



Community spirit lifted and euthanasia rates reduced

Benefits of shelter volunteer dog walking programs

- Reduced euthanasia rates mean better animal welfare, a happier community and savings for local authorities through reduced admission rates and veterinarian costs
- Provides opportunities for people to volunteer which research shows increases feelings of wellbeing
- Creates opportunities for local residents to interact with each other and with the dogs
- Encourages residents to exercise

Volunteer work can improve access to social resources, bring families together, build new friendships and increase levels of physical activity.⁵⁶

Volunteers at Domestic Animal Services (DAS), part of Territory and Municipal Services in the ACT, get the opportunity to enjoy these benefits in the great outdoors and help dogs (many of whom spend extended periods of time at the shelter) find appropriate new homes.

It is generally acknowledged that dogs receiving regular exercise, training and socialisation are less stressed and therefore more attractive to new owners. Similarly, dogs that are comfortable with strangers have a better rate of rehoming than those that are not.

Rangers at the DAS facility had heavy and unpredictable workloads which left little time to exercise shelter dogs. The organisation addressed this issue when it began a formal volunteer program; one that ensured dogs at the facility received regular exercise and socialisation opportunities outside of their pens.

Volunteers at the shelter take the dogs out for 15-20 minutes walks, utilising the organisation's two grassed yards and walking track. Not only are the dogs enthusiastic for human interaction, volunteers also get a chance to exercise and bond with the dogs and play an active role in reducing shelter euthanasia rates while improving animal welfare conditions.

Over the last ten years, the admission rate of dogs to both the Domestic Animal Service's shelter and the RSPCA shelter in the ACT has fallen by 21.5%. More spectacularly, the euthanasia rate in these two facilities (the only refuges in the ACT) fell by 65.1% over the same period.

Registrar Scott Horan believes that Domestic Animal Services has a particularly low euthanasia rate.

"Last financial year we were able to re-home over 95% of suitable dogs."

Scott Horan, RSPCA ACT



Tips

- Work with the local animal welfare shelter or pound
- Develop a protocol for a volunteer program considering training of volunteers as well as liability issues
- Advertise for volunteers in local newspapers, council newsletters and websites, veterinary surgeries and local dog rescue groups

"Dogs that are extremely old or very sick are generally not made available for rehoming, although in some cases DAS has been able to work with rescue groups to give the dogs a final home where they can recover. While aggressive dogs are not considered for re-homing, healthy happy dogs have a great chance of finding a new home through our service."

The reduction in euthanasia rates at DAS, improved animal welfare levels and uplifted community spirit have resulted from the concerted efforts of the DAS staff combined with the hard work of volunteers and various dog rescue groups, both local and interstate.

Web Links

DAS services - www.tams.act.gov.au