Beyond the Box: Closing After-Hours Drop Boxes

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Animal Humane Society

5 Shelter Locations in Minnesota
- Buffalo
- Coon Rapids
- Golden Valley
- St. Paul
- Woodbury

- Private, non-profit shelter
- Open admission philosophy
- $13 million annual budget
- 289 employees (full and part time)
- Annual Intake – 25,000 (including wildlife)
- 3 of the 5 sites had After-Hours Drop Boxes
Bound for Home Initiative

Our strategic plan started in 2009 to place all healthy and treatable animals by:

• Improving the care we provide to ensure the health and wellbeing of animals in our care
• Reducing length of stay by removing barriers so no animal waits for needed services and moves to placement quickly
• Increase placement rates and reduce euthanasia

How were we going to reach our goal?

➢ Implementing a managed admission process or appointment process was key
Managed Admissions

In January 1, 2011 we began receiving animals only through an appointment process.

Part of the Planning Process:
• What is our goal with managed admission?
• Does having drop boxes fit into that philosophy?
• If we elect to stop using how do we communicate?
Goals of Managed Admissions

• To better serve the animals and the people in our community with a surrender process which promotes a face-to-face exchange of information.

• Allow us to better manage the flow of animals. This helps ensure the best placement possible, provide the best care and to move animals more quickly through our shelters.

• Better partnership with community. This is a community problem – not an AHS problem.

• Gives us the opportunity to provide resources to help keep the pet in the home and intervene before the bond is broken.
Do Drop Boxes Fit?

Considerations:
• In 2010; 1,880 animals were left in the drop boxes across all 5 sites.
• Even with drop boxes, animals were sometimes left outside in boxes, tied to trees, etc.
• We have cold/harsh winters so staff/volunteers were concerned of what would happen to the animals.
• What is happening in our state?
  No other shelter in MN has them.
• What is happening across the country?
  Other shelters that removed the boxes did not see an increase in strays or animals left outside.
• Do we believe the majority of people in our community care about animals and will do the right thing?
Do Drop Boxes Fit?

The short answer was No!

- If want a face to face conversation – we cannot get this if we continue with boxes.

- Keeping drop boxes was a way for those who did not want to make an appointment to “by-pass” the system.

- If we truly wanted to accomplish our goals of partnering with the community, we needed to remove them.

- We know we will still have animals left outside of our doors but the majority of people will do the right thing.
After-Hours Drop Boxes

We made the decision to close/remove at all locations.

• Due to our weather, we closed boxes on Nov 1st 2010.

• Communicated the upcoming change:
  • 2 months prior to closure
  • Letter sent to local vets, ACOs, and partners
  • City Contracts received access to buildings
  • Company newsletter and site meetings
  • Gave staff/volunteers opportunity to ask ?’s

• We did not advertise or mention drop boxes on our website
Our Message to Staff/Volunteers

• Expect some animals to be left outside: There will always be people who make the poor choice to drop their animals outside of our building.

• We feel most people want to make the right and responsible choice for the pet and will work within our regular business hours to surrender an animal.

• We did our research. Other communities that made the change have not seen an increase in strays/abandoned

• We will never achieve our goals of partnering with people when they surrender if we keep the boxes open.

• We will move forward with this plan, monitor and re-think if we are seeing negative impacts.
Our Message to Public

• Posted signage at all three locations in the incoming areas by October 1, alerting the public of the closing.

• Created a brochure on how to surrender a pet and what to do if you found a stray. Brochure is available outside incoming entrance.

• Information on the website and on our voice message about what to do if you find a stray:
  o Keep animal until we are open
  o Call local animal control
  o Consider leaving alone, if not in danger and is doing well.
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Animals Left in Boxes</th>
<th>Intake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2,986</td>
<td>33,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,880</td>
<td>34,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>25,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18,701</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Staff/volunteers and the community have embraced change and see the benefits of managed intakes and removing drop boxes.
- We are very glad we made the decision to remove the boxes and strongly believe we need to partner with the community to surrender pets and have them be part of the process.
Our advice to those considering removing the boxes…

Just remove the darn things!
Nancy Hill
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www.spokanecounty.org/scraps
SCRAPS – Who We Are

- Spokane County – Washington State
- Municipal open admission shelter
- Serve population 250,000
- 1700 square miles
- Handle about 6800 animals per year
History of SCRAPS Drop Box

- Originally outside cages – problematic due to weather extremes
- Opened inside room – to eliminate weather issues
- Customer completed form, placed animal in cage and locked cage
- Room only open when SCRAPS was closed
- Designed for dropping off strays only
The Numbers

- 6,855 dogs/cats handled 2010 by SCRAPS
- 29% were left in drop box area
- 45% of drop box area animals w/o paperwork
The Problem

- No information sheets on 45% of animals
- Animals left from outside jurisdiction – creating budget issues
- Information sheet might say animal bit – but bit who – required quarantine (just in case)
- Owners dropping off animals – no accountability or information
- Occasional injured animal put in area – delay in medical treatment
The Problem

- Room filled and animals left tied to door or in hall
- Doors not locked – animals stolen – nighttime shoppers
- Lack of information on temperament causing safety concerns for staff
- Wildlife left in cages
Obstacles

• Public push back
• Staff push back
• Alternatives…
Public Education

Signage
Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Receiving Room Closing SCRAPs Extending Business Hours

Spokane County, January 20, 2011 - As of Thursday, January 27th SCRAPs after hours animal receiving room will be closed. SCRAPs will extend its business hours opening on Wednesdays from 12 – 5:30. SCRAPs will be open Monday – Saturday from noon – 5:30 PM and closed on Sundays. An animal protection officer is on call on Sundays and will respond to emergencies and time permitting stray animals.

SCRAPs after hours receiving room was the only remaining one in the region. SpokAnimal and the Spokane Humane Society closed theirs over three years ago. "The industry standard no longer advocates for keeping receiving rooms open as it is difficult to track information on animals dropped off typically in the middle of the night," said SCRAPs Development Coordinator Jackie Bell.

Closing the room will hold people more accountable, prevent animals from out of our region from coming into the shelter and provide important information about the animals coming in to the shelter.

SCRAPs has outgrown its current building and is prevented from expanding because building requirements would require a new fire hydrant which would mean drilling under the nearby railroad tracks which is cost prohibitive. Vacating the receiving room will allow SCRAPs to expand into that space.

Almost 2,000 animals were dropped off after hours in 2010. Most of the people dropping the animals off did not complete any paperwork which provides SCRAPs with important information about the animal’s temperament, where they were found or if the animal has been involved in a bite. SCRAPs is hopeful that people will do the right thing and bring animals into the shelter during its open hours or call to report a stray animal.

About SCRAPs:

Spokane County Regional Animal Protection Service (SCRAPs) is a progressive municipal animal care and protective agency serving the unincorporated area of Spokane County, the Cities of Spokane Valley, Liberty Lake, Millwood, and Cheney. SCRAPs has deputized animal protection officers extensively trained to enforce animal laws and respond to emergency situations. SCRAPs is also active in educational and community outreach programs and is dedicated to its continued investment in innovative behavioral programs. SCRAPs mission is "Building a more humane community, protecting public safety and ensuring animal welfare through compassionate, responsive, professional enforcement of laws and public policy." For more information, please visit www.spoakanimalprotection.org

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Closing Area – Results

- Reduced overall intake for 2011 – 1,120 dogs & cats
- Reduction less than number of dogs and cats left in room – 1,994
- Eliminated non-jurisdictional animals
- Held owners more accountable
Today

• Expanded hours
• Accessible to public
• 24.7 Animal Protection Officer emergency service
• 24.7 pet license look up
Thank you!
Julie Levy, DVM, PhD
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University of Florida

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Alachua County Animal Services

- Municipal shelter
- Open-admission policy
- $2 million annual budget
- 35 employees
- Serves 250,000 residents over 969 square miles
- Gainesville, FL area
- No other shelters in area
Annual intake – 5,800 in 2012
73% live release for dogs
86% live release for cats
Animal Shelter and Drop Boxes

• Built in 1986
• Capacity for 100 dogs and 100 cats
• Designed for traditional animal control functions
• High intake, short length of stay
After-Hours Drop Box

• Intended for use when shelter was closed
• Concrete shelter with metal cages located at entrance of property
• Forms to be submitted with animals when placed in cages
• Also have after-hours on-call animal control officers for emergencies
• Emergency vet clinic accepts injured strays
Drop Box Issues

Management

• Many animals left without documentation
• No animal history
• No opportunity to divert intake
• Animals from outside the county
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Welfare

• Multiple animals stuffed in cages
• Animals stolen
• Injured, sick, neonatal animals left without care
• Animals tied to gate, tossed over fence, left in carriers
2001: By the Numbers

- 3,059 of 10,715 dogs and cats left in the boxes
- 40% of total intake
- Only 12% left with owner information
- 3 in 10 animals left the shelter alive that year
2002: A new direction

• No More Homeless Pets in Alachua County community coalition forms

• $3.7 million grant from Maddie’s Fund

• Goal to end euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals via adoptions, spay/neuter, rehabilitation, TNR, retention
Backlash

• Drop box closure bundled with controversial policy changes implemented by new director
• Open adoptions, discounted adoption fees, mass adoption events, treatment of sick and injured animals
• Staff rebelled and went to media and county administration with stories of catastrophic outcomes
Results

3,059 animals left in boxes in 2001 – Intake 10,715
2,985 animals left in boxes in 2002 – Intake 11,081
245 animals left outside in 2003 – Intake 10,048
155 animals left outside in 2004 – Intake 8,933
Results

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55 animals left outside in 2012 – Intake 5,800

No increase in road kills, emergency calls, ER clinic intakes
Lessons Learned

• Removing drop boxes was the right thing to do for the animals, the shelter, and the community goal to save more animals

• Unexpected small decrease in overall intake – BONUS!

• Nearly eliminated animals abandoned without information

• Biggest opposition was from staff who feared dire consequences if animals could not be left at the shelter 24/7

• Staff should be involved in the planning of drop box closure to win support and learn to trust the public
Other Voices

6. Drop Boxes

Although shelters often face challenges posed by limited operating hours for public access, the use of unattended “drop boxes” where live animals are placed by the public in receptacles for later intake may result in animal suffering or death and should be avoided. Alternatives should be provided (e.g., drop-off arrangements with police department or veterinary emergency clinics). Information about these alternatives should be made available to the public.

http://www.sheltervet.org