

2015

Best Friends National Conference

# Playbook



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

**Austin, Texas**



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This playbook is one in a series meant to be used as guides as you explore how you can save more lives in your community. Getting to no-kill isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition. Each community is unique, with its own challenges and resources, so the playbooks highlight a variety of communities and detail the various ways that leaders in those communities progressed to no-kill or have their communities firmly on that path. Of course, there are some common denominators: Collaboration, commitment, hard work and data-driven approaches to problem-solving are some of the factors that have taken these communities to lifesaving levels once believed to be unreachable. We hope that you will find the information in the playbooks helpful and inspirational as your community works to **Save Them All**®.

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

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

**Some keys to Austin's success:**

- Establishing a bottle baby program to save neonatal kittens
- Saving puppies with parvo and cats with ringworm via programs dedicated to those purposes
- Setting up a program to help prevent people from relinquishing their pets to the shelter
- Implementing enrichment programs (e.g., play groups, volunteer dog walking) and a behavior program to make dogs more adoptable
- Working proactively with local government to make animal welfare a priority
- Offering innovative promotions to encourage people to adopt
- Committing to off-site adoptions and conducting them consistently
- Engaging the public and offering people a variety of ways to help
- Developing a collaborative relationship between the municipal shelter and the major rescue partner
- Operating a robust foster program focused on adoption

## 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 Austin 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. Before APA was created, the live outcome from the city shelter was only about 15 percent, though after their initial advocacy 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 volunteer 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 100 paid staff) with an approximate \$3 million annual budget.

While initially an advocacy organization, in 2008 APA shifted its focus to determining why animals are euthanized at the city shelter. Very little information existed about what exactly these animals needed in order to be adopted rather than killed, so APA took a novel approach to finding out.

The staff at Austin Animal Center evaluate animals and, based on available resources, decide what animals can be made available for adoption. Additionally, they work closely with other animal welfare organizations in the transfer of animals. APA selects from cats and dogs who have not been transferred to rescue organizations and will most likely end up on the euthanasia list and be killed due to lack of resources. 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 Austin 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 the old city shelter and is now leased from the City of Austin, or in their extensive foster care network homes.

Though APA does not euthanize for space, it doesn't pride itself on the fact that it is a no-kill shelter. Their mission is to make the entire city of Austin no-kill, thus their programs are different than what might be utilized at a traditional no-kill shelter, as their intent is to create a safety net for every animal, regardless of the problems the animals are facing, to prevent them from dying in any shelter in the city.

In February 2011, for the first time in Austin history, 92 percent of the animals in Austin 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 2011 (with 89 percent), the live outcome rate out of Austin every month has been 90 percent or higher. And at least 50 percent of that success is due to the efforts of APA, which has taken more than 24,000 cats and dogs into its programs and has found homes for 22,000 since June 2008.

City of Austin	
2008 save rate:	<b>56.1%</b>
2014 save rate:	<b>93.8%</b>



## Bottle baby program

Austin Animal Center, like most municipal shelters, does not have the capability to provide around-the-clock care for neonatal (unweaned) kittens, which previously resulted in immediate death for the 1,200-plus kittens who entered that shelter annually. APA, in response, created a ward specifically set up to house and care for these kittens. Modeled after a wildlife center's care program for baby animals, APA's bottle baby 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 (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 to 1,500 kittens come into Austin Animal Center annually. The bottle baby program began in September 2009 and APA was able to pull about 200 kittens in the first four months. In 2010, they pulled around 800 kittens; in 2011, 1,200; in 2012, almost 2,000; and in 2013, 1,500. With a roughly 89 percent save rate for a huge population of kittens who would have otherwise been killed, this is considered APA's "crown jewel" program.

In 2015, APA will be opening the bottle baby program in a new, much larger space. The added space will allow the program to help bottle babies from many different communities and allow more volunteer participation.

### 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.
- **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.
- **Opportunity to 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 in helping animals.

- **Volunteers “own” the program:** Volunteers are responsible for every aspect of the program, including feeding the kittens, cleaning, ensuring disease control, and filling out the charts correctly. Staff augment by making pleas for additional foster homes, giving medications and overseeing population management to prevent having 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.
- **Educating the public about what to do if kittens are found:** APA has an informational area on its 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 Austin 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:** Orphaned 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 get an injection of an antibiotic. Flea and worm treatment are also administered.
- **Nursing mom program:** APA instituted a program to save adult female lactating cats or those who are pregnant. They pull the lactating cats from Austin Animal Center as soon as possible 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 three times before signing up for solo shifts. This extra guidance helps reduce the number of mistakes that can spread disease.

## WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Spread of disease:** It’s hard to control diseases. Young 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. Currently, volunteers put on different smocks and wash their hands or use gloves between handling each litter to help prevent the spread of disease. However, these strategies are not always successful.
- **Death rate:** Despite all efforts to save the kittens, there is still about an 11 percent death rate, and the loss is emotionally difficult for volunteers.
- **High level of stress:** If all shifts are not covered, the responsibility shifts to paid feeder or key volunteers. This causes a high level of stress among these few valued volunteers, sometimes resulting in burnout. Constant recruiting of new volunteers is necessary to keep staff costs low.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- **Helping other cities:** APA would like 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. American Pets Alive is the resource for this training.



## Parvo program

The parvo program started by accident when APA saved some puppies who were sick when the organization first started receiving animals from Austin Animal Center. Since euthanasia wasn't an option once the dogs were 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 Austin Animal Center from that point onward, which in turn meant that all puppies were saved because parvo puppies were the hardest group to save.

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 they're 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 \$250. APA staff 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 staff pull 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 has an 88 percent survival rate for these dogs and treats about 500 puppies per year. Many of the animals arrive after the ideal treatment start time. Austin 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

- **Increasing the save rate dramatically:** APA has been able to save around 88 percent of the dogs with parvo; previously, the euthanasia rate was 100 percent.
- **Treating highly adoptable puppies:** Puppies are greatly desired by the public, especially in Austin, where there aren't enough puppies for interested adopters, so "throwing them away," when it only costs \$50 to \$250 to treat them, is not an option.

- **No cross-contamination:** All supplies are kept in a locked, self-contained part of the building with its own entrance. Before entering, caregivers use 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 the shelter. Also, all feces are flushed down a toilet instead of being deposited in the trash to avoid potentially exposing raccoons and feral dogs, who are susceptible to parvo.
- **Having 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, to write up orders, and to see if IV catheters are needed, most 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 WORK

- **Not vaccinating puppies:** When there are a lot of puppies, the chance for other disease transmission is increased. So now the puppies are vaccinated upon intake, prior to entering the ward, even if they are already sick, to prevent other diseases like distemper. The vaccine may not work 100 percent, since the puppy is sick, but some coverage is better than none. 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. APA hopes to create a hands-on training program for others to take back to their communities. American Pets Alive is the resource for this.





## 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 Austin 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. The 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 no statistics that can prove that a person did not return later to surrender the animal.
- **Helping people rehome animals:** When people want to get rid of a pet for some reason, they often don't know how to do it. They've called shelters and rescue groups and no one will take their pet. The PASS representative listens to their concerns and helps them 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 the 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. It's more effective at preventing relinquishment than telling people their pet might not make it out alive, because most people believe that their pet is not likely to be the one chosen for euthanasia.

### WHAT'S NEXT

- **Shift in services:** There is one paid coordinator and now that no-kill has been achieved, that person answers the hotline from home rather than standing in front of the shelter.



## Walking Warriors program

Walking Warriors 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 Walking Warriors 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 exists.

They have two shifts per day, 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 8 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

- **Run by volunteers:** 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. Staff will walk any dogs who have not been walked by volunteers before their shift ends, but it would not be possible for staff to walk 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 volunteers offer mini-training (called Easy Start) for newcomers to the Walking Warriors program so they can start right away.
- **Having different levels of handlers:** New volunteers are only allowed to walk the easiest dogs. When volunteers have been through several training classes for each broad group of dogs (such as "boo training" for scared dogs), they are given clearance to walk all the dogs. Since APA handles large numbers of big dogs with behavioral issues, it is essential that everyone stays safe.
- **Positive reinforcement:** The APA dog volunteers' Facebook page, the most active Web page in the organization, encourages people to come meet new dogs and to try new walking areas. It generally encourages participation.

## WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **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 aren't many volunteers, the people who are helping can begin to feel overwhelmed.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- **A new shelter:** APA is at the beginning of a capital campaign to build a new shelter, which will be designed to allow dogs to be walked in a less stressful way, avoiding all the cage reactivity from other dogs. A lower stress situation will help get more dogs walked.



## Ringworm Ward

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 treatment area called the Ringworm Ward. They are treated both orally and topically with weekly dips until they are no longer contagious. They are then either sent to foster homes to complete any treatment, to allow their hair to regrow and to be put up for adoption. One-hundred percent of ringworm cats are saved in Austin.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Volunteer care of cats:** Volunteers called “fungus fighters” come to the Ringworm Ward at least twice a week to deep-clean the building, bedding, scratching posts and litter boxes, and to dip all the cats.
- **Fun adoption promotions:** Adoption promotions that feature cats with ringworm — Adopt a Fun Guy (Fungi), Lord of the Ringworm, Hairy(less) Potter — are a hit. If an event has a super fun name, people will come specifically looking to adopt cats with ringworm; they are also enticed by the reduced adoption fee of only \$15, as compared to \$125 normally. All treatment medications are sent home with the adopters free of charge to set them up for success. It’s a great way to get the cats adopted and out of their foster homes. Waivers, educational counseling and handouts given to adopters help protect the organization, too.
- **An isolation ward that the public can enter:** Keeping cats with ringworm in the public eye while they’re being treated is essential to getting them adopted.
- **Foster homes:** It’s important to educate and recruit foster volunteers who are willing to treat ringworm in order to ensure that there’s enough room for all of the cats with ringworm at the peak of the season.
- **Doing the dirty work:** Foster families and adopters are encouraged to bring their cats to the ward for twice-weekly dippings so that the smell of lime sulfur does not become a part of the caregivers’ home lives.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Limited space:** There is only so much space at the shelter to isolate cats with ringworm, and treatment takes four to six weeks. Since space is limited, as are the number of foster homes, a limited number of cats with ringworm can be pulled by APA from Austin Animal Center. This is one of the hardest categories of cats to save.

### WHAT'S NEXT

- **Helping other cities:** APA would like every city to have a ringworm program so that no cats are ever in jeopardy at a shelter just because they have this skin fungus. American Pets Alive is the resource for this training.



## Dogs Playing for Life program

The play group program implemented at APA has been hugely helpful in efforts to save all the large-breed adult dogs. Information about Aimee Sadler's Dogs Playing for Life program can be found at [dogsplayingforlife.com](http://dogsplayingforlife.com).

### WHAT WORKED

- **Using play groups as an enrichment strategy:** The dogs are able to get out of their kennels and socialize with other dogs and people. They burn off energy and get much-needed dog-to-dog interaction. For large-breed dogs who spend months in a shelter, this program is essential to their mental health.
- **Using play groups for assessment:** Play groups allow the behavior staff to evaluate dogs in a more natural setting. Instead of assessing a stressed-out dog on a leash or in a frenetic environment, the behavior evaluation can be done in a real situation with other dogs. Most of the dogs who come to APA with a label of "dog aggression" are in fact very social around other dogs, but they can't exhibit that on a leash with a strange person in a shelter. If they are not dog-social, we learn that, too, and can then label them fairly and educate potential adopters. This assessment method prevents all the big dogs in the shelter from being labeled "not good with dogs," which drastically decreases their chances of adoption.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Using inexperienced staff:** The idea of letting 90 to 125 dogs play together in small rotating groups is daunting. It wasn't until APA staff hired an expert that they were able to pull off running play groups in a very successful fashion.

### WHAT'S NEXT

- **Training more people to run play groups:** In partnership with Dogs Playing for Life, APA would like to train people to become experienced enough to implement this program in shelters all over the country. APA now offers internships to other shelters for this purpose.



## Dog behavior program

About 20 percent 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 run amuck. The dog behavior program focuses on 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. They are considered the last piece of the no-kill puzzle.

The program is operated by key staff helped by a corps of volunteers. Volunteers receive varying levels of training on techniques for different dogs. The first level of training (leash training, teaching a dog not to jump up, etc.) is for all volunteers who walk dogs. Tier-two training is for volunteers working with slightly more difficult dogs, such as those who are at high risk of running away. This training makes the volunteers more aware of potential problems. Tier-three training is for the most elite volunteers, the only ones trained to handle certain high-risk dogs.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Using 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 the program who are already known to have behavioral issues.
- **Training volunteers:** Since implementing the volunteer 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.
- **Using 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 silver 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 differently 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 whose personality types will complement the dogs' training.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Having higher-tier dogs under one roof:** Having moved from one shelter to another, 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.

- **Not enough volunteers:** While the volunteer recruitment team is doing a great job, the shelter can always use more volunteers for this program.
- **Not enough resources:** APA can pull most (but not all) dogs with known behavioral issues from Austin Animal Center. Since it's difficult to find foster homes for these dogs, and cage space is limited, staff must decline a couple of dogs per month who probably could have been saved.

### WHAT'S NEXT

- **New building:** 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.
- **More staff for the program:** APA needs to increase the behavior team staff so that all dogs get as much one-on-one care as they need.





## Canine Good Citizen Program

With the support of Best Friends Animal Society, Austin Pets Alive began training adoptable dogs to pass the Canine Good Citizen test, designed by the American Kennel Club (AKC) in 2013. The test consists of 10 different real-world scenarios that demonstrate a dog's solid obedience training and general reliability. Dogs are tested by an AKC evaluator after a period of training. After passing the test, a dog is eligible for the title of CGC Ready, which means that when partnered with a responsible person, he or she possesses all the qualities of a well-trained and reliable pet.

This pilot program has become a full-fledged core program of APA, with more than 120 dogs trained so far. The result: The average length of stay for large-breed adult dogs has dropped by 60 percent.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Implementing the program:** The CGC program is working great overall and gives opportunities to volunteers who are looking to improve the lives of dogs in the shelter. It provides volunteers with clear objectives for working with the dogs and helps structure volunteer time. Also, people are more interested in adopting dogs when they are CGC Ready, and the dogs rarely get returned.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Marketing:** The marketing of these great dogs continues to be challenging. The goal is to get them adopted quickly and sometimes it is not fast enough.
- **Regression of some dogs:** Staff and volunteers spend hours of their time training these dogs, yet a few dogs have lost their CGC status after completing training.
- **Constraints of the CGC program:** The tight constraints of CGC prevent some needy dogs from getting help. If a dog has a "record" from his previous shelter or at APA, he can't participate.

### WHAT'S NEXT

- **Working with more dogs:** APA would like to work with more dogs on all layers of behavior, to instill training in every dog at APA. This might require a rebrand of the program, however, because currently only the dogs who fit the tight CGC prequalification can benefit.



## Working with local government

When APA was reinvigorated under Ellen Jefferson’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 Austin 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 in which the city council was open to some change. As a result, this opened doors for APA to do a lot with Austin Animal Center.

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

### WHAT WORKED

- **Having a politician on the 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.
- **Having an informed city council:** Council members have so many issues that the public wants them to address that 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 realized that as public servants, it’s up to them to help solve city issues, and this is one issue they have fully embraced.
- **Getting 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. When large numbers of people speak in support of no-kill at council meetings, it sends a huge message.
- **Passing a 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 Austin 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.)

- **Vaccinating all animals upon intake:** Though Austin 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 its political ties, the city council had an unscheduled audit performed and discovered more than 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.
- **Running Woodrow for governor:** A local Austin woman signed up her adopted dog, whom she had rescued from death row at Austin 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 campaign received a lot of media attention, even nationally, and provided public awareness for APA as well as generating 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 WORK

- **Outsourcing adoptions at Austin Animal Center:** APA went through a laborious request for proposal (RFP) process to become the nonprofit partner to outsource animal adoptions from Austin 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 its 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 more funding was allotted for more spay/neuter, which had already been in the city budget, rather than programs to support live outcomes from the shelter. Thus, programs to increase live outcomes were not financed as anticipated. APA receives no funds from the city, but takes in roughly 20 percent of the city's intake per year.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- **Continuing to host 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 its main facility and off-site adoption locations. One such idea is to allow people to select the price they would like to pay to adopt a pet, while another is to allow people to adopt a pet for free.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Tapping into 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 the first “name your own price” adoption event, one person donated \$500 for a dog who was harder to place than most.
- **Getting increased traffic:** The first couple of times APA hosted a “name your own price” event, it generated increased public attention and traffic. In fact, adoptions increased significantly, at least doubling APA’s typical adoption numbers.

### WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- **Having no-fee adoptions:** At the no-fee events, APA didn’t make much money, which was difficult because APA counts on bringing in adoption fees to offset costs. Now, instead of no-fee events, it has a \$25 minimum donation at “name your own price” promotions. (Note: APA still does all its normal screening for all lower-fee adoptions.)
- **Promotion loses efficacy:** APA discovered that after the “name your own price” promotion had been used once or twice, the concept was no longer catchy. Thus, traffic and adoptions went back down to normal levels.
- **Offering all animals at “name your own price” promotion:** Puppies are often worth more than what the public gives during a “name your own price” promotion. 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 are in high demand any time, during these promotions defeats the purpose. The intent is to prevent foster families from bringing puppies, particularly those who have incurred expensive medical treatments, to “name your own price” events. However, with hundreds of dogs in foster homes, logistics make it difficult to communicate specifically to those homes with puppies.

### WHAT’S NEXT

- **Making “name your own price” an element, but not the central focus, of events:** “Name your own price” will no longer be the focus of an adoption event, but instead can be the pricing structure offered with other promotional campaigns, such as 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. 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. Each event raised about \$10,000.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Involves minimal effort from APA:** APA provides some volunteers to help, but Subaru does almost all of the work associated with the events.
- **Using the corporate 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 dealership 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 been aware of APA are introduced to the organization.
- **Including extras during events:** Other smaller fundraisers such as a raffle and silent auction are included during the ride/walk to help raise additional funds.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Corporate needs are different than a nonprofit's needs:** 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

- **Holding 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).
- **Making the events annual:** 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 investing time and resources on getting animals out of Austin 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, other 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, its adoption numbers should match its rescue numbers. If either gets out of balance, the organization quickly realizes something needs to be adjusted.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Adopting in 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 pet stores and non-animal-related spots with significant foot traffic. One popular location is an Airstream trailer in the trendy South Congress (SoCo) entertainment district in downtown Austin. Since so many people frequent SoCo, the adoption numbers and donations there are actually higher than at other animal-specific spots.
- **Staying consistent:** 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.
- **Using 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 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 to manage than the dog sites because the cats live there 24/7 and are not transported daily.)
- **Using 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.

- **Having 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 and other supplies.
- **Giving good 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 WORK

- **Not enough cat locations:** The volume of cats coming into Austin Animal Center is so high in the summer that additional off-site adoption areas are needed so that the public has maximum opportunity to come across the cat of their dreams.
- **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 the most successful strategy is more locations with a small number of animals to choose from.
- **Weather elements:** APA is always at the mercy of the weather for the dog adoption sites, since the sites are outside. The Texas heat in the summer is a huge factor, forcing APA to cancel some adoption 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 PetSmart and Petco stores would eliminate a lot of the setup and break-down 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 adoption program.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- **Expansion:** Ideally, APA would like to expand to more off-site adoption locations. The more places that homeless animals are in front of the public, 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, APA wants 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 a successful adoption, compared to the prospective adopter basing his/her decision solely on cage card information.
- **Relationship building with pet stores:** Setup on-site is labor intensive. APA hopes to bolster its relationships with pet stores like PetSmart and Petco to allow for permanent tents and cages for dogs. Also, it would like the stores to allow better signage to direct the public to its inside cat adoption areas.
- **Lower-fee adoptions:** If donations increase, APA would like to be able to decrease its adoption fees, which it believes would increase the number of adoptions.



## Helping APA without spending a dime

There are so many people who don't have money, but they 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.

For example, the development coordinator helps set up cause marketing promotions in which APA encourages supporters to "like" a business's 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. As long as the business does not hurt animals or promote something against APA's ideals, APA feels that donations to help save animals outweighs being discriminatory against potentially controversial benefactors.

### WHAT WORKED

- **Relationship building:** Marketing promotions with businesses helps build connections with sponsors and donors. The promos provide outlets for businesses to donate to a good cause while getting their names out in the APA blog and among supporters.
- **Easy 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 WORK

- **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 Austin Animal Center

When APA reorganized under Ellen's leadership, APA did not initially have the greatest working relationship with Austin Animal Center, mostly because of hurt feelings about APA shining a light on what types of animals needed to be and could be saved. 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 save rate of more than 90 percent, APA's relationship with Austin Animal Center has significantly improved because APA is seeing how much effort Austin is putting into the animals' welfare. In fact, the difference between where Austin was in 2007 and now is half attributed to APA and half attributed to the city's increased number of adoptions.

### WHAT WORKED

- Maintaining the commitment:** As part of Austin's commitment to maintaining its hard-won success and tenacious approach to best practices in animal welfare, Tawny Hammond was hired as the chief animal services officer for the City of Austin in June 2015. During her tenure as animal shelter director at the Fairfax County Animal Shelter, the shelter became the largest jurisdiction in the nation with a live release rate above 90 percent. Even before officially starting her new position, Tawny began reaching out to animal welfare stakeholders in Austin and talking with Austin Animal Center staff about strategies to strengthen partnerships and collaborative lifesaving efforts.
- Shift in philosophy:** When the city council approved the no-kill resolution, 90 percent was the mandated goal for the shelter to achieve. Austin is now treating shelter animals as if they'll live, as opposed to treating them as if they'll die, which is the way it was in the past. 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 its animals were dying. The shelter's investment of resources into the animals has significantly reduced expenses for APA, allowing APA to save additional animals.
- Shelter adoption efforts:** Austin is now hosting its own adoption events, promoting animals through PR and Craigslist and staying open on holidays, thus increasing its own adoptions and decreasing the demand on APA to do the same.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- No city funding:** APA hasn't received funding 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 it's doing for Austin's shelter animals.

- **City location:** Once the new Austin municipal shelter on the east side opened in 2011, the city rented the downtown shelter location to APA for three years at the rate of \$1 per year, after which the plan was 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 to both the city's save rate and to APA's programs.



## Foster program

Austin Pets Alive started pulling animals scheduled for euthanasia from Austin Animal Center in June 2008. Initially, APA had no building, so foster homes were needed for all animals. APA rented a facility in September 2010, and now has a facility 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 foster program has grown, and now APA has more than 1,200 approved foster parents and hundreds of cats and dogs in foster homes.

### WHAT WORKED

- Creating a team and 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 use. A Google spreadsheet, accessible to all team members, keeps track of all the dogs in foster homes, including details such as sterilization status, when animals are scheduled to go to adoption sites, and if an adoption is pending. 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.
- Using an 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 that 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 a cat with feline leukemia, a request is posted on appropriate Yahoo groups. What is needed and why it is important are explained and a request is made for group members to 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:** Getting an animal in a shelter adopted is important because it frees up that space for another animal, and the same holds true with foster homes. APA avoids the mindset that an animal is safe once the pet is with a foster family. Instead, the foster home is considered a 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:** Bad attitudes can be contagious. It is important for everyone to have a “yes, we can” attitude, so it is better to remove a vocal volunteer with a poor outlook before damage can occur, resulting in the loss of multiple good volunteers.

## WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Using paper foster applications forms:** Initially, all foster applications were completed by hand. Not only was this time-consuming, as the applications had to be delivered or mailed, but paper forms were labor-intensive for APA to process. Online applications are far more efficient.
- **Using individual caregiver agreements:** Initially, all foster families had to complete a paper caregiver agreement each time their foster dog was adopted, and the form had to be signed in person by the foster family. There was no need for the signature to be witnessed, and people resented having to complete this form for each dog they fostered. So, APA switched to a system that allowed the foster homes to email the document. 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 and other considerations.
- **Expecting foster families to read all information sent:** People are busy and simply do not have the time to read 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 is sent containing information about the cat's needs (such as vaccination dates) and a reminder about points of contact. When foster families miss a vaccination date, APA has a team of volunteers who contact them with a reminder.
- **Not limiting the number of animals:** Initially, if foster families had a home with sufficient space to quarantine cats individually, they 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. APA hopes to be even more effective in helping rural shelters during the winter months when intake is reduced in Austin.
- **Specialized foster homes:** 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 the first American Pets Alive three-day no-kill conference in Austin featuring many different presentations, a tour of the APA facility, one-on-one mentoring, and a panel-style lunch.

### 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 APA 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 firsthand.
- **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 WORK

- **Too little time to prepare:** APA staff and volunteers organized the entire conference within an approximate time frame of six weeks. 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

- **More conferences:** APA plans to host conferences around February each year. 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.
- **Training camps:** APA would like to host extended trips to APA so others can learn in-depth how to implement the programs that have made Austin no-kill.



Dr. Ellen Jefferson



Tawny Hammond

## Presenters

**Dr. Ellen Jefferson** graduated from veterinary school in 1997 and started a career in private practice. In 1999, in response to an 85 percent death rate at the city shelter, she started Eman-ciPET, a low-cost and free spay/neuter clinic in an effort to decrease the number of homeless animals. In 2008, still not satisfied with how fast the city of Austin, Texas, was moving toward no-kill status, she stepped in as executive director of Austin Pets Alive. Austin Pets Alive became the driving force behind bringing the entire city of Austin to a greater than 90 percent save rate, becoming the largest no-kill city in the U.S.

In 2012, Ellen linked up with San Antonio Pets Alive to implement the no-kill programs that have proven successful in Austin, increasing the live release rate in San Antonio from 30 percent to 82 percent in three years.

Married to a horse veterinarian, Ellen and her husband have two dogs (one a distemper survivor), two cats and a bird, as well as many foster animals.

**Tawny Hammond** came on board as the chief animal services officer for the City of Austin in June 2015. Tawny has spent the last 26 years working in the public service arena in Fairfax County, creating and implementing programs and services for people and their animals.

During Tawny's tenure as animal shelter director at the Fairfax County Animal Shelter, the shelter became the largest jurisdiction in the nation with a live release rate above 90 percent and was named by the Humane Society of the United States as part of the top 1 percent of shelters in the nation.

Under Tawny's direction, the shelter decreased the length of stay for shelter pets by 75 percent, doubled dog adoptions, created an award-winning social media program, implemented play groups for shelter dogs, developed a robust transfer-in program from less resourced communities and tripled the number of volunteers and fosters. With around 25 full-time staff members and an annual intake of between 4,000 and 5,000 animals per year, the shelter excelled at making relatively limited resources go a long way toward saving lives.