general population. They then go on to lead normal, healthy lives.

The cost to treat each puppy is between \$50 and \$150. APA must rely on donated funds and supplies to be able to say yes when a shelter calls to ask them to pick up a dog with parvo. While they charge a flat \$225 adoption fee for all recovered parvo puppies (instead of the normal \$150 adoption fee), additional funds are always being solicited to offset the extra costs.

Something to take into consideration is that adult dogs can get parvo if they've never been vaccinated. Illness can mask serious behavioral issues, so when APA pulls dogs with parvo from the shelter, they can't get a good gauge on temperament. Though they have not run into this situation, there is a possibility that once an adult dog has recovered, he or she may exhibit aggressive behaviors that would make him or her unadoptable.

APA had an 88 percent survival rate for the 224 dogs treated in 2010. Many of the animals arrived after the ideal treatment start time. Town Lake Animal Center, some of the rural shelters, and even veterinary clinics call APA with a same-day deadline (generally within two hours) to pick up puppies with parvo, so treatment can start immediately. (Note: A licensed vet is required to prescribe medications necessary for treatment.)

WHAT WORKED:

- **Save rate:** APA has been able to save around 80 to nearly 90 percent of the dogs with parvo who previously were all euthanized.
- **Treating highly adoptable puppies:** Puppies are greatly desired by the public, so getting them healthy allows for a quick turnover to get them into homes.
- **No cross-contamination:** All supplies are kept in a locked, self-contained unit in the cat building, and before entering, caregivers utilize a parvocidal foot bath and put on scrubs and shoes specific to that ward. All towels and linens as well as the washer and dryer are dedicated to that program. Therefore, there is no cross-contamination between the parvo ward and medical clinic. Also, all feces are flushed down a toilet, instead of being deposited in the trash, to avoid potentially exposing raccoons, who are susceptible to parvo.
- **Volunteers do the bulk of the work:** While a vet team does come in once a day to make sure the puppies are on the right track and see if they need an IV catheter, the majority of the care is provided by volunteers, who come in the morning and evening to keep up with the puppies' daily treatment needs.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Spread of disease:** When there are a lot of puppies, the chance for other disease transmission is increased. So the puppies are vaccinated upon intake, prior to entering the ward, even if they are already sick, to prevent other diseases like distemper. It's devastating to save a puppy from parvo only to lose him or her to another disease later.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Spreading the word:** APA would like to teach other cities how to set up a parvo program. They hope to create a hands-on training program for others to take back to their communities.



Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS) program

The Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS) program was set up to help prevent people from relinquishing their pets to Town Lake Animal Center. There are people who believe that the shelter is the place to take unwanted pets or found animals, not realizing that there is the chance the relinquished animals might be euthanized or that opportunities exist to rehome the animals themselves.

The PASS program consists of both a hotline and front gate intervention. Volunteers compassionately provide guidance and/or resources to help people either maintain their pets or successfully rehome the animals themselves. Volunteers are always careful to evaluate each person and situation to avoid sending an animal back to a home where the animal might be in danger. In other words, the PASS representative will approve the surrender if necessary.

When given the opportunity to talk to someone outside the shelter, APA has about a 20 to 25 percent chance of that person returning home with that animal when he or she is given alternative information about topics like rehoming a pet, pet medical care, animal behavior, or lifestyle changes that could help the pet.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Front gate intervention:** Focusing intervention efforts at the shelter has theoretically resulted in a decrease in intake numbers, although at this point there are not statistics that can prove that a person did not return later to surrender the animal.
- **Helping people rehome animals:** Often when people want to get rid of a pet for some reason, they don't know how to do it. They've called shelters and rescues and no one will take their pet. The PASS representative listens to their concerns and helps the person create a Craigslist ad and/or an email to friends and family. The rep gives good pointers on what to say and how to best market that animal to generate interest. The rep conveys that being the personal advocate for one animal is far more effective than bringing the animal to the shelter where he must "compete" with all the others. When crafting the plea, APA recommends including a 48-hour deadline before saying the pet will be taken to the shelter, which can inspire another individual to offer the animal a home. If there is a sad or difficult beginning to the pet's life, this can also help "sell" the animal. A touching story will make people want to help save that animal.
- **Presenting reality of situation:** Instead of informing people who want to surrender an animal that there's a chance that the animal might be euthanized, the PASS representative states that the shelter is full. Therefore, if the animal is left, the shelter's staff will need to euthanize an animal already there to make room for this new arrival. Realizing that surrendering their pet will result in the death of another animal causes many to rethink relinquishment, whereas most people believe that their pet is not likely to be the one chosen for euthanasia, so they do not connect with the representative when told their pet might not make it out alive.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **More staff or a shift in services:** There is one paid coordinator who schedules and oversees one to two volunteers per week. APA would like to have someone at the shelter during all hours it's open to the public to provide intervention. Ideally, this service would be provided by the city instead of APA.



Love on a Leash (LOL) program

Love on a Leash (LOL) is the APA dog walking program. APA has found that program names mean everything when it comes to recruiting volunteers. APA has generated more volunteer interest by naming the program LOL instead of just calling it the dog walkers program, as it was previously called. People want to be a part of something meaningful and names give volunteers a sense of ownership that can make a big difference in volunteer retention. Of course, actually doing meaningful work like letting pets have real potty breaks rather than being forced to soil their kennels is the real reason this dedicated team of volunteers exist.

They have two shifts per day, from 7 to 9 a.m. and 8 to 10 p.m., to ensure the dogs get potty breaks before and after they are transported to and from the off-site adoption locations. Volunteers are also welcome to show up and walk the dogs who remain on site during the day.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Volunteer run:** This program is staffed by volunteers as opposed to paid employees because it's not a lifesaving, essential need. However, it is important that the dogs not have to go to the bathroom on themselves. Each morning and evening shift has a team leader who makes sure the dogs get out for some exercise and to relieve themselves.
- **Naming contest and new name:** Because dog walking is a lot of work, there was not enough buy-in among volunteers to fulfill all needs. So APA had a contest to come up with a new name for the program. That helped them identify themselves and build up volunteer excitement. Also, when it was previously called the dog walkers program, volunteers wanted to take the dogs out for long walks, when what is actually needed is short potty breaks for all the dogs.
- **Helps keep dogs clean:** Since the dogs get a bathroom break, it helps keep the crates clean when transporting the dogs to the off-site adoption locations and reinforces any house-training they may have previously received.
- **Offering on-the-spot training:** APA is trying to eliminate barriers that prevent people from walking the dogs. So twice a week, APA offers mini training for the LOL program to newcomers, even if the volunteers haven't gone through official volunteer orientation.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Not enough volunteers:** It's difficult to get people to show up day after day to give dogs potty breaks. It's a lot of work. Volunteers need to deal with barking dogs, and it's difficult to work with dogs who are scared or have other issues. Since there are not many volunteers, the people who are helping can begin to feel overwhelmed.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Staff worker each shift and more volunteers:** Ideally, APA would like to have one staff member at each shift and have an increased number of volunteer helpers.



Daizey's Ward/Putting the FUN in Fungus

Sadly, many adoptable cats are killed at shelters simply because they contract ringworm, an easily treated, non-painful skin fungus.

APA rescues such cats and keeps them isolated in a special ringworm area called Daizey's Ward. They are treated both orally and topically with weekly dips until they are no longer contagious. They are then sent to a foster home to complete any treatment, allow their hair to regrow, and be readied for adoption.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Volunteer care of cats:** Volunteers come to Daizey's Ward to feed and clean up twice a day.
- **Putting the FUN in Fungus/Adopt a Fun Guy (Fungi):** An adoption promotion that featured cats with ringworm was a hit. People came that day specifically looking to adopt cats with ringworm or were enticed by the reduced adoption fee of only \$15, as compared to \$125 normally. Eighteen cats with ringworm were adopted in one day. All treatment medications were sent home with the adopters free of charge to set them up for success. It was a great way to get the cats out of their foster homes and adopted.
- **Volunteer-run promotion:** The foster homes that had ringworm kittens helped get the word out. The entire adoption event was planned, promoted and executed by volunteers.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Limited space:** There is only so much space at the shelter to isolate cats with ringworm, and treatment takes four to eight weeks. Since space is limited, as are the foster homes, there's a limited number of cats with ringworm APA can pull from Town Lake Animal Center. This is one of the hardest categories of cats to save.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Additional ringworm-specific promotions and space:** APA wants to do more promotion of the cats with ringworm so they can rescue more. The program is currently small, with about 15 cats in the ward and about double that number in foster homes. If cats with active ringworm are adopted to consenting homes, that frees up valuable space faster than treatment would take. This would allow APA to save more cats.



Healthy Dogs, Healthy People program

The Healthy Dogs, Healthy People program pairs high-energy dogs with high-energy people for the benefit of both. On Saturday and Sunday mornings, APA takes the dogs to a location on the running trail on Lady Bird Lake. Using a driver's license as collateral, people can borrow a dog for a run or walk (although APA tries to match up the more active dogs with running buddies).

The program has proven to be so popular that there is always a line of people waiting for the dogs.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Enrichment:** The dogs are able to get out of the shelter for a while on a break. After time spent in a cage at Town Lake Animal Center and then the APA facility, getting out provides some much-needed enrichment, particularly for very active, high-energy dogs.
- **Exposure:** The dogs wear "adopt me" vests and are seen by many people on the trail in addition to the person who walks/runs them. It's a good opportunity for dogs who have had a long stay at the shelter to get some extra exposure. Plus, the public is exposed to some great dogs, perhaps changing

some people's incorrect assumptions that there's something wrong with animals who have been at the shelter for months.

- **All volunteer run:** Volunteers manage this program and transport the dogs both to and from the APA facility themselves.
- **Signage:** An easy-to-read and understand Jog-a-Dog sign lets joggers know about the program and gets the word out.
- **No problems so far:** It's what many might consider a high-risk program since APA is handing over a dog to a random person in a crowded environment who only supplies a driver's license as collateral. Thus far there have been no problems, however.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Transporting dogs:** The number of dogs is limited by the availability of volunteers willing to transport them in their own personal vehicles from the APA facility to the site at Lady Bird Lake. Because of the need to transport, APA can only do this program on Saturdays and Sundays and generally there are only a handful of dogs.
- **Lack of adoptions:** People who are jogging aren't really thinking about adopting a dog. Plus, since these are the high-energy dogs, they are often difficult to adopt.
- **Lack of donations:** People who are jogging don't generally have purses or wallets with them, so donations are minimal.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Permanent structure at Town Lake:** Once Town Lake Animal Center moves into its new shelter, and APA takes over the old facility for a year, the plan is to use some of the space in the old shelter for a Jog-a-Dog program since it's right on the lake.
- **Offering daily program:** With the new facility, there will be no need to transport the dogs. Thus, APA could offer the program seven days a week, instead of just on weekends.
- **Parking space:** APA believes that a permanent structure with parking will make it easier for people to adopt and/or donate.



Louie's Fresh Start program

About half of the dogs at APA are easy to handle. The others, due to previously being on the euthanasia list for behavioral issues, require some special handling to make sure they don't accidentally get loose or bite someone. The Louie's Fresh Start program focuses on some of the dogs who have less than perfect manners. Previously, these dogs at shelters would not have been saved because of the extra support needed. APA is giving these pups a second chance.

Volunteers receive varying levels of training on techniques for different dogs. The first level of training is basic for all Love on a Leash volunteers who walk dogs. Basic leash training, teaching a dog not to jump, etc., are covered. Tier-two training is for volunteers working with slightly more difficult dogs,

who are at high risk of running away or who may be jumpy. This training makes the volunteers more aware of potential problems. Tier-three training is for the most elite volunteers, who are the only ones who are trained to handle certain high-risk dogs.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Volunteers:** Since there is not enough staff, leveraging volunteers to help with the dogs' needs has been very beneficial. Volunteers help break up the work, thus allowing APA to take dogs into their program who are already known to have behavioral issues.
- **Training program results in fewer dog bites:** Since implementing the training program, APA has had dramatically fewer bite incidents, thus making a safer environment for the people as well as avoiding putting the dogs into ill-advised situations.
- **Colored collar coding:** For safety, APA employs five different colored collars, based on how difficult the dogs are to handle, from green for super easy dogs to dark blue for dogs who may only be handled by certain staff or tier-three volunteers. The colored collars help people determine at a glance whether handling a certain dog would be appropriate for them.
- **Pairing people with dogs:** Certain people give off certain vibes that may work well with some dogs and not with others. Some people are active and some people are quiet, and different dogs respond well to different personality types. To set animals up for success, dogs are matched not only to people with a certain level of training, but with people with personality types that will complement the dogs' training.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Having higher tier dogs under one roof:** Having moved from one shelter to another shelter, the dogs are under a lot of stress. With only one building housing all the APA dogs who are not in foster homes, the activity, noise and commotion are too much for the higher tier dogs. Unless in a quieter environment, these dogs are unable to accept the behavioral enrichment needed to help them overcome issues and thus become more likely to be adopted.
- **Not enough volunteers:** While the volunteer recruitment team is doing a great job, the shelter could always use more volunteers for this program.
- **Not enough resources:** APA can only pull a limited number of dogs with known behavioral issues from Town Lake Animal Center. It's hard to justify pulling a really difficult dog, knowing the animal will take up space for a longer period of time that could be used for several easier-to-adopt dogs.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Separate facility for higher tier dogs:** APA would like a separate building to house dogs with extra issues. Having fewer dogs in this location would give them a quieter place to bond one on one with the caregivers and allow for specific work to help them with their challenges. Funds, resources and a location are needed to build such a facility.
- **Staff for program:** APA does not currently employ a behaviorist, but they would like to have enough qualified staff to work specifically for this program so that all behaviorally challenged dogs can be saved.



Working with local government

When APA was reinvigorated under Ellen's leadership, it was during a time period when Ryan Clinton, an attorney who founded Fix Austin, a grassroots advocacy group, had been pressuring the city of Austin to force change at Town Lake Animal Center and end the killing of adoptable animals.

By running full-page ads in the local newspaper and using the media in other ways, Fix Austin got the word out that the status quo was not good enough and asked the public to push the city to replace the shelter's director and to adopt methods to end the killing of shelter animals that had been successful in other cities. This "greasy wheel" strategy resulted in the city receiving many phone calls and emails about the killing of adoptable animals. The public outcry created an environment where the City Council was open to some change. As a result, this opened doors for APA to do a lot with Town Lake Animal Center.

Animal welfare is now a hot topic, and APA has become a political force. Council members now even come to Ellen for endorsements.

WHAT WORKED:

- Politician on board of directors:** State representative Eddie Rodriguez has served on the APA board of directors for several years. He believes in the animal welfare cause and gives credibility to the organization, demonstrating that advocates are professionals and not "crazy" animal rights folks. He is well respected by many other legislators and helps promote the cause in a productive way.
- Informed City Council:** Council members have so many issues that the public wants them to address, but they don't have the ability to take them all on. The lines of communication were opened with Council members Mike Martinez and Laura Morrison, who took the time to really learn the facts about the animal welfare issue in Austin. They have realized that as public servants, it's up to them to help solve city issues, and this is one issue they have fully embraced.
- Public sympathy:** Encouraging the public to show up at City Council meetings was very helpful. Many citizens want to save animals and politicians want to be in tune with what the masses want. Large numbers of representatives/speakers supportive of no-kill at Council meetings sends a huge message.
- No-kill resolution:** The Austin City Council passed a no-kill resolution in March 2010. There were many components, but the most striking was the moratorium on the killing of animals at Town Lake Animal Center when there are empty cages. (There is a mistaken belief that there need to be empty cages to provide separation between animals to prevent the spread of disease. Per Ellen, vaccination before entry into the shelter kennels is far more effective in the prevention of life-threatening illnesses, although sadly most shelters do not embrace it.)
- Vaccinations for all animals upon intake:** Though Town Lake Animal Center employees were budgeted to vaccinate all animals, records for the animals pulled by APA who subsequently died of a shelter disease proved this did not often happen. Communications with shelter staff regarding this issue were largely ignored. Because this was an important issue to APA and their political ties, the City Council had an unscheduled audit performed and discovered over 50 animals at the shelter who were not vaccinated. This has now forced a response by the shelter, and compliance is now greatly improved, almost perfect.

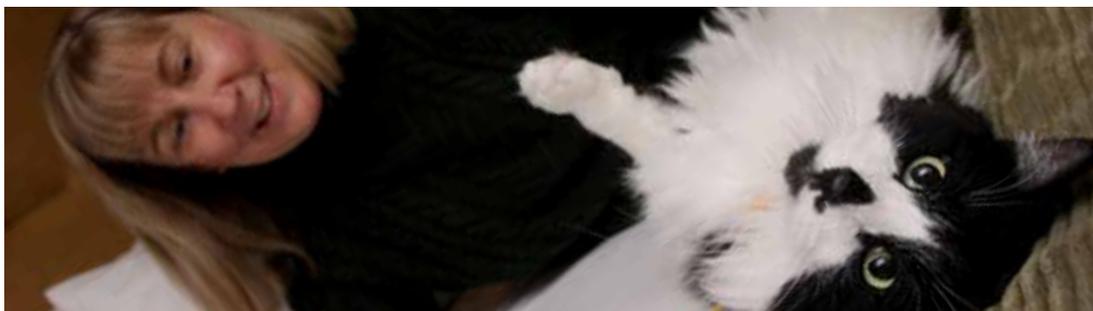
- **Woodrow for governor:** A local Austin woman signed up her adopted dog, whom she had rescued from death row at Town Lake Animal Center, to run for the governor of Texas, with the campaign slogan “How ruff could it be?” All campaign contributions were given to APA. There was a press conference where past gubernatorial candidate Kinky Friedman endorsed Woodrow for the position. T-shirts and bumper stickers were sold. This received a lot of media attention, even nationally, and provided public awareness for APA as well as generated roughly \$5,000 in donations. Though Woodrow did not win the election, the campaign provided a fun spin on promoting no-kill.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Outsourcing adoptions at Town Lake Animal Center:** APA went through a laborious request for proposal (RFP) process to become the nonprofit partner to outsource animal adoptions from Town Lake Animal Center. This opportunity fell through. Thus APA wasted valuable time and resources creating the proposal. However, the upside is the shelter implemented new adoption strategies on their own and hired a new director.
- **Funding for no-kill implementation plan:** The implementation plan for the no-kill resolution was supposed to distribute resources evenly for saving lives and prevention. However, at the end of the process, funding was allotted for more spay/neuter, which had already been in the city budget, to a much larger degree than programs to support live outcomes from the shelter. Thus programs to increase live outcomes were not financed as anticipated.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Candidate forums:** It is crucial to keep animal welfare in the forefront of politicians' minds. APA has hosted and plans to continue hosting forums for political office candidates to express their viewpoints, allowing the public to see where politicians stand on specific issues and hold them accountable if they win.



“Name your own price” and “no fee” adoptions

APA tries to come up with innovative adoption promotions to bring the public to their main facility and off-site adoption locations. One such idea was to allow people to select the price they would like to pay to adopt a pet, while another was to allow people to adopt a pet for free.

WHAT WORKED:

- **The public's generosity:** Despite the fact that people could use this opportunity to adopt at a bargain price, many people paid more than the typical APA adoption fee. In fact, at their first “name your own price” adoption event, one person donated \$500 for a dog who was harder to place than most.
- **Increased traffic:** The first couple of times APA hosted a “name your own price” event, it generated increased public attention and traffic.
- **Increased adoptions:** The first couple of times this “name your own price” promotion was utilized, adoptions were significantly increased, at least doubling APA's typical adoption numbers.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **No restrictions:** At the no-fee events, APA doesn't make much money, which was difficult because they are counting on bringing in adoption fees to offset costs. Now, instead of no-fee events, they have a \$25 minimum donation at "name your own price" promotions. (Note: APA still does all their normal screening for all no-fee or lower-fee adoptions.)
- **Promotion loses efficacy:** APA discovered that after the "name your own price" promotion has been used once or twice, the concept is no longer catchy. Thus, traffic and adoptions go back down to normal levels.
- **Offering all animals at pricing promotion:** Puppies are often worth more than what the public gives during a "name your own price" promotion. However, with hundreds of dogs in foster homes, logistics make it difficult to communicate specifically to those homes with puppies. The intent is to prevent foster families from bringing puppies, particularly those who have incurred expensive medical treatments, to "name your own price" events. The whole purpose of the special pricing is to help move some of the animals who have been at APA for a longer period of time. Also, the adoption fees of the more desirable animals, like puppies, help offset the costs to run the organization. So offering very adoptable puppies, who have a high demand anytime, during these promotions defeats the purpose.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Making "name your own price" an element, but not central focus, of event:** "Name your own price" will no longer be the focus of an adoption event, but instead can still be the pricing structure offered with other promotional campaigns like "Adopt a Fun Guy."



Subaru partnership

The local Subaru dealership offered to host two major events, along with some smaller ones, to fundraise and promote adoptions for APA in 2010-11. These reach both Subaru owners as well as the general public. The purpose is to raise \$20,000 to be the lead sponsor of the new APA dog behavior condos, which are being built as funds become available.

Two events have already taken place: a Pedal for Puppies bike ride, with the route in the shape of a puppy head, and a Wag-a-Thon Walk-a-Thon, a dog walk around the Hill Country Galleria, a town square-type shopping center in the Austin area. So far, over \$10,000 has been raised.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Minimal effort from APA:** APA provides some volunteers to help, but Subaru does almost all of the work associated with the events.
- **Ad fund:** Corporate Subaru has a fund, which can be used monthly, that helps reimburse local dealerships for cause marketing advertising costs. So the local Subaru can promote APA at no or minimal cost to themselves.
- **Brings awareness to Subaru as well as APA:** The Pedal for Puppies bike ride starts and ends

at the dealership, so not only does the Subaru dealer receive awareness and traffic, but participants who may not have previously been aware of APA are introduced to the organization.

- **Extras during events:** Other smaller fundraisers like a raffle and silent auction are included during the ride/walk to help raise additional funds.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Corporate needs are different than a nonprofit's:** Since Subaru is a successful corporation, it's been difficult for APA to effectively communicate about needs that both organizations have. As a local grassroots organization, APA relies on volunteers and does not have a professional paid marketing staff.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Additional events:** Subaru has just completed the second annual Pedal for Puppies bike ride and is planning a Paddle for Puppies (paddle boarding fundraising event).
- **Annual events:** The original plan was to host two to four once-only events. However, APA hopes some of the events will continue annually.



Off-site adoptions

To create a no-kill city where animals are recycled back into the community via adoption at the same rate at which they are taken in is just as important as rescuing the animals.

After spending all the time and resources on getting animals out of Town Lake Animal Center (and other area shelters) and taking care of their health, there have to be outlets for the animals to get into loving homes. As much focus needs to be put on adoptions as is put into rescue and care of the animals since adoptions are a vehicle for getting the animals out of the shelters alive. Otherwise a bottleneck occurs and APA becomes a warehousing outlet.

In addition to APA's headquarters, current adoption locations include PetSmart and PETCO stores, South Congress Walking Street trailer, Tomlinson's pet stores, and a storefront location in the Austin Tarrytown neighborhood.

APA can see how well they are doing based on how many animals are in their program at any given time. In short, their adoption numbers should match their rescue numbers. If either gets out of balance, the organization quickly realizes something needs to be adjusted.

WHAT WORKED:

- **High traffic areas:** Off-site locations get the animals in front of people who would not necessarily go to an animal shelter. APA has sites at both non-animal related spots with significant foot traffic as well as pet stores. One popular location is an Airstream trailer in the trendy South Congress (SoCo) entertainment district in downtown Austin. Since there are so many people at SoCo, the adoption numbers and donations there are actually higher than other animal-specific spots.

- **Consistency:** Just as with any retail business, the public needs to know where and when the animals will be available for adoption and not have to guess. Having regular hours at each off-site location has been critical.
- **Paid adoption counselors:** Since consistency is so important, APA decided to employ paid counselors right from the start in 2008 because it's not possible to find volunteers who are willing to do the job seven days a week, 12 hours a day. The counselors are responsible for packing up the animals in the morning, transporting the animals, setting up the site, overseeing the animals, handling adoptions, packing up the site, and transporting the animals back to the APA headquarters. APA was able to immediately cover salaries to make full off-site adoption coverage possible with people's contributions to donation jars at each location and animal adoption fees. (Note: There are some additional animals who are brought to the sites by foster families. Also, since the volume of cats is so high, APA has more adoption sites to promote cats, so there are some volunteer cat adoption counselors in addition to paid ones. The cat off-site adoption locations are simpler than the dog sites because the cats live there 24/7 and are not transported daily.)
- **Volunteer assistance:** Since there is only one adoption counselor at each off-site location, APA has requested that volunteers go to those sites to help out. With volunteers' help, the counselor can take a break without leaving the animals unattended, even for a short while. Volunteers also walk dogs because the counselor is not able to do that throughout the day since he or she is responsible for overseeing all the animals as well as speaking to potential adopters.
- **Inventory for each site:** There is a basic setup for each of the off-site locations that includes exercise pens, tents, signage, blankets, little pools, crates, etc.
- **Customer service:** Good customer service is key. The counselor engages the public in a positive way and encourages physical interaction with the animals. Never pushy, he or she attempts to facilitate connections between the animals and visitors, thus increasing the chances of adoption. If adopting is not an option, visitors are encouraged to foster, volunteer or donate.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Not enough cat locations:** The volume of cats coming into Town Lake Animal Center is so high in the summer, additional off-site adoption areas are needed so that the public has the opportunity to come across the cat of their dreams by having cats available at the right places at the right times.
- **Too many animals at one location:** There should be a limited number of animals at any off-site adoption location. Too many choices can become overwhelming and people tune out. APA has found that more locations with a small number of animals to choose from to be most successful.
- **Weather elements:** APA is always at the mercy of the weather for the dog adoption sites since the sites are outside. The Texas heat last summer was a huge factor that forced them to cancel some days in consideration of the health and welfare of the animals.
- **Time in vehicles:** APA estimates about 40 percent of a counselor's time is spent loading, driving, unloading, reloading, driving, and then unloading again. That is not time spent in front of customers trying to get animals adopted. Permanent setups at PetSmarts and PETCOs would eliminate a lot of the setup/breakdown time.
- **Vehicle breakdowns:** Because of the wear and tear sustained on the donated used vans, they are constantly breaking down. A lot of money is spent repairing the vehicles. A fleet of newer vehicles would be a huge boon to APA's off-site program.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Expansion:** Ideally, APA would like to expand to more off-site adoption locations. The more areas they have homeless animals, the greater likelihood of the right person connecting with the right animal.
- **More customer service training:** Often people who care about animals are not necessarily the best at customer service. While customer service is currently good, APA wants it to be amazing. APA would like to offer additional customer service training to the counselors as well as volunteers. Additionally, they want to start offering personal adopters, dedicated staff or volunteers who figure out what visitors want and know the animals well enough to pair them up appropriately. This should result in a greater chance of a good match and successful adoption than if the person solely went by cage card information.

- **Relationship building with pet stores:** Setup on site is labor intensive. APA hopes to bolster their relationships with pet stores like PetSmart and PETCO to allow for permanent tents and cages for dogs. Also, they would like the stores to allow better signage to direct the public to their inside cat adoption areas.
- **Lower fee adoptions:** If donations increase, APA would like to be able to decrease their adoption fees, which they believe would increase the number of adoptions.



Helping APA without spending a dime

There are so many people who don't have money but do have some extra time and want to help APA. There are others who don't have time or money. The APA development coordinator regularly comes up with easy ways for these people to make a difference and support the organization.

The development coordinator helps set up cause marketing promotions where APA encourages supporters to "like" a business' Facebook page. In turn, those businesses will make a donation. Something as easy as a mouse click can bring in thousands of dollars to APA. This is a mutually beneficial relationship, since a large audience of potential new customers is exposed to the participating businesses via the APA blog. So long as the business does not hurt animals or promote something against APA ideals, APA feels donations to help save animals outweighs being discriminatory against potentially controversial benefactors.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Relationship builder:** Marketing promotions with businesses help build connections with sponsors and donors. The promos provide outlets for businesses to donate to a good cause while getting their name out in the APA blog and among supporters.
- **Fundraising:** The promos bring in donations to the organization with minimal effort by staff and volunteers.
- **Empowerment to supporters:** The promos provide an outlet to people who support the APA mission but who don't have a lot of money to support the organization.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Missed opportunities:** There are many businesses that could benefit from partnerships with APA, so there's more potential money to be made via this avenue. Soliciting such partnerships is high on APA's priority list.
- **More promotion desired:** Some participating companies want more promotion than APA can give them.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Expansion:** To encourage more companies to take part in this program, APA will need to become more creative in promoting opportunities, perhaps devoting a page on the website to them.



Working with Town Lake Animal Center

Because of the position they were in when APA reorganized under Ellen's leadership, APA did not initially have the greatest working relationship with Town Lake Animal Center. APA originally aspired to become the nonprofit arm of the shelter; however, that did not happen.

Since February 2011, when the shelter began experiencing a 90+ percent save rate, APA's relationship with Town Lake Animal Center has significantly improved because APA is seeing how much effort Town Lake is putting into the animals' welfare.

WHAT WORKED:

- **New director hired:** As part of Austin's goal to achieve a 90+ percent live outcome rate, Abigail Smith was hired as the new director of Town Lake Animal Center. She has a strong background in achieving no-kill and immediately began efforts to save animals.
- **Shift in philosophy:** Town Lake is now treating the shelter animals as if they'll live, as opposed to in the past when staff treated the animals as if they'd die. Support is now provided to the animals, which helps APA; animals are being microchipped and heartworm or combo tested; and treatment is started for sick animals. Previously, this had not been cost effective for the shelter when 50 percent of their animals were dying. The shelter's investment of resources into the animals has significantly reduced expenses for APA, allowing them to save additional animals.
- **Shelter adoption efforts:** Town Lake is now hosting their own adoption events, promoting animals through PR and Craigslist and staying open on holidays, thus increasing their own adoptions and decreasing the demand on APA to do the same.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **No city funding:** APA hasn't received funding or tangible support from the city of Austin for the services provided.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **City funding:** APA is hoping for city funding to help support the lifesaving work they're doing for Austin's shelter animals.
- **City location:** Once the new Austin municipal shelter on the east side is open, which is scheduled for fall 2011, Austin will rent the current downtown shelter location to APA for 18 months at the rate of \$1 per year, after which the plan is to tear it down to build an education center and storefront adoption center. A mutually beneficial outcome is desired and it is hoped that this location will be permanently given to APA. This would provide a safety net, as their current headquarters is not permanent and is rented on a year-to-year lease.



Foster program

Austin Pets Alive started pulling animals scheduled for euthanasia from Town Lake Animal Center in June 2008. Initially, APA had no building, so foster homes were needed for all animals. They rented a facility in September 2010, and now have an area for housing animals, but foster homes are still necessary for youngsters, sick or injured animals, dogs or cats who don't do well at the adoption site, and animals who need a break from the stress of a shelter environment. The program has grown, and now APA has over 1,200 approved foster parents and hundreds of cats and dogs in foster homes.

WHAT WORKED:

- Creating a team/tools dedicated to fostering:** To save so many lives, a tremendous number of foster homes are needed. To stay organized, volunteer foster teams were created to oversee the program and provide resources to assist the foster parents, allowing them to focus on the well-being of the animals. Various duties of these teams include processing foster applications, placing animals in appropriate homes, answering questions, scheduling animals for off-site adoptions and medical appointments, recruiting new foster families and more. Additionally, tools were developed for teams to utilize. A Google spreadsheet, accessible to all team members, keeps track of all the dogs in foster homes, including details like sterilization status, when animals are scheduled to go to adoption sites, if an adoption is pending, and so on. Individualized email accounts were created for the mentor and adoption teams, which give foster parents one point of contact at APA, yet the accounts are managed by multiple people.
- Automated foster application process:** Instead of paper applications, the public can complete an online application on the APA website. The website uses Zoho, which is not only easy for the applicants to use, but the data is automatically uploaded to a database, which can be accessed by a team of screeners.
- Asking, even if it seems impossible:** APA found out that it never hurts to ask when something is needed. For example, if a foster home is needed for cat with feline leukemia, they post the request on appropriate Yahoo! groups. What is needed and why it is important are explained and a request is made for group members to socially network the request on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. The responses are generally amazing. A "foster found" message is posted afterward to thank the person who stepped up to help as well as inform others that assistance is no longer necessary for that particular animal.
- Thinking of foster homes like kennels in a shelter:** Much like getting an animal in a shelter adopted is important to free up that space for another animal, the same holds true with foster homes. APA avoids the mindset that an animal is safe once the pet is with a foster. Instead they think of the home as potential space to save the next cat or dog. A strong focus on permanent adoption keeps the foster home open to the next animal.
- Maintaining a positive attitude:** Volunteers are important, but bad attitudes can be contagious. It is important for everyone to have a "yes we can" attitude, so it is better to remove one vocal person with a poor outlook before damage can occur, resulting in the loss of multiple good volunteers.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- Paper applications to foster:** Initially, all foster applications were completed by hand. Not only was this time consuming, as the applications had to be delivered or mailed, but they were labor intensive for APA to process. Online applications are far more efficient.

- **Paper caregiver agreements:** Initially, all foster homes had to complete a paper caregiver agreement each time their foster dog was adopted that had to be signed in person by the foster person. This was highly inefficient, so APA switched to a system that allowed the foster homes to email the document. Though there was no need for the signature to be witnessed, documentation could still be lost and people resented having to complete this for each dog they fostered. APA has now added a one-time contractual agreement to the foster application that references the pet's health, return of animals, damage/injury liability, etc.
- **Expecting foster people to read all information sent:** People are busy and simply do not have the time to read and learn a 50-page foster manual. APA has edited the cat foster manual down to 15 pages, but still sends all the basics via email as soon as a person is approved to foster. When the person is ready to pick up a cat, another short email is sent with contacts for medical or behavior questions, a link to the foster manual and some basic information. Then after the cat has had time to settle in, another email regarding the cat's needs (such as vaccination dates) and a reminder about points of contact is sent. When fosters miss a vaccination date, APA has a team of volunteers who contact overdue fosters with a reminder.
- **No limit to number of animals:** Initially, if fosters had a home with sufficient space to quarantine cats individually, the caregivers were given as many felines as they thought they could care for. However, it was determined that instituting a maximum number of cats resulted in more individualized attention, better socialization, adherence to vaccination schedules, and more marketing via social networking, thus resulting in a faster turnaround of foster animals into adoptive homes.
- **Unclear job descriptions:** Duplication of efforts can get messy and frustrating when there are multiple people doing the same duties, so it is important that all team members have clear job descriptions with specific responsibilities. For example, the mentors in the cat foster mentor program are assigned certain letters of the alphabet for the names of their foster families. That way there is no confusion and work is distributed fairly.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Reaching out to other communities:** Since no-kill status has been reached in Austin, APA is continuing to reach out to shelters in other communities to obtain animals. They hope they can be even more effective in helping rural shelters during the winter months when intake is reduced in Austin.
- **Specialized fosters:** As the program continues to grow, more foster homes will be needed. APA particularly wishes to expand the number of specialized foster homes that can take in animals with specific medical or behavioral issues.
- **More marketing:** APA wants a larger marketing team to better promote animals who are being fostered. When a foster cat or dog is adopted and space opens up in a foster home, another animal can be rescued from a shelter.



No-kill conference

Given their successful track record, the folks at Austin Pets Alive wanted to help others implement their lifesaving programs in their own communities. So in September 2011, they held a two-day no-kill conference in Austin featuring 19 different presentations, a tour of their facility, one-on-one mentoring, and a panel-style lunch. There were 75 attendees.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Program handbook:** Each of the conference attendees received an almost 400-page handbook that outlined the details on how to recreate successful APA programs. The feedback they received on the handbook has been overwhelmingly positive.
- **Tours:** Conference attendees enjoyed the tour through the APA facility. They commented on how helpful it was to see the programs that had been discussed during the presentations being run first-hand.
- **Presenters who implemented the programs:** The people presenting the conference sessions were the folks who actually implemented the programs at APA. Thus, the attendees were able to learn directly from the experts who are most familiar with the programs.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Too little time to prepare:** APA staff and volunteers organized the entire conference within an approximate six-week time frame. While the event was a success and ran smoothly, it caused stress for the organizers because of an unanticipated local fire and rescue effort that occurred only weeks prior to the conference. Plus, it did not give sufficient time for attendees to schedule cost-efficient travel.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Another conference:** APA plans to host another conference around February 2012. Some anticipated changes include booking a larger venue, offering more advanced sessions in addition to the basic ones, scheduling more one-on-one time with the presenters and ending the conference with a presentation wrap-up and overview. It may run two and a half days instead of two.

2012 Update

Austin Pets Alive has had quite a year of forward-moving progress. From relocating to a larger facility to expanding programs and increasing adoptions, APA has achieved many of its objectives for 2012.

BOTTLE BABY PROGRAM: Two additional staff members were hired and earmarked specifically to maintain cleanliness and administer a greater number of feedings. The new hires arrived in the nick of time, as the bottle-baby population soared. Volunteer involvement is still critical, however, for ensuring that all kittens are fed and the facility is cleaned each day.

APA's bottle baby program manager gave a presentation on kitten lifesaving protocol at both the American Pets Alive second annual no-kill conference and the University of Florida's Shelter Medicine Conference. These speaking engagements, along with requested consultations from other central Texas cities, continue to lay the foundation for numerous other groups and organizations to more easily establish their own programs.

PARVO PROGRAM: The program and its how-to manual were featured at the American Pets Alive No-Kill Conference and the University of Florida's Shelter Medicine Conference. Hands-on demonstrations were not included, but hopefully they will be in the future.

PASS PROGRAM: The city of Austin now has paid staff offering Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS)-type services. The services provided include counseling and resources, though not rehoming. The shift in responsibility to the city allows APA's paid staffer to focus on manning the hotline and addressing other tasks pertaining to the new San Antonio endeavor.

LOVE ON A LEASH PROGRAM: Since APA's June relocation to the Town Lake Animal Center (TLAC), the Love on a Leash program has undergone some changes, not the least of which is that both staffers and volunteers walk dogs throughout the day and evening. Ideally, more volunteers will get involved so that dog counselors can walk less and attend to more pressing caregiving tasks.

SAVING CATS WITH RINGWORM: Now that APA is in the new TLAC facility, an entirely separate, public-accessible building is available for cats with ringworm. The result: Many more cats with ringworm are being treated and then adopted out.

HEALTHY DOGS, HEALTHY PEOPLE PROGRAM: Relocating to TLAC has provided so many advantages and perks, including the recreational benefit of being right on the water. Joggers can trot across the street, borrow an APA dog and head for the running trail as part of the new Jog a Dog program. Partnering with a local running group provides more than 80 volunteers to exercise the dogs. Also, TLAC has so much more space than the previous facility to accommodate the parking needs of employees, volunteers and potential adopters.

LOUIE'S FRESH START: Dog behaviorist Mike Kaviani was warmly welcomed into the APA family in June, and he quickly revamped and combined existing programs like Louie's Fresh Start into the new APA Dog Behavior Program. Mike uses dog play groups as a way to evaluate behavior in a more natural setting than dogs in cages or on leashes. In play groups, dogs are free to socialize and release energy, thereby increasing their potential for better behavior learning.

This single modification has already proven to be a lifesaving technique for the 10 percent of APA's dogs who have behavioral challenges. The average length of stay for these dogs has decreased from 65 to 52 days. The additional space available at TLAC allows separation of certain dogs if appropriate.

WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: APA and other animal welfare organizations came together again this year to host a forum in which local political candidates expressed their viewpoints on the status of animal welfare in Austin. APA continues to maintain close relationships with city council members and the city shelter staff.

FREE OR LOW-FEE ADOPTION EVENTS: So far this year, APA has experienced a 55 percent increase in animal intake. Other local rescue groups are also having a surge in intake and are working hard to get animals adopted.

To compete with the city shelter's ongoing free adoption events, APA has been holding "name your own price" and "free with donation" events. APA has had many more adoptions as a result. The next adoption promotion that APA will try is Free Friday, a standing event that offers no-cost placement for cats and large dogs.

SUBARU PARTNERSHIP: Paddle for Puppies (a Subaru-sponsored paddle boarding fundraising event) was a major success and great fun for all involved. Subaru has also equipped APA with live streaming video of dog play groups, which is a tremendous catalyst for increasing adoptions, educating the public about dog behavior and showing the world what APA is all about.

OFF-SITE ADOPTIONS: By virtue of all the extra space, APA's new TLAC location has met the need for increased adoptions without having to acquire an additional off-site location. Hiring matchmakers to assist in pairing adopters with appropriate animals has also enhanced the adoption process. Several low-fee events have taken place this year as one way to keep up with the constant influx of animals. Much hard work has been done — and continues to be done — to secure enough donations to offset the decreased revenue from adoptions.

NEW DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR: The addition of a development department director has provided APA with greater manpower to work on increasing financial resources.

CITY FUNDING: APA received some city funding for 2011-2012 but is in jeopardy of losing it in November 2012. Negotiating new contract terms will hopefully secure future city funding to continue the organization's lifesaving work. After weeks of meetings and negotiations, APA and Austin city officials finalized a contract for APA to occupy Town Lake Animal Center until 2015.

FOSTER PROGRAM: Ann Lindholm, APA's original foster program manager, gave a presentation at the Best Friends No More Homeless Pets Conference, as well as to the city of El Paso, the latter of which is working on ways to increase the number of lives saved. Foster homes are now more consistently available than they have been in years past, when the time of year would dictate whether APA had enough foster families to accommodate the seasonal need. This greater level of reliability has created a beneficial domino effect whereby more animals are being saved because rescue efforts can extend further into the community.

APA doesn't yet have the funds to hire a marketing staff person, so the foster program outreach helps attract supporters and volunteers, as well as spread the word about all the good work being accomplished.

NO-KILL CONFERENCE: American Pets Alive hosted a two-and-a-half-day conference in February 2012 and has already scheduled another for February 2013.

2013 Update

Austin Pets Alive has had another great year. From celebrating an impressive 91.5 percent save rate in its Bottle Baby Kitten Nursery to launching a new veterinary internship program to reducing returns through its Dog Matchmaking Program, Austin Pets Alive has achieved many of its objectives for 2013.

BOTTLE BABY KITTEN NURSERY: In the thick of another high-intake summer, the Bottle Baby Kitten Nursery celebrated an unprecedented 91.5 percent save rate. Several things contributed to this success. First, there was more staff to fill in on shifts that are harder for volunteers to cover, such as late nights and early mornings. APA also welcomed two medical interns to the team, as well as an assistant for the neonatal program manager. Second, in the last year, the bottle baby team implemented an “all in, all out” protocol, which doesn’t allow new litters of kittens to fill empty cages as they become available. Instead, APA waits until every litter has moved out of the room, then sanitizes the room before moving new litters into the empty cages. This system has stopped the spread of disease in its tracks, nearly eliminating the problems seen in previous kitten seasons.

MEDICAL TRIAGE CLINIC: So far, 2013 has meant a better setup and better equipment in APA’s Medical Triage Clinic. APA converted an old office space into a fully functioning veterinary clinic, complete with exam rooms, an operating room and a brand new X-ray machine generously donated by Maddie’s Fund. In summer of 2013, APA launched a new Veterinary Internship Program for recent veterinary school graduates with the hiring of Dr. Kristen Kjellberg. Her presence rounds out the medical team so they can handle every need, from the wellness of their healthiest pets to the treatment of medically challenged cats and dogs.

PARVO PUPPY ICU: APA’s Parvo Puppy ICU is one of the top three parvo treatment facilities in the U.S. Celebrating an 85 to 90 percent survival rate, APA’s parvo team members put in countless hours and sometimes even stay the night to make sure the patients in this ward are stable and as happy as they can be. This summer, APA opened its parvo ICU doors to local reporters as part of a segment encouraging the community to vaccinate their pets.

PASS PROGRAM: APA’s Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS) program continues to provide support and coordinate resources for people who think surrendering their pet is the only option because of unforeseen circumstances and money troubles. In 2013, APA built up its boarding network to 35 facilities that donate time to pets APA is helping to place in new forever homes. APA also started a PASS Medical Fund to come to the rescue of pet owners faced with either surrender or euthanasia as the only alternatives to medical emergencies.

DOG VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROGRAM (FORMERLY LOVE ON A LEASH): After general orientation, APA’s dog volunteers start working with dogs under the direction of mentors experienced in dog handling. APA combines a color-coded collar system for the dogs with a multi-level training program for volunteers. This has resulted in more volunteers being able to work with more of the dogs, rather than having volunteer coverage for the easier dogs and leaving the more difficult dogs to be handled by staff only. Mike Kaviani, APA’s behavior team manager, runs invaluable training courses for the humans of APA three days a week to make sure the team has the knowledge and training to work with even the most difficult canine behavior issues.

DAZEY’S WARD: SAVING CATS WITH RINGWORM: In 2013, 109 cats who have spent time in Dazey’s Ward have gone on to be adopted into loving forever homes. APA continues to enjoy its dedicated building at Town Lake Animal Center, and more and more foster parents and volunteers are signing up to help put the FUN back in FUNGUS.

RUFFTAIL RUNNERS (FORMERLY HEALTHY DOGS, HEALTHY PEOPLE / JOG A DOG): Rufftail Runners continues to be one of the best things a shelter dog could ask for, training more than 600 new runners in 2013 alone and running between 20 and 50 dogs a day. Town Lake Animal Center’s prime location allows APA’s shelter dogs to stretch their legs on one of the best waterside hiking and biking trails in Austin.

Shelter dogs get a regular dose of the good life among other humans and four-legged friends against the scenic environment and majestic Austin skyline, and runners share notes from their excursions that help APA’s staff learn how

each dog reacts in various situations. The number of runners-turned-adopters of their favorite running buddies has climbed into the 20s, with many more runners joining the ranks as foster parents, donors and APA volunteers. The organizers of Rufftail Runners have also started charging an orientation fee, which goes into a fund that so far has paid for heartworm treatment for six dogs and for much-needed supplies.

DOG MATCHMAKING PROGRAM: In 2013, APA placed a huge emphasis on matchmaking as a way of reducing returns and increasing adoptions in general. APA combines notes from volunteers, foster parents, its own databases and Rufftail Runners to assess the dogs' personalities and match them with homes based on potential adopters' responses to interview questions. For example, a couple recently walked in with a list of 15 dogs, but based on interview questions and good old-fashioned conversation, one of APA's matchmakers recommended Louise, who wasn't on the list. Louise had been in the system for almost two years, and that night she went to her forever home.

Matchmaking reinforces the belief that there is a loving home for every pet, and that long-term success depends on getting to know the dogs by keeping extensive notes and having potential adopters answer intuitive questions.

DOG BEHAVIOR PROGRAM (FORMERLY LOUIE'S FRESH START): APA's behavior team, led by Mike Kaviani, is doing groundbreaking work with under-socialized and other behaviorally challenged dogs, who are often at risk of being killed in shelters. APA has continued its dog play groups, as well as adoption follow-ups and lifetime behavior support.

In the summer of 2013, dogs at APA began training to pass the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test. To pass the test, a dog must demonstrate solid obedience training and general reliability in 10 different real-world scenarios. A dog who achieves the title of "CGC prepared" has demonstrated that when partnered with a responsible person, he or she possesses all the qualities of a well-trained and loving pet. Since a key component of the CGC program is developing a bond between owner and pet, APA offers incentives and free training for adopters who return to APA for formal CGC certification after adoption.

WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: APA continues to maintain close working relationships with the Austin City Council and city shelter staff. This summer, Austin proclaimed June 22 as Love Your Rescue Pet Day. Animal welfare organizations and the community had the opportunity to recognize the rescued pets in their lives, and APA celebrated about 40 adoptions on Love Your Rescue Pet Day alone.

FREE OR LOW-FEE ADOPTION EVENTS: So far this year, the city shelter has ceased open intake for dogs and cats multiple times for the first time in more than 60 years. Kill lists were being assembled for the first time since Austin's 2011 No-Kill Plan was implemented. The rescue community came together and offered relief to the city shelter; through free and low-fee adoption promotions, they placed many dogs and cats in loving forever homes.

SUBARU PARTNERSHIP: The Subaru partnership, which includes fundraising events and other resources to help APA, continues to thrive.

OFF-SITE ADOPTIONS: In 2013, APA added three permanent off-site adoption locations and received air-conditioned cargo vans from a generous Petco grant.

NEW DEVELOPMENT STAFFERS: In 2013, APA added a donor database coordinator and a marketing manager, thanks to a grant from Best Friends Animal Society.

FOSTER PROGRAM: When asked what she thought the single most important component of no-kill is, APA executive director Dr. Ellen Jefferson answered with one word: "Foster." APA has the largest foster network in the U.S., and quite possibly the world. When kennel space is nil and the attention list is long, fostering can make the difference between life and death. Fostering takes the pressure of daily care off APA staff and volunteers, making it easier to give animals the best treatment and freeing up space for animals who are harder to place.

NO-KILL CONFERENCE: APA is currently gearing up to host the fourth annual American Pets Alive conference, where people gather to meet like-minded folks from around the country and learn how to implement no-kill programs in their own communities.