

Cat Adoption Collaboration with Local Pet Store

Overview: Cats are being adopted more quickly than ever before, as the result of an innovative partnership between Placer County Animal Services (PCAS) and PetSmart.

Challenge: Our challenge was to reduce the number of days cats spend at our shelter before being adopted. Although we save more than 93 percent of our cats and kittens, finding creative ways to move cats out of the shelter faster and increase adoption rates is essential to maintaining a successful cat program. Delays in adoptions create a drain on resources such as staff time and supplies. The stress of being at the shelter can also result in increased illness and behavior issues.

Particularly in the spring and summer months, known as “kitten season”, when we have an abundance of kittens available for adoption, visiting a municipal shelter can be overwhelming for those wanting to adopt a cat. Additionally, it can be inconvenient for some potential adopters to visit our shelter because of work, school and/or family commitments that conflict with our operating days and hours.

Solution: In November 2018, we began a cat-adoption partnership with PetSmart, which offers a different option for people considering adopting a pet that is away from the large, institutional feel of a public animal shelter. Our first cats were taken to PetSmart in January 2019, which has operating hours that extend beyond PCAS service hours providing an additional 25 hours per week where pets are available to be adopted. This added availability has expanded the prospective pet adoption pool of people, which has reduced the number of days it takes for cats to be adopted from 31 at our shelter to 3 at PetSmart.

Innovation: PCAS is one of the only municipal shelters in the state to pursue this type of partnership with PetSmart and we have found unique ways to increase our adoption success at the store. When potential adopters search our website for adoptable cats, those that are housed at PetSmart are highlighted and include a link to a map to send potential adopters directly to the PetSmart location. Additionally, PetSmart employees take care of all aspects of pet care and adoptions, which is not generally offered with this type of partnership. Our staff transport cats to and from PetSmart and visit cats daily and since PetSmart is located less than a mile from our animal shelter in Auburn, we can quickly address any concerns with animals housed at the store. Many who visit PetSmart are unaware that adoptable pets are available at our nearby shelter, so PetSmart shares information about PCAS and promotes our services to its customers. Additionally, cats with special needs can get overlooked by adopters at the shelter amid the dozens of available cats, but at PetSmart they

receive much more attention, as they can be highlighted in a smaller adoption section. Our adoptions through this partnership have been so successful that PetSmart leadership have commented that they are a “stand out” store in the region for pet adoptions, prompting other store leaders to inquire about how the program is so successful with PCAS.

Results: After four years, nearly 850 cats and kittens have been adopted from PetSmart as part of this partnership. This is almost 30% of our total cat adoptions. In addition to pet care and adoption counseling/processing, PetSmart provides all food, cat litter and supplies and cares for each cat housed at their store. This saves PCAS both time and resources. To date, about 1,000 hours of Placer County staff time have been saved, which has allowed us to focus on sheltering and care of other animals. We also have trained volunteers to assist with socialization and adoption of cats at PetSmart. PetSmart has provided PCAS with \$16,000 in donations based on meeting adoption goals from PetSmart Charities. The more adoptions that occur at PetSmart, the more they donate to our shelter. Additionally, PetSmart has donated nearly \$20,000 of in-kind donations such as food, cat litter and other supplies. Furthermore, our continued partnership with PetSmart has resulted in an overall reduction in costs, which is due to a decrease in staff time and resources needed for cat care at the shelter. To better explain the impact of this program on each individual cat adopted, here are some details about one of the first adoptions made possible through this program: In March 2020, a concerned shopper noticed a cat in a crate in a mall parking lot outside and contacted PCAS. Very soon after the cat (Kimmie) came to our shelter, our community and shelter were placed under stay-at-home orders, and our shelter began limiting staff, public and volunteer access. Pets at our shelter had limited interaction with people, as our staff was reduced, and volunteers were advised to stay home. Adoptions were initially very limited during the early days of the pandemic. PetSmart remained open and continued to allow adoptions during this time, so we sent Kimmie to PetSmart, and she was adopted within a week! Kimmie’s foster care giver volunteered at the PetSmart store and even assisted with Kimmie’s adoption for an extra-smooth transition.

Replicability: Most large pet retailers offer simple application and guidelines to assist in setting up an adoption program. PCAS took this partnership to a new level, as we developed a new protocol for off-site adoptions and utilized existing technology in a new way to stream-line our adoption process. These new protocols, adoption applications and all marketing materials are available to be shared with other shelters interested in creating a similar program.

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Additional Materials: Please follow this link - <https://placercounty.box.com/s/wywr8ixlqq1rl64i637kmj45h1xl116>.