

Beyond the Box: Closing After-Hours Drop Boxes

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Animal Humane Society



Locations

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?

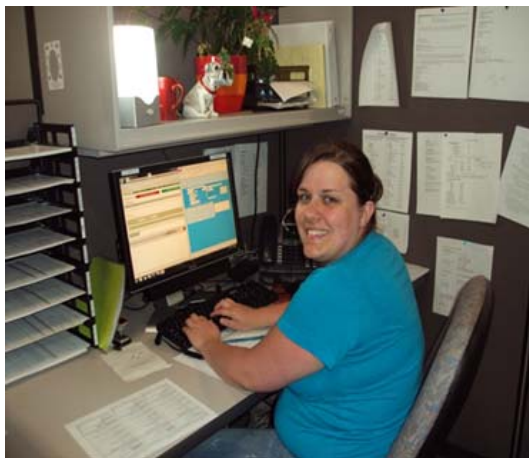
- **Implementing a managed admission process or appointment process was key**

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 we 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:
 - Keep animal until we are open
 - Call local animal control
 - Consider leaving alone, if not in danger and is doing well.

Results

2,986 animals left in boxes in 2009	– Intake 33,600
1,880 animals left in boxes in 2010	– Intake 34,500
213 animals left outside in 2011	– Intake 25,600
105 animals left outside in 2012	– Intake 23,100
23 animals left outside so far 2013	– Intake 18,701

- 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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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





Receiving room – view from inside

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



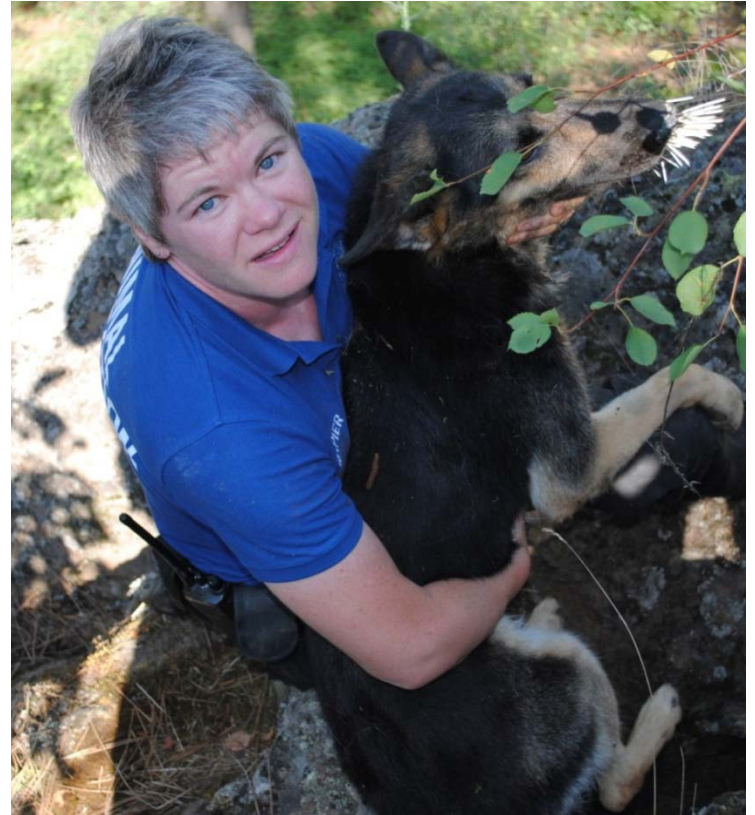
Closing Area – Results

- 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!



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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

PLEASE DO NOT ABANDON ANIMALS
CONFINEMENT OF ANIMALS WITHOUT SUFFICIENT FOOD WATER OR VETERINARY
ATTENTIONMENT IS CRIMINAL - 18 USC 1701
ANY PERSON WHO IN THE COURSE OF RECEIVING OR HOLDING AN ANIMAL IN CUSTODY
OR ANY OTHER PERSON ABANDONS SUCH ANIMAL TO SUFFER DEPRIVATION OR NEGLECT
OR HARDSHIP OR ANIMAL IN A TYPICAL HOME OR PUBLIC PLACE WITHOUT
PROVIDING FOR THE CARE SUFFICIENT PROTECTION AND CARE OF SUCH ANIMAL
IS GUILTY OF A VIOLATION OF THE ABOVE STATUTE. PENALTIES AS PROVIDED IN
18 USC 1701 AND 1702 OF ANY ANIMAL THAT DIES OR IS IN
DISCOMFORT ARE A FINE

Drop Box Issues

Management

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

Drop Box Issues

Management

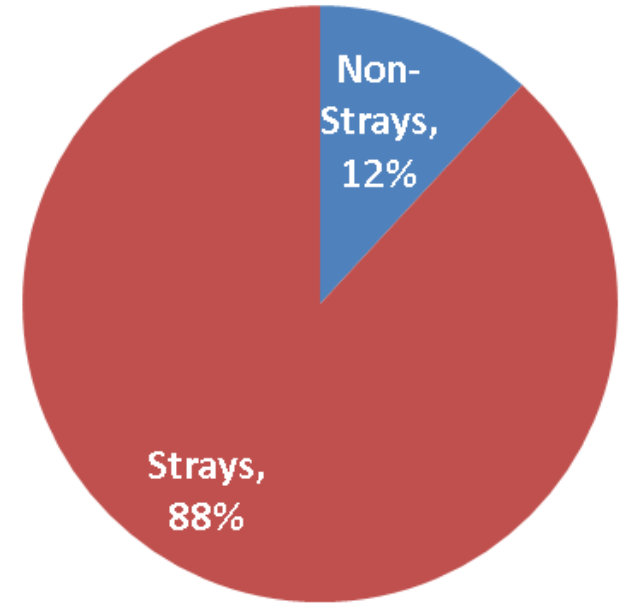
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Welfare

- 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

Lives in the balance

Bickering may cost area coalition grant for animal adoptions

By CINDY SWIRKO

Sun staff writer

Published: Monday, September 8, 2003 at 6:01 a.m.



LARA NEEL/The Gainesville Sun

Dr. Randy Caligiuri, the director of Alachua County Animal Services, holds kittens from the facility.

By all measures, a coalition of animal advocates - with the help of a \$2.8 million grant - is making strides toward its goal of ending the euthanasia of healthy cats and dogs at Alachua County Animal Services.

But the money and the goal are in danger of evaporating in part because of the fracturing of the coalition - No More Homeless Pets - that landed the grant.

Some current and former Alachua County Animal Services employees are claiming Director Randy Caligiuri is mismanaging the agency. Some Alachua County Humane Society employees are joining in.

They say sick animals are not euthanized and die a slow death to reduce euthanasia counts. They also said night drop boxes were removed to keep people from leaving animals. Animals are now being tied to the fence. And they say Animal Services has created new fees that are unfair.

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

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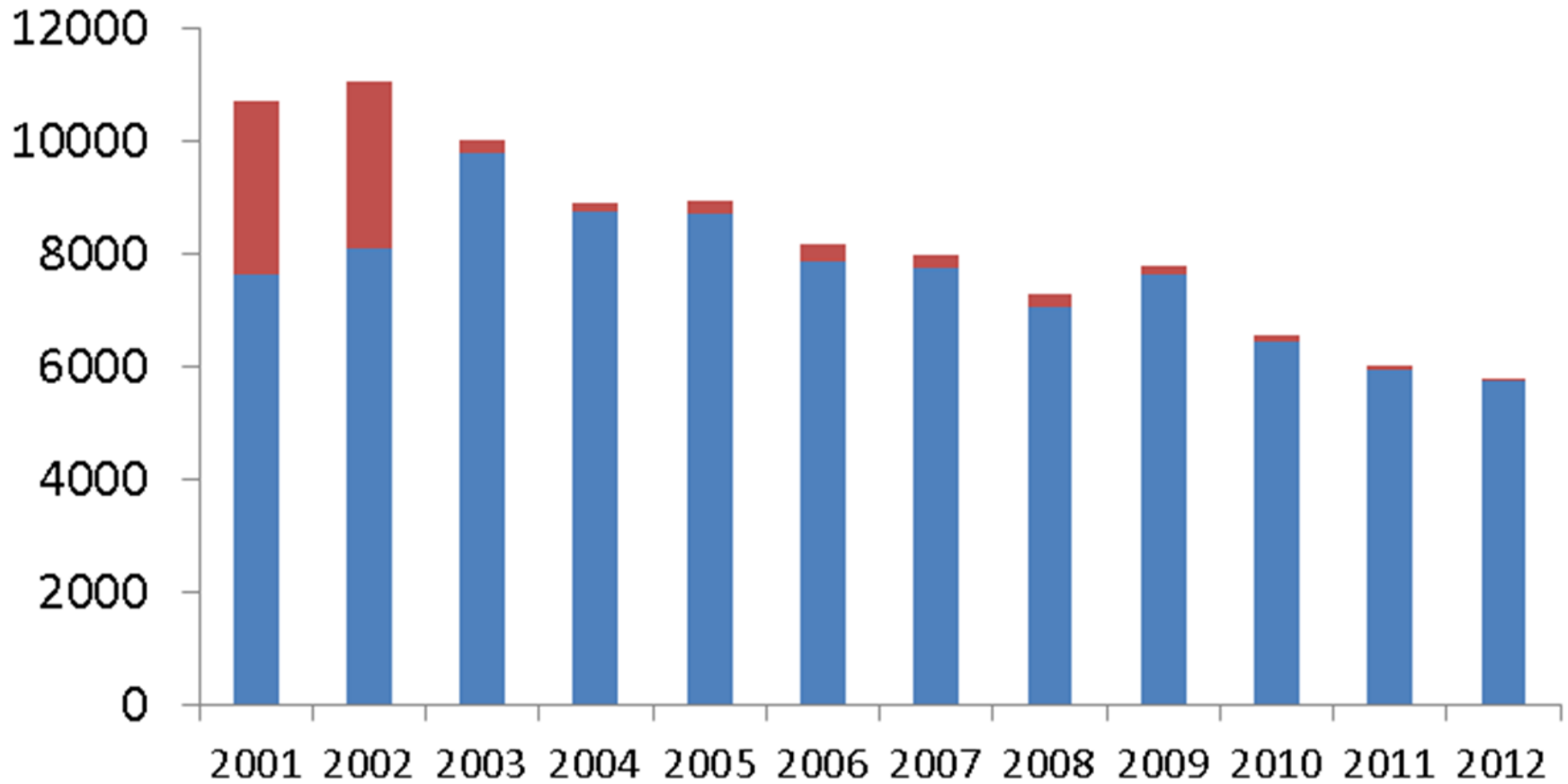
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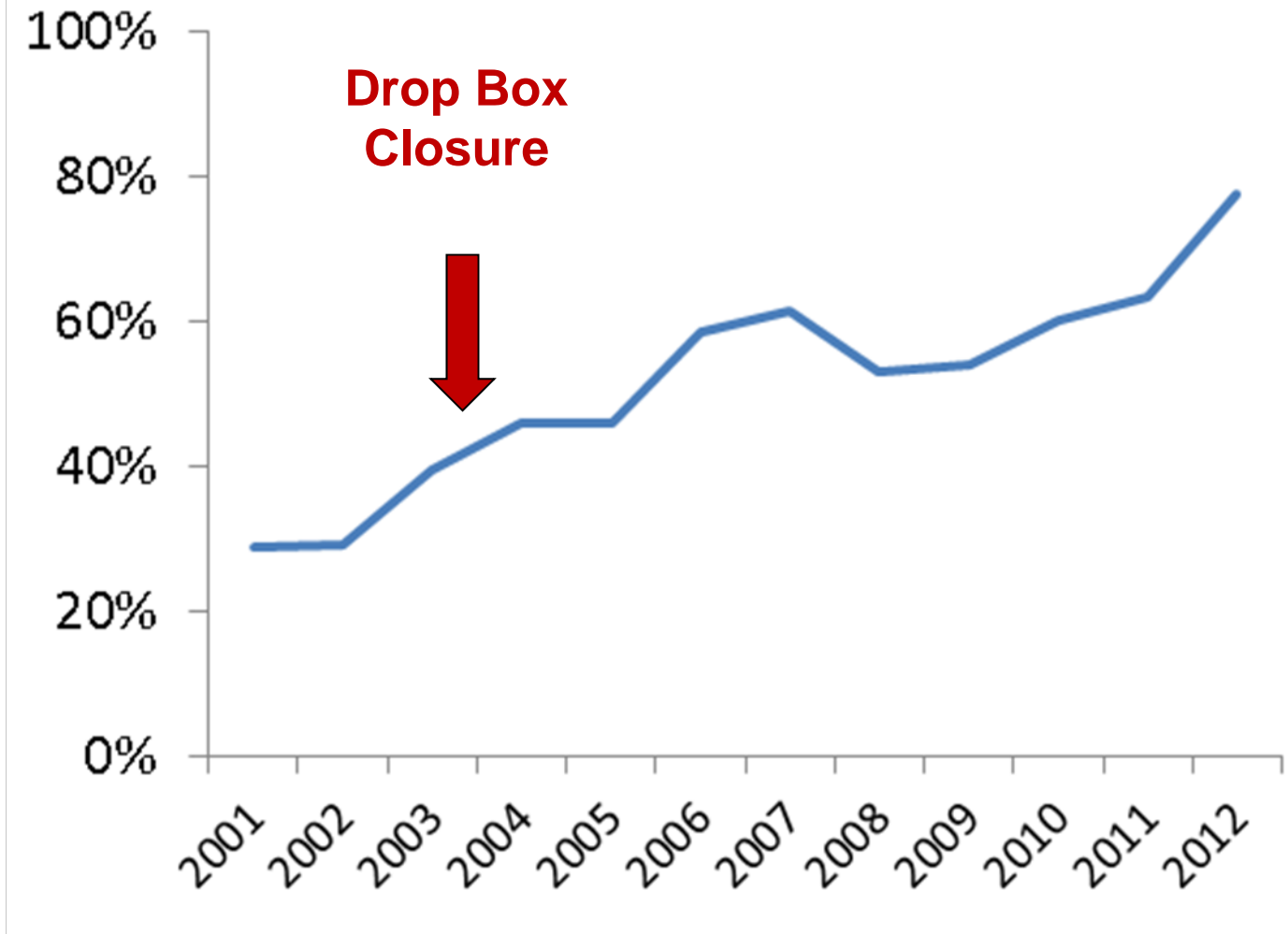
55 animals left outside in 2012 – Intake 5,800

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

■ OTC and Field Intake ■ Drop Box Intake



Live release rate



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



Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians • 2010

Authors:

Sandra Newbury, Mary K. Blinn, Philip A. Bushby, Cynthia Barker Cox, Julie D. Dinnage, Brenda Griffin, Kate F. Hurley, Natalie Isaza, Wes Jones, Lila Miller, Jeanette O'Quin, Gary J. Patronek, Martha Smith-Blackmore, Miranda Spindel

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.shelternvet.org>