

Integrating Human and Animal Services

Introduction

Delivery of truly effective animal services often happens through collaboration with human service providers and vice versa. After all, the needs of pets exist within the complexities of a wide variety of human needs and environments.

Local governments should facilitate the coordination and where appropriate, integration and clustering of these social services in the community. As a first step, they might consider making an inventory of all social services available in a community and explore the ways in which each service might interface with individuals and animals with pets.

The goal of this chapter is to provide helpful information for municipalities wishing to engage in the assessment, coordination and integration of social services and related local laws, regulations and policies related to as they may apply to animal owners. Below are a few common areas in which the connection of social services and animal services are likely to be effective.

Homelessness Prevention Services

Safe, accessible, and affordable housing is a critical need for all communities. Yet, many residents experiencing homelessness often refuse housing services that do not accommodate pets. Other residents who may only be able to afford subsidized housing face additional barriers. Municipal housing laws, regulations, policies and services that address the needs of the most vulnerable pet owners can also help combat homelessness and ensure equal opportunity for all residents by preventing unlawful discrimination. Some communities have taken steps to ensure that residents of all income levels are not unfairly penalized simply for having pets. Such provisions might come in the form of setting maximum thresholds for pet fees and deposits in a way that aligns with overall rent stabilization policies or prohibiting evictions for residents with pets who would otherwise be legally protected from such proceedings during an emergency.¹ Yet other communities have built partnerships with referral organizations to provide sheltering

services for the pets of people experiencing homelessness. With limited exceptions, most housing is also covered by the Fair Housing Act, which prevents discrimination against tenants with disabilities who have assistance animals.² Municipalities should also be mindful of the possibility of potential disparate impact claims for pet owners under the Fair Housing Act, where discrimination against certain types or breeds of animals tend to impact a specific segment of the population more than others.³

Below, are just a few of many ways that municipalities can address the housing needs of people with pets:

Example #1:

In 2019, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion requiring any county funding housing to allow pets. The motion was advanced after finding that approximately ten percent of people experiencing homelessness had pets for which they would have difficulty leaving behind to secure housing. Supervisor Hilda Solis explained, “A pet may be the only source of comfort for senior citizens and people with disabilities. In addition, many victims of domestic violence hesitate to apply for supportive or permanent housing after they realize they have to abandon a trusted pet. No one should have to sever a bond with a pet to find housing.”⁴ The motion in Los Angeles County followed a similar motion passed by the City of Los Angeles.

Example #2:

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Santa Monica, California extended its eviction moratorium to apply to residents in a variety of circumstances that would ordinarily not be protected from eviction proceedings, including the presence of pets, whether authorized or not.⁵

Example #3:

In New Jersey, *Young v. Savinon* established that tenants that were allowed to have pets at the beginning of a tenancy could not have their leases changed to prohibit those same pets upon renewal.⁶

Municipalities can:

1. Review statutes and case law that govern the rights of pet owners and ensure local laws are in alignment.
2. Encourage animal services to disseminate information about pet-friendly housing options in the community.
3. Ensure that excessive “pet rent” is not allowed to be used as a loophole to circumvent local rent control ordinances.

Hunger Relief Services

Often, if an individual or family needs food and is having financial difficulty affording it, their pets are in need of food, too. However, those experiencing financial difficulty are more likely to give up their pets to a shelter. Pets play a large role in the well-being of families and vulnerable individuals, such as senior citizens, who tend to have lower incomes. Thus, being forced to relinquish a pet may lead to a poorer quality of life, and even greater instability during an otherwise challenging time. Through collaboration with various

divisions, a number of municipalities have incorporated the distribution of pet food either through pantries that distribute pet food only, or through food banks that distribute both human and pet food. Often supported by community and company donations and local volunteers, establishing such resources in the community may be achieved through little to no extra cost to the taxpayer.

Below are some examples of innovative partnerships that have preserved the ability of individuals and families to keep their pets:

Example:

The Community Resources Division in Fayetteville, Arkansas consists of the Code Compliance, Community Development and Animal Services Programs. In 2010, the division established the Ranger’s Pantry Pet Food Bank (“Pantry”) after a housing crisis led to a significant increase number of pets being relinquished to the animal shelter simply because families could no longer afford to feed them. During the same year, the city made a goal to “reduce spending, to prevent any tax increase, to avoid wholesale layoffs of workers as has happened in other cities across the nation, and to maintain excellence in programs and services that our citizens expect and deserve.”⁷ Since then, the program has provided over 165,000 pounds of pet food, with 100% of the food being donated by businesses and local residents. The program has also received private grant funding. The Pantry also provides an AniMeals program, which allows distribution to homebound participants in the local Meals on Wheels Program.

Municipalities can:

1. Establish a pet food pantry through a resolution, motion or order, while encouraging private-public partnerships to help secure food donations.
2. Consider integrating the distribution of pet food through existing programs that provide food for vulnerable individuals and families.
3. Identify opportunities to encourage referrals to local food banks by animal services to individuals who may be relinquishing a pet due to difficulty affording their own meals

Legal Services

Known for their value in providing critical legal services for underprivileged, disabled and elderly members of society, legal aid organizations are often supported by municipalities through appropriations of funds. Likewise, these organizations are often where clients are introduced to the availability of government-supported social services. In many instances, the areas covered by legal aid, such as family, disability and employment law, housing and foreclosure are also directly connected to animal ownership. For example, a client with a service animal protected under the Fair Housing Act may be facing an unlawful eviction under a “no pets” clause in a lease. In this case, effective legal assistance may preserve affordable housing options in the community, avoid potential code enforcement while

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preventing the unnecessary intake of an animal at a shelter as well as its associated costs. As growing number of states allow animals to be included in protective orders to make it easier and safer for victims of domestic violence to avoid dangerous environments, a proactive legal aid organization might ask a potential client whether they have any pets and wish to include them in such orders. They may also refer the client to a local organization that can help provide temporary housing for pets of victims of domestic violence.

Example #1:

Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma issued a publication, entitled Assistance Animals- Your Rights Under the Fair Housing Act in English and Spanish. The work that provided the basis of the publication was supported by funding under a grant with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Example #2:

Iowa Legal Aid maintains resources for individuals with pets, emotional support and assistance animals in a variety of circumstances including housing and disability law, as well as domestic violence and disaster situations.⁹

Municipalities can:

1. Evaluate the ways in which animal ownership and related services are integrated into government funded local legal aid programs.
2. Offer opportunities for legal service professionals to provide community education around services for clients with animals, especially as they align with local laws and policies.
3. Facilitate the exchange of information between animal services, legal service organizations and social services agencies that accept referrals from those organizations.

211 and 311 Services

Through government CRM technology, 211 and 311 hotlines and mobile services allow residents of the United States and Canada to easily access non-emergency municipal and human services in their communities. The technology is often promoted as a centralized way for municipalities to efficiently and effectively spend tax dollars, while ensuring that a variety of government agencies are able to better focus on their core purposes and manage workloads. These services typically operate by providing free and confidential referrals to a number of city and community services including food, housing, medical care, job training, and much more. Including animal related services among the list of assistance areas can add to even greater positive outcomes for the community.

Municipalities can:

1. Coordinate with animal services to ensure that their services are represented among other important community services referrals.
2. Track incoming requests to assess which specific animal services are most needed.
3. Provide helpful information through referral services which may resolve complaints and reduce the need for code enforcement.

Example:

The 211 service provided by the Greater Twin Cities United Way provides referrals for several resources related to animals, including adoption, spay/neuter, and pet food pantries.⁹

Conclusion

By integrating human and animal services in the community, municipalities can more effectively and efficiently maximize their services to residents with a variety of needs. Ongoing collaboration may also serve to address these issues when they begin and before they turn into a more complex situation in need of greater resources. Homelessness prevention, food insecurity, and legal services are just a few areas in which services may be integrated with animal services. Municipalities may wish to conduct an assessment of needs specific to their community.

Notes

1. *Pet Ownership by Tenants*, City of West Hollywood, Weho.org (2020), <https://www.weho.org/city-government/rent-stabilization-housing/rent-stabilization/evictions-and-relocations/pet-ownership-by-tenants#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20West%20Hollywood,permitted%20pets%20after%20their%20loss>. (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
2. Assistance Animals, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Hud.gov (2020), https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_op/assistance_animals (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
3. Linder, A. *The Black Man's Dog: The Social Context of Breed Specific Legislation*, 25 Animal L. 51, 60-63 (2019).
4. Jessica Ogilve, *LA County Wants To Keep Homeless People And Their Pets Together*, LAist, 2019, https://laist.com/2019/03/13/keep_homeless_people_and_their_pets_together_says_la_county_board_of_supervisors.php (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
5. COVID-19 - Eviction Moratorium - santamonica.gov - City of Santa Monica, Santamonica.gov (2020), <https://www.santamonica.gov/coronavirus-eviction-moratorium> (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
6. *Young v. Savinon*, 201 N.J. Super. 1, 492 A.2d 385 (1985). 7 Mayor Lioneld Jordan, State of the City 2 (2011), <https://www.fayetteville-ar.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/162> (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
8. Iowa, Iowalegalaid.org, <https://www.iowalegalaid.org/search?q=pets> (last visited Sep 17, 2020).
9. 211unitedway.org (2020), <https://www.211unitedway.org/search-category/animal-services/?Search=Pet%20Food> (last visited Sep 17, 2020).