

Capacity for Care: A Management Model for Increasing Animal Live Release Rates, Reducing Animal Intake and Euthanasia Rates in an Australian Open Admission Animal Shelter

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Abstract : More than ever, animal shelters need to identify ways to reduce the number of animals entering shelter facilities and the incidence of euthanasia. Managing animal overpopulation using euthanasia can have detrimental health and emotional consequences for the shelter staff involved. There are also community expectations with moral and financial implications to consider. To achieve the goals of reducing animal intake and the incidence of euthanasia, shelter best practice involves combining programs, procedures and partnerships to increase live release rates (LRR), reduce the incidence of disease, length of stay (LOS) and shelter intake whilst overall remaining financially viable. Analysing daily processes, tracking outcomes and implementing simple strategies enabled shelter staff to more effectively focus their efforts and achieve amazing results. The objective of this retrospective study was to assess the effect of implementing the capacity for care (C4C) management model. Data focusing on the average daily number of animals on site for a two year period (2016 - 2017) was exported from a shelter management system, Customer Logic (CL) Vet to Excel for manipulation and comparison. Following the implementation of C4C practices the average daily number of animals on site was reduced by >50%, (2016 average 103 compared to 2017 average 49), average LOS reduced by 50% from 8 weeks to 4 weeks and incidence of disease reduced from $\geq 70\%$ to less than 2% of the cats on site at the completion of the study. The total number of stray cats entering the shelter due to council contracts reduced by 50% (486 to 248). Improved cat outcomes were attributed to strategies that increased adoptions and reduced euthanasia of poorly socialized cats, including foster programs. To continue to achieve improvements in LRR and LOS, strategies to decrease intake further would be beneficial, for example, targeted sterilisation programs. In conclusion, the study highlighted the benefits of using C4C as a management tool, delivering a significant reduction in animal intake and euthanasia with positive emotional, financial and community outcomes.

Keywords : animal welfare, capacity for care, cat, euthanasia, length of stay, managed intake, shelter

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