

There are currently more than 400,000 animals in Texas shelters, due to overpopulation (Shelter Animals Count (SAC), 2019). The overwhelming animal population left uncared for emphasizes the need to provide animal services such as, spaying and neutering programs, shelters and forever homes. Without such services, these pets can become at risk for animal cruelty (Humane Society of the United States [HSUS], 2019b).

Animal cruelty has been defined as “socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to, and/or death of, an animal” (Browne, 2014, p.16). The most common forms of animal abuse are intentional cruelty and neglect. Animal cruelty can be broken down into two main categories: active and passive cruelty also referred to as acts of commission and omission, respectively.

ACTIVE CRUELTY

Active cruelty (acts of commission), sometimes known as non-accidental injury, implies malicious intent where a person has intentionally caused harm to an animal. Animal abuse can occur for many reasons. Examples include using animals to “intimidate family members into sexual abuse [...] or simply to psychologically torture the victims, flexing their ‘power’” (Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation [WRR], n.d.).

PASSIVE CRUELTY

Passive cruelty (acts of omission) is characterized by cases of neglect, in which the crime is lack of action as opposed to the action itself. Severe animal neglect can cause large amounts of pain and suffering to an animal.

Starvation, dehydration, inadequate shelter in extreme weather conditions, or allowing a collar to grow into an animal’s skin are all examples of neglect (WRR, n.d.).

THE ABUSERS

The Humane Society of the US (HSUS), reports that there are predominantly two types of abusers: hoarders and intentional abusers. Animal abuse has been correlated with two primary demographics as well. Women over 60 years of age have a higher percentage of involvement in animal hoarding cases, while men under 30 years of age have a higher percentage of involvement in animal fighting and neglect (HSUS, 2019a).

ANIMAL CRUELTY AND VIOLENT CRIME

Numerous studies have established that people who participated in or witnessed animal cruelty have an increased risk for involvement in crimes against humans (HSUS, 2019a). Studies have also suggested that the risk of violent behavior towards people increases with violence towards animals. “Animal abuse distinguished by features that increase its severity should be considered to place a person in a high-risk category that may include the co-occurred and/or future propensity toward other types of violence or criminal offending, and the possibility of past and current victimization” (Emily Patterson-Kane, as cited in Felthous, 2017).

Numerous studies have shown a “strong link between animal abuse and traditional bullying” among preadolescent boys and girls, teenagers

and young adults. A recent study that examined the relationship between bullying and animal abuse found that “gender, general approval of aggression, traditional bullying perpetration, and cyberbullying perpetration were significant predictors of animal abuse” (Sanders and Henry, 2017).

Witnessing animal cruelty within the family appears to increase the chance of generational animal cruelty. A scientific study of a group of inmates’ surveys reported that witnessing animal abuse by a friend, relative, or parent was correlated with increased levels of animal cruelty in adolescence (Browne, 2014). Interestingly, another study found that when witnessing strangers abusing animals, adolescents actually reported fewer instances of animal cruelty (Richardson, 2017).

In many cases, animal cruelty is also considered the first step towards committing child and/or spousal abuse. While some perpetrators abuse animals without cause, others abuse as a way to gain cooperation from the pet’s owner (usually a woman or a child) to commit unsavory acts or to prevent the victims from seeking help (Animal Welfare Institute, 2018). Due to the abuse that is often endured by the spouse, in 2018, the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) act was introduced into law. The PAWS act protects women and pets by donating grants to shelters that may house the two from an abusive spouse. It ensures safety for both women and pets (Animal Welfare Institute, 2018).

Several shelters have developed programs in response to the growing concern of co-occurrence of domestic violence and animal cruelty. One such program is the Safe Havens for Animals™ Program, which allows victims of domestic violence to leave their animals in foster care while they are receiving or seeking medical care, counseling and help. Within the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation counties of interest, there are four organizations participating in the Safe Havens for Animals™ Program:

- Crisis Center of Comal County
- Family Violence Prevention Services

- Haven for Hope
- Kendall County Women’s Shelter
(Animal Welfare Institute, n.d.).

TREATMENT FOR ABUSED ANIMALS

Animals abused within the first few weeks of life are rarely suitable as pets. For instance, “cats that have not been exposed to people within the first seven weeks of life will never be fully accepting of people” (Dodman, 2015). When abused in the first few weeks of life, cats are more likely to be hostile toward humans for the rest of their lives. The same is true for dogs; however, the human interaction must occur by 12-14 weeks of age (Dodman, 2015).

Treating or rehabilitating an abused animal requires time and patience. Like an abused human being, an abused animal will be wary, untrusting, and potentially aggressive in its attempt to protect itself. While most animals can be rehabilitated, there are some that cannot, either because of the age when they were first abused or because the abuse happened over such an extended period of time that the animals are not able to recover. It often takes up to a year to rehabilitate an abused pet (Dodman, 2015).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Overpopulation is a major contributing factor of animal cruelty. The following presents a picture of the problem:

- Two breeding cats with all of their offspring in six years could generate 420,000 cats
- Two breeding dogs with all their offspring in six years can produce 67,000 dogs
- 70,000 puppies and kittens are born every day in the United States
- Only 1 in 10 dogs will ever find a forever home
- Only 1 in 12 cats will ever find a forever home

(A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter, n.d.)

There’s an estimated 30 to 40 million stray cats living within U.S. communities. Of those, only 2% are spayed or neutered (Animal Sheltering, 2019). As a result, large populations of cats are left underserved, resulting in high demands for spaying and neutering.

Spaying and neutering (surgical sterilization) helps control the animal population and benefits both pets and owners. The risk of animal health problems and aggressive behavior, including biting and scratching, is reduced. In addition, pets are less likely to roam the neighborhood, run away, or get into fights. As a result, neutered pets tend to live longer (Animal Sheltering, 2019).

ANIMAL CARE FACILITIES/SHELTERS

A 2018 report made by Shelter Animals Count (SAC), found that 3,668,937 animals were taken into shelters. Of those, 550,927 animals either died in care, became lost, or were euthanized. The gross live outcomes (resulting in either adoptions or transfer outs) was 3,089,041 (SAC, 2019a).

There remains a disparity in the concept of a “kill” or “no kill” shelter. “No kill” shelters are generally limited-admission facilities. They are selective about the animals they take in either by breed, number, or condition. They play an important role in helping homeless companion animals find responsible homes. Limited admission shelters do not euthanize animals based on space availability or length of stay.

However, the need still exists for “Open Admission” shelters whose doors are open to all homeless animals in every community. Municipal Animal Care and Control facilities generally fill this need. They are also responsible for enforcement of state and local animal health and safety codes and, in most cases, investigating reports of animal cruelty and abuse (Rice, 2019).

Tracking data from animal shelters has long been a problem since there is no national reporting requirement for individual shelters. The *Asilomar Accords*, a set of guiding principles, standard definitions, and statistical formulae, were developed in 2004 and represented the first animal welfare industry standards (SAC, 2019b). Adoption of those standards remains voluntary but has become widespread. In 2011 work began on *Shelter Animals Count: The National Database Project*,

a collaborative initiative to create and share a national database of sheltered animal statistics. A standard set of statistics, the *Basic Data Matrix* (based on the *Asilomar Accords*), have been collected from participating shelters through an online database that will also provide public access to the data. Data and statistics from 2,873 shelter organizations are currently available for viewing online. 27 animal welfare organizations in the KCF counties of interest have signed-up thus far (Maddie’s Fund, n.d; SAC, 2019a&b).

ANIMAL ISSUES FACING THE SAN ANTONIO AREA

One generally accepted indicator of community animal services is the Annual Live Release Rate. While there is no accepted national average for live release rates, the *Asilomar Accords* formulas of total live outcomes divided by total outcomes was calculated using data provided by SAC (2019a). The national Live Release Rate for 2018 (based on the 2,873 organizations reporting) was calculated to be 84.8%.

The following is the most recent data representing Bexar County; however, the data is not a full representation of the county as only Animal Care Services (ACS) is reported:

Indicator	2016	2017	2018
Annual Live Release Rate	88%	91%	92%
(ACS, 2018)			

This data indicates that Bexar County has made noteworthy progress. In fact, the City of San Antonio Animal Care Services “ACS participated in community summits and rescue summits which lead to adding five new rescue partners to assist with live placement for ACS pets. ACS set a new annual record high of 91.6% in FY 2018 awhile impounding over 1,000 more animals. Proactive programs and practices have been the largest contributors to this success” (ACS, 2019 pg1).

During the fiscal year of 2018 Animal Care Services took in 31,230 animals. Of these animals, 22.9% were adopted directly from the shelter to a permanent home, 39.7% were transferred to a rescue group who in turn found a home for the animal, 23.9% were returned to

their owners, 3.3% went directly to foster care, 3.1% were trapped, neutered, and released. Rates on death were not disclosed for the fiscal year (ACS, 2018).

In addition to managing the animal care shelter, ACS is also responsible for handling all reports of animal bites and animal cruelty. The risk of rabies infection from animal bites continues to be an important concern. There were 836 reports of possible rabies (animal bites) investigated in the Kronkosky area of interest in 2018, 44 cases tested positive:

- None in Bandera County
- 24 cases in Bexar County
 - 23 Bats
 - 1 Fox
- 16 cases in Comal County
 - 13 Bats
 - 2 Fox
 - 1 Raccoon
- 4 in Kendall County
 - 3 Bats
 - 1 Dog

(Texas Department of State Health Services, 2019)

RESOURCES FOR ANIMALS IN THE SAN ANTONIO AREA

As stated earlier, increasing awareness and making spaying and neutering services available are essential for reducing the number of homeless and unwanted puppies and kitten born each year.

There are many low-cost spay/neuter facilities in San Antonio. Additionally, Animal Control Services sponsors free spay/neuter services through its partner clinics for residents of eligible zip codes. In 2018 ACS spay & neuter surgeries totaled 41,951 (ACS, 2018).

Pet Shotz, Inc. Partners with ACS to provide free spay/neuter to qualified residents as well as free ACS Rabies vaccinations and microchips through weekly mobile clinics in addition to its physical location. They now provide X-Ray services as well (Pet Shotz, Inc., n.d.).

SNAP (Spay/Neuter Assistance Program), open to both income-qualified families in partnership with ACS and the general public, provides a mobile clinic for San Antonio and the outlying

counties as well as a regular spay/neuter clinic. Services include spaying or neutering surgeries, rabies vaccination, reduced cost vaccination, flea and tick prevention, heartworm testing and prevention, and microchipping (SNAP, 2019).

Open Admission shelters in the KCF counties of interest include The City of San Antonio Animal Care Services and (not a comprehensive list):

Humane Society of the New Braunfels Area (HSNBA) is an Open Admission shelter that serves Comal County. Despite the fact that they accept stray animals regardless of its health and breed, they reserve the right to reject owner surrenders. In addition to pet adoption services, it also provides foster care, spay and neuter programs, and end of life euthanasia for the community (HSNBA, 2018).

No-Kill, limited intake shelters include (this is not a comprehensive listing):

Animal Defense League of Texas (ADL) provides foster care for animals in addition to adoptions. Adoption of a pet includes “spay/neuter surgery, age appropriate vaccinations, microchip, internal and external parasite treatment, [and] 30 days of 24PetWatch Pet Insurance.” A dog training program and humane education programs are also available (ADL, n.d.).

San Antonio Humane Society (SAHS) offers low-cost services such as trap neuter release (TNR) for all pets, including feral cats. Other services include finding temporary shelter and homes for abandoned or unwanted animals, preventing cruelty to animals, and educating the community on responsible animal care. SAHS performed 19,443 spay/neuter procedures in 2018 (SAHS, n.d., 2019a).

SNIPSA, Inc. (Spay-Neuter-Inject-Protect of San Antonio) is a rescue organization whose purpose is to rescue animals from “kill” shelters (predominantly from ACS), provide any rehabilitation and/or medical treatment necessary, and find adoptive homes. Animals are placed in volunteer foster homes until permanent placement is found. “Several times a year, SNIPSA holds Big Fix clinics. These ...

operations provide sterilization, vaccinations, and microchipping to over 450 cats and dogs in a single day” (SNIPSA, n.d.).

Cowboy Capital Pet Assistance League (CCPAL)

is an organization in Bandera county, that provides fostering and adoptions for homeless animals. It also offers a sponsorship program for animals that are hard to place for health or behavioral reasons, and offers quarterly obedience classes for dogs (CCPAL, n.d.).

Canyon Lake Animal Shelter Society has a thorough adoption process that begins with an adoption counselor. All pets adopted from the Canyon Lake Animal Shelter Society are spayed and neutered, vaccinated, and microchipped. In addition, dogs are current on their heart worm medication (Canyon Lake Animal Shelter Society, n.d.).

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