



2022, What A Year!

More animals returned home or placed in new homes, more industry challenges, more employee personal growth, more organizational growth, more lives saved. In the animal welfare world, stats from 2020 (the start of the pandemic) are typically not used in year-over-year comparisons. Nothing about that year was ‘normal’ or predictive of the future. And part of 2021 was also spent in shelter-in-place. So, 2022 is our first ‘back to normal’ data point. And it was anything but ‘normal’!

INTAKES

Industry data shows that during 2020, animals coming into shelters dropped to all time lows. In 2021 and 2022, those numbers rose again, but not to the pre-pandemic numbers. Our intakes in Petaluma follow this trend. Seized Custody/Stray + Owner Guardian Surrender animals (these are the pets that an open admission shelter like ours is legally required to bring into our care) have increased slowly in 2020–2022, from 2019. The rate of increase is slower than industry norms, because we have been able to continue a live-saving program that we started during the pandemic—our pet pantry. Before the pandemic, we’d always distributed some food and pet supplies to our community. But during the pandemic, we ramped up this service, not only keeping more food and variety of food on hand, but also delivering food to the community, where they needed it. We have kept this mobile pet pantry alive because our community needs it, and because it keeps pets in their homes (where they belong) and out of the shelter. Valuable community partnerships have made this possible from suppliers like PetCo, to distributors like Una Vida.

The only ‘safety valve’ that we have to control intake numbers, is in the number of pets we transfer from other animal shelters in need. When we have space, we welcome more pets into our program; when we don’t have space, we can’t help. In 2020, that number plummeted. All over the country, and in CA, where we help the most, shelters did not have pets to transfer to us. They were adopting pets out faster than ever. And the pets who weren’t adopted, were fostered locally by families who were sheltering in place. 2021 saw another drop in numbers. Our partners were experiencing a wonderful swell of local support. Then 2022 hit and for a number of reasons, our transfer partners needed us again. We were able to respond, in part. But like many of the transfer recipients, we had diverted those resources into other life-saving programs (like the pet pantry), so we couldn’t help as much as we had previously.



Here is just one of the factors contributing to the crisis we now find ourselves in when we look at the big picture: fewer pets are transferring from high volume shelters, to partners who in the past could supply fosters and adopters.

The last piece of our intake numbers is all about wildlife. In 2020, as the community was home, more notice was taken of wildlife ‘encroaching’. 2021 and 2022 have continued this increase. This is an area that we expect growth for animal services in Petaluma, especially as the human population grows and wildlife are forced into smaller spaces or forced to share human spaces.

OUTCOMES

Adoptions and Return to Owner numbers dipped a bit from 2019 to 2020. This is a common thread in the industry (another factor contributing to our current animal welfare crisis). But in Petaluma, we did not see the same kind of dip that other parts of the state or country saw. We were committed to doing everything possible to get pets into homes (where they belong), while adhering to safety guidelines during the height of the pandemic. It was actually during 2021 that we increased our 'open' hours. One of our goals had always been to keep our doors open to the public during times that it was convenient for the public to use our services. We found that responding 'yes' to the question 'can I pick my pet up now' at 6:05 pm when we were officially closed, did a few things: reunited that pet with their family quickly, contained the cost for care, built goodwill with the community, increased morale for the staff. So, we've officially expanded our hours of public service.



The euthanasia and DOA numbers have remained steady. The majority of the DOA animals are wildlife—a result of sharing a shrinking wild space in favor of human spaces. The number of animals who died in our care in 2022, were more than double those in 2020, and 2021, returning to numbers closer to 2019. The high number of cats who died, the majority of which were kittens under 2 months of age, can be expected during kitten season. We take on the most vulnerable, provide the best care possible, and sometimes nature has other plans.



MEDICAL

Over the last three years, the veterinary world has been turned upside down. Not only were vets closed for much of 2020, but fewer veterinarians entered the workforce. NBAS fared well in 2020 and benefitted our vet partners because our protocol had always been 'touchless' visits. With extra cleaning protocols put into place, we could continue those practices. But as folks started to bring pets back to their vets in 2021 and 2022, the spots available for shelter animals shrunk. (Another factor contributing to the current animal welfare crisis.)

Spay and neuter surgery numbers were reduced in favor of basic exams and vaccines, along with emergency medical care. This also led to an increase of animals who could not be adopted, but in order to keep pets moving into homes, an increase in pets who went home on a foster-to-adopt basis. These pets enjoyed life with their new families, while waiting for their spay or neuter surgery.

This changing landscape required staff to grow into new roles. No longer were they required to simply care for and track progress of pets in the shelter, but now they had to become case managers for the pets in homes who still needed our care. Growth and opportunity, challenges and successes.

CALLS FOR SERVICE

We saw a decrease in calls for service this year, even below 2019 levels. We're doing fewer patrols and responding to more targeted calls, especially bark complaints and enforcement calls. As the community needs change, we shift our officers to respond.



DOG LICENSING

During the last couple of years, pet owners had a difficult time getting vet appointments for even routine vaccines. Therefore, they could not renew their dog licenses (requires a current rabies vaccine). The vet appointments are starting to open up again, and vaccine clinics are more readily available. In 2023, we have an initiative to increase dog license compliance. The increased revenue will help us offset increased vet care costs, but more importantly, we can enforce rabies control. That's what licensing is actually all about. We want Sonoma County to continue to lead CA in the fewest number of rabies cases reported. We do our part by reminding the community to renew their dog license, and thereby renew their dog's rabies vaccine.

A nice by-product of having a dog license on your dog's collar is quick return when they get lost. Of course, a microchip is the best identification and reunification tool. But a dog with a current license tag, not only helps us reunite the dog with the owner, but reassures the victim in the event of a bite that the dog's rabies vaccine is up to date.



CURRENT ANIMAL WELFARE SITUATION

In most of the US, we saw a decrease in intakes during the height of the pandemic. And while folks were staying home, pets were added to households. Vet care was hard to get, so fewer people were spaying and neutering their pets. Many people lost their jobs. Since animal shelters were not the source to find adoptable pets at this time, people turned to reputable breeders and the increase of back-yard breeders for their new 'pandemic puppy.' When shelters finally opened up again, they were often not the first choice to find a new best friend. So, shelters have re-ignited marketing campaigns to convince the public that shelter animals make great pets.

At NBAS, we're finally able to get back out into the community to host adoption events. We have great success matching pets to families at these events and will continue to increase our community presence.

However, inflation & the shortage of vet care, play a big part in the decision to adopt a pet. In addition, communities who lifted the pandemic-related eviction moratorium early in 2022, have experienced an increase in intakes due to 'housing' issues (you may be evicted from housing that allowed pets, especially a big dog, but cannot find the same housing that allows pets to move into). In Petaluma, the eviction moratorium was lifted late in 2022, so we have not experienced this increase in owner surrenders yet.

Currently in our shelter systems across the country, pets are staying longer & fewer pets are getting adopted. The flow from high pet population areas to shelters who can help has slowed. The Petaluma shelter has always been one of the helpers – transferring pets INTO our system and finding great homes for them – alleviating some of the strain on our higher intake partners. In 2022, we enjoyed more adoptions than in 2020 and 2021, but we are not back up to our 2019 numbers. If we see a slowdown in adoptions at our own shelter, this will impact our ability to transfer animals from high impact areas.

Respectfully submitted by
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