

SHARING THE VISION

When a 2-year-old Pug-Beagle mix named "Oscar," labeled as a "food guarder," was recently accepted at an animal shelter in Denver, the staff knew the designation would hamper adoption efforts. Thanks to an alliance among Denver-area shelter and rescue organizations, there were many positive options to help place this dog in a forever loving home.



"Maid Mary," an Australian Shepherd mix, is cuddled during a Metro Denver Shelter Alliance adoption event in Golden, Colo.

A phone call to the Metro Denver Shelter Alliance (MDSA) spread the word to 16 organizations that Oscar needed special attention. Answering that need was the Humane Society of Boulder Valley, a shelter with a behavior modification program that deals with food guarding in dogs. Oscar was transferred to Boulder and put on a path toward rehabilitation and adoption, another triumph that might not have been without the alliance.

"We have a very strong behavior modification program. Five full-time staff trainers use positive reinforcement to correct issues such as separation anxiety and food guarding," says Kim Sporrer, director of communications for the Humane Society of Boulder Valley. "Our trainers are always learning and applying new techniques to improve their skills, and they do a free hourlong training session with adopters so the animals keep receiving positive reinforcement in their new homes."

Animal welfare networks known as alliances or coalitions have formed in many major cities across the United States over the past 10 years. These collaborative organizations share resources, ideas and opportunities. Competition for precious fundraising that once led to animosity, or worse, silence, has faded away as the



Prospective adopters Jamie Furney, left, and Cody McCullah, consider adopting "Benson," a 4-month-old Labrador Retriever mix, at an MDSA event.



The Metro Denver Shelter Alliance (MDSA) consists of 16 animal welfare organizations that share resources and ideas and gather for large adoption events like this one held in October.

focus of the shared mission has taken shape. In cases like Oscar's, alliances are helping to provide solutions.

COMING TOGETHER

"The Metro Denver Shelter Alliance came together because animal organizations recognized the focus needed to be on the dogs and cats," says Jayme Nielson, MDSA facilitator. "There were several groups in Denver working together on a one-on-one basis, but the



"Shadow" rests during the MDSA event, but was later adopted.

alliance provided an opportunity for interaction among all the animal welfare groups. This interaction was previously impeded by mistrust, misperceptions and a lack of access to a forum in which to share information."

Representatives from several Denver municipal and private shelters and rescue groups stepped up to form MDSA in 2000. The impetus for the alliance

was the awareness that regardless of budgets or philosophies, all the organizations had common goals to reduce pet

euthanasia, increase adoptions and improve the welfare of animals.

The initial meeting of what would become MDSA turned into a brainstorming session for the 40 attendees. During the open forum, the organizations discussed their individual programs and desires while being mindful of common goals. The

idea was to foster collaborative efforts to promote responsible pet ownership and increase adoptions of companion animals.

Coming together presented challenges, such as finding an accurate view of Denver's animal welfare picture. The semantics of data collection and reporting created a fuzzy estimate of the number of adoptable animals.

"We classify an animal coming into the Dumb Friends League with minor illnesses or treatable behavior problems as adoptable," says Bob Rohde, president of Denver's largest private shelter. "Other agencies are more limited in the services they can provide and may consider such an animal as unadoptable."

MDSA formed a subcommittee to



establish definitions for “adoptable,” “potentially adoptable” and “unadoptable” animals. These definitions were essential to bridge the gap among the 25 member organizations that unite under the MDSA umbrella.

The benchmark work done by MDSA led to the drafting in 2004 of the Asilomar Accords, a set of guiding principles, standardized definitions, statistics for tracking shelter populations, and formula for determining adoptions. Bimonthly alliance meetings at a location convenient to all members are shaped by an agenda and end with a round-table discussion that provides opportunities for informal interaction.

“It’s important to have a facilitator to keep things on track,” Nielson says. “We have a lot of information to cover at every meeting. We might discuss population and shelter management, listen to a report from our Hispanic community outreach committee or spend time analyzing the data from our ‘Chip Your Cat’ initiative. We also make time for members to talk about animals or problems specific to their efforts.

“The figures show that for most shelters, dog adoptions are going well,” she says. “We are reinforcing our efforts for cats.”

Led by the Denver Area Veterinary Medical Society and the Dumb Friends League, alliance members collaborated on a feline microchip initiative that offered free microchips and lifetime registration for 150,000 cats in Denver’s six-county metropolitan area.

“As an animal welfare community, we still have a lot of work to do,” says Nielson, “but we’ve made great strides through our collaborative efforts. It’s encouraging to think what the future may hold.”

THE BIG PICTURE

When a shelter with minimal storage space in Chicago recently received a generous pet food donation, an alert went out through the Chicago Animal Shelter Alliance (CASA). An organization that operates a food pantry, where people in need can receive food for their pets at no cost, stepped forward to gratefully accept the delivery.

“Most likely, prior to CASA, incidents like this would not have happened,” says Jim Borgelt, past president of CASA and

Dr. Melinda Barkley sees “Twiggy” in the Cat Adoption Team’s clinic in Sherwood, Ore.



Kathy Covey, public relations manager for the Cat Adoption Team, poses with "Lancelot," who was later adopted.

member of the Lakeshore Animal Shelter board of directors. "That dog food would have ended up going to waste instead of helping feed hundreds of animals throughout the Chicago area."

Alliances not only create opportunities for food donations, they promote animal adoptions by elevating pet rescue into public view. They also work together to gain opportunities for financial support from organizations such as Maddie's Fund, a national foundation that supports organizations that work to save animals' lives. Maddie's Fund has awarded more than \$70 million since it was established in 1999.

"We received a Maddie's Fund starter grant in 2003," says David de Funiak, executive director of Tree House Humane Society and CASA treasurer. "This grant was crucial because it was the impetus for our member organizations to pick up steam and work together. The key for receiving a starter grant is reporting and full disclosure of shelter statistics. These grant requirements forced us to take a look at our reporting structures."

CASA is comprised of 15 rescue and shelter organizations and three associate members. "The alliance started as a forum for animal welfare groups to communicate openly and exchange ideas," de Funiak says. "Each organization adapted its reporting to satisfy the requirements for a Maddie's Fund grant. Having a common standard really helped us create a more complete picture of the animal welfare system in Chicago."

Since then, CASA has expanded its mission to include advocacy and education and developed programs to assist member organizations. A recent meeting focused on the challenges of animal microchipping.

"It is time-consuming for shelters to track down owners," says Cynthia Bathurst, CASA president and principal director of Safe Humane Chicago. "It's possible that an animal has had multiple owners since it was microchipped, but it is difficult to change the microchip data to record a new owner."

"As an alliance, we'd like to present our findings to microchip manufacturers and

encourage them to create more user-friendly software programs, which would enable shelters to use the technology to track current owners."

To help fulfill its mission of increasing pet adoptions, CASA holds an annual adoption and expo event called "Howl-O-Ween." The one-day event, which includes 25 shelters, helped place more than 100 animals in forever homes last year and provided community education through presentations by veterinary experts.

MEETING NEEDS

The Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland (ASAP) is solving Oregon's cat overpopulation with its "Spay & Save" program. "Spay & Save was designed to focus on one of our biggest regional needs: creating a better safety net for cats," says Joyce Briggs, president of the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs, an organization that advocates spaying and neutering. "From 2006 to 2009, we significantly raised the adoption rate for cats, and we reduced euthanasia in Portland

by 29 percent. We had great momentum and knew that we could do more.”

Spay & Save launched in 2010 to serve low-income pet owners and provide for the spaying and neutering of homeless cats. The 10 groups that comprise ASAP include animal control agencies, shelters and veterinary associations. Together, they coordinate the transportation of cats to select clinics, where more than 10,000 cats are neutered and spayed annually.

“Communication between ASAP members allows us to centralize scheduling and take advantage of the unused capacity of

Kathy Covey, public relations manager for the Cat Adoption Team in Sherwood, Ore. “Many of the alliance members already had a veterinary hospital, so it was a natural fit for us to build these subsidized surgeries into our schedules.”

Participation in ASAP gives CAT the opportunity to fulfill dreams it had yet to realize as a solo organization. “Something like the Spay & Save initiative has always been one of our goals,” Covey says. “As part of the alliance, we have more players at the table who support our goals. ASAP is a support network in which we can

social marketing, maximizing fundraising opportunities and writing successful grant applications.”

Prior to helping create the Mayor’s Alliance, Hoffman was a Wall Street lawyer and member of the New York City Bar Association’s Committee on Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals. The alliance was formed in 2002 to partner with Animal Care and Control (AC&C) of New York City.

The Mayor’s Alliance worked with a pro bono team from a management consulting firm to create a 10-year strategic plan. With a road map in place, the alliance analyzed data to pinpoint problems not being addressed in New York City’s animal shelter and rescue system.

The findings produced initiatives such as the Picasso Veterinary Fund, which pays for lifesaving medical treatments for sick and injured animals taken in by AC&C shelters. Ultimately, the animals are transferred from AC&C to alliance-participating organizations for adoption. A transportation initiative, Wheels of Hope, annually moves approximately 7,000 animals from AC&C shelters to partner rescue groups and shelters for adoption.

The Mayor’s Alliance has grown into a staffed organization that is nationally recognized as a model for collaborative rescue efforts. “People think that we sprang forth out of nowhere,” says Hoffman. “That’s not the case. It took many volunteer hours, a great deal of planning and a lot of patience to get where we are today. You have to crawl before you can walk and walk before you can run.

“Alliances allow animal welfare organizations to step back and look at the big picture,” she says. “Whether each organization is saving 45 animals or 4,500 animals, the contributions and collaborations that we are creating are making the world a better place for animals.”

That has proved true for Oscar, the dog that was transferred to the Humane Society of Boulder Valley to receive training for food guarding. He was adopted within 10 days, having overcome his food guarder label.

Oscar may be a special dog, but his story is not unique. Countless dogs and cats like him across the country are reaping the triumph that comes from the teamwork created by alliances. ♦



The Wheels for Hope initiative by the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals annually transports around 7,000 animals from New York City animal control shelters to alliance-participating organizations.

existing veterinary clinics,” says Briggs. “By doing this, we didn’t need to add a high-volume clinic, and thus avoided major capital expenses.”

The success of the program lies in the support of members. The Oregon Humane Society (OHS), a charter member of ASAP and the lead agency for Spay & Save, oversees the project. The Portland Veterinary Medical Association, an ASAP member organization, has helped recruit private veterinarians to participate.

The program comes together with the donation of veterinary facilities from five alliance members: OHS, Multnomah County Animal Services, the Humane Society for Southwest Washington, the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon, and the Cat Adoption Team (CAT).

“CAT is very excited to be involved,” says

bounce around ideas. We have cat-focused organizations talking to dog-focused ones, and it reminds us that we share the mission of ending euthanasia of healthy, social and treatable cats and dogs in area shelters.”

MAKING A BETTER WORLD

Understanding that education is as valuable to alliance members as it is to the public, the staff of the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals develops educational opportunities for its 150 participating groups.

“One of our key initiatives is strengthening the resources of our participating organizations,” says Jane Hoffman, president of the Mayor’s Alliance. “This includes volunteer programs, fundraising, and shelter and rescue operations. We provide educational sessions for our members on

