

Columbus Dispatch article points of clarification

The Capital Area Humane Society introduced a new strategic plan in July, 2009. The strategic plan is the culmination of engaging key constituents and the analysis of service data to determine the Capital Area Humane Society's goals and objectives to best serve the animals and people in our community. A number of service changes have been implemented. These changes are not the elimination of services, but rather changing how we provide services to the community. We recognize the changes are complex, but the bottom line is the Capital Area Humane Society is here to help the community and will never turn away an animal in need.

In response to the article "Humane Society won't take pets for free," which appeared in the Wednesday, September 2 edition of the *Columbus Dispatch*, we offer the following points of clarification regarding our service changes:

- The Capital Area Humane Society is making strategic service changes focused on providing great service for pets and people. We are committed to strengthening our community's capacity to serve animals in need through education and access to services and support.
- In regards to the fee structure, we have always asked for a financial commitment from clients who bring animals to the Capital Area Humane Society. In the past, we had a suggested donation for animals admitted. We have changed our language to more accurately reflect that there is an admissions fee for service, as it is not tax-deductible as the word donation implies. Now, as in the past, if a client is unable to pay the fee, we will lower or waive the fee entirely.
- We admit owned dogs, owned cats, stray cats from Franklin County and litters of kittens on an unlimited basis. Animal admissions are currently available on a walk-in basis Thursday through Monday (2 pm to 6 pm weekdays and 12 to 4 pm weekends).
- As of September 1, the services available to a few specific populations of animals have changed. These changes are designed to ensure that we are providing the best service possible for those animals. We will always accept any companion animal in immediate danger of abuse, neglect or abandonment. More detail regarding the specific populations of animals involved are below:

Stray cats from out of county: We will no longer admit stray cats from outside of Franklin County. Lost cats should remain in the community they were found for the very best chance of finding their way home. This change does not include owned pets in need of rehoming services.

Healthy Feral Cats: We will serve healthy feral cats by helping to coordinate spay/neuter services. Truly feral cats are not candidates for adoption and the best service we can provide a healthy feral cat is to get them spayed/ neutered, rabies vaccinated and returned. We have been providing those services to feral cat caregivers in our community for years at no cost. Rather than admitting those healthy feral cats for euthanasia, we believe the best service we can provide that client and cat is access to services to ensure the cat is spayed or neutered and vaccinated. If the cat is part of a colony of cats – we will refer that client to our own Feral Fix program. If it is a single cat – we can refer the client to a low cost spay/neuter clinic. We will always admit any animal, at anytime, if we think they are in danger of abandonment.

Moms with neonate kittens (nursing kittens): Rather than admitting these vulnerable animals to our organization without offering alternatives to the owner/finders, we have recognized that the best service we can provide for that client and those animals is to provide foster care support for whomever took them in – food, cat litter, veterinary services – whatever we can do in partnership with the owner/finder to set those animals up for success. Admission of these kittens and/or their mom will be guaranteed to the caregiver when the kittens are 8 weeks of age. We will always admit any animal, at anytime, if we think they are in danger of abandonment.

Pocket Pets and Rabbits: Our facility was not designed to provide housing for these animals so our ability to care for them well is limited. We continue to admit pocket pets and rabbits but ask clients to work with us – often deferring the admission of a pocket pet or rabbit until space is available. We have been managing the admission of rabbits in this way for over a year. Without managing admission, our only option is to provide euthanasia services – but what most families want is help rehoming their pocket pet or pet rabbit so they choose to wait until we have space.

- We will be improving our services for clients by moving to an “admissions by appointment” process but don’t expect to have that program fully implemented until early 2010. Based on best practices at peer organizations, we will serve clients better by appointment, rather than a walk-in basis. An appointment allows the owner/finder of the pet to remain involved in the outcome for the animal. We hope to offer clients same day or next day appointments, though that will fluctuate depending on demand for service. We expect to serve some clients on a walk-in basis after we make the transition.
- Our overall placement rate has increased from 25 percent in 2004, to 34 percent in 2008. We have demonstrated the most dramatic shift in our placement rate for cats – from 14 percent in 2004 to 25 percent in 2008. We are able to place all healthy and behaviorally sound dogs. Our placement rate for dogs in 2008 was 82 percent, up 4 percent over 2004. In 2009, our overall placement rate through June was 43 percent.

While we have seen improvement, the plight of homeless and abused animals in our community is not changing to the degree that is necessary and possible. It is our vision that all animals live free of suffering and all companion animals are members of loving and caring families. These service changes will enable the Capital Area Humane Society to save more lives by strengthening our community’s capacity to serve animals in need. We are here to help. If you need help with an animal or for more information about our programs our services, please visit our website at www.cahs-pets.org.

The Capital Area Humane Society, a non-profit animal welfare organization founded in 1883, provides programs and services for animals and people in Central Ohio. Through animal adoptions and admissions, cruelty investigations, pet visitation, public health initiatives with feral cats, safe haven sheltering for the pets of victims of family violence, training classes and humane education the Capital Area Humane Society seeks to protect those who cannot speak for themselves. More than 95 percent of our funding is provided by donations and fees for services, we are not a government agency and we do not receive operating support from national organizations.