

Los Angeles Dogs Get a 'Safety Net'

A new program helps dog owners find alternatives to surrendering pets.

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Animal shelters across the nation have reported an increase in the number of dogs surrendered by their owners. On Dec. 22, 2008, Los Angeles's animal services agency took steps to address this issue by launching the Operation Safety Net program.

During the past year, L.A. Animal Services has experienced a 20 percent increase in animals in need of care. As a result, the agency said pet euthanasia was also up for the first time in nearly a decade.

The new safety net program was created to help keep pets and families together during harsh financial times. It works by combining the efforts of various animal welfare agencies for a common cause.

For example, when a dog owner believes he has no choice but to take his pet to the South L.A. shelter, where the program will initially debut, the staff encourages the pet owner to take the dog home and call the Downtown Dog Rescue phone number that's on a postcard given to pet owners. Upon calling the hotline, a volunteer returns the call within 48 hours to help the pet owner deal with the problems they might be dealing with in caring for a pet.

L.A. Animal Services said that in most cases people are dealing with a combination of issues, such as a need for spay or neuter services, vaccinations, licensing, or training. Another frequent request pet owners make is monthly pet food deliveries.

The animal welfare groups collaborating with L.A. Animal Services and Downtown Rescue are Karma Rescue and Paw'd Squad. The new program was modeled after Dog Rescue's 13-year-old Skid Row program to help homeless dog owners.

"These three private organizations bring tremendous experience working with large breed dogs who are more frequently relinquished and euthanized at the shelter," said Ed Boks, general manager of L.A. Animal Services.