

Animal Care & Control



AD HOC TASK FORCE

PROCESS & SERVICE SUBCOMMITTEE

February 18, 2015 from 3:45 pm – 5:15 pm

The subcommittee approved the meeting summary from the February 4, 2015 meeting.

The Behavioral Assessment subgroup presented their recommendations based on their observations and discussions with MCACC staff.

1. Create a consistent safe area for assessments at West and stick to it. Use only the portable pens for assessments at East.

A member asked if it is possible to erect a shade structure over the fake grass in the evaluation areas. The grass gets very hot.

2. All behavioral information gathered on assessment should be available on the kennel card.

This will help potential adopters and rescue groups understand why a dog is given a certain temperament classification. A member suggested that the subcommittee recommends that the kennel cards are redesigned to include comprehensive medical and evaluation notes. (Note: Also see discussion under Recommendation #11 regarding displaying behavioral information on kennel cards.)

3. Institute continuing education for staff conducting the evaluations.

4. Certification process for those who will be doing assessments.

Staff currently completes a training class, but aren't "certified". A member asked about the difference between training and certification. Bob Crough explained that a certification program requires a test of the attendee's understanding of the training content. The evaluation training at AC&C does not currently require a skills demonstration at the completion of the training.

5. Supervisors should observe the evaluation process on a regular basis to make sure protocol is being followed.

6. Create an enrichment program for all animals to decrease psychological decline during time at MCACC.

An enrichment program could consist of something as simple as PVC pipes with caps on the end and treats inside. An enrichment program is anything that can help keep the dog's brain active. MCACC does not currently have a formalized enrichment program, but long-term residents of Chi Town are sometimes given toys, additional walks, or participate in the day foster program.

7. Education offered to evaluation staff about breed characteristics dogs and how that plays a role in fair assessments.

Dogs may be assessed unfairly for behaving in a way that is common for the breed. For example, German Shepherds typically will bark at new people that approach their kennel but this does not mean that they are aggressive toward humans.

8. Education to help evaluation staff properly identify dog breeds.

9. Get Second Chance group like they have at East at West Shelter.

10. Consider using a personality test instead of, or in conjunction with, the temperament test currently used by MCACC.

Harbor Humane Society in Michigan instituted a personality test to reduce the number of dogs being returned because the dog's personality was not compatible with the adopter's lifestyle. The personality test assigns each animal a color or number that reflects his/her personality type. For example, a hyper Jack Russell terrier may be classified as the "Life of the Party" and should be paired with an active person. MCACC's uses a version of the SAFER assessment process, which is a temperament test. A member pointed out that the SAFER test uses a series of yes/no questions that tries to eliminate evaluator bias. The SAFER test is also used by other shelters, which makes it easier to transfer dogs to other shelters for adoption.

11. Completely overhaul the MCACC behavior assessment protocol.

The subcommittee discussed this recommendation and the previous recommendation at length. A member suggested that shelters are making statements about an animal's personality beyond what is reasonable to assume based on the results of a limited evaluation. The member was concerned that if MCACC presents all of this information on the kennel card we may be limiting the dog's chance of being adopted. In addition, the average person doesn't know what assessment terms like "barrier aggression" mean.

Another member asked if there was a potential for liability if MCACC said that an animal was docile and then he ended up biting someone.

The Chair asked how the New Hope partners use the behavioral information on the kennel cards. A rescue group representative that is part of the subcommittee said that the rescues conduct their own evaluation. Information printed on the kennel card is not critical. If the rescue has a question about the dog they ask a staff person.

A member asked if Chameleon had the capability to print medical and behavioral information on the kennel card. Mr. Al Aguinaga said that it may be possible to create a template to publish behavioral notes. Currently the only way to publish the behavioral notes is to publish all the notes, which could include contact information for people who have inquired about the dog. Another member suggested that aggression is actually a medical problem (mental health) and that information should be included in the medical notes.

ACTION ITEM: The Chair asked staff to consider the subcommittee's dialogue surrounding publishing behavioral information on the kennel cards. The request is for staff to present their review and position at the next meeting.

12. HALO should pass along their evaluation notes to MCACC if HALO does not select an animal.

13. Evaluation teams should have minimal or only positive interactions with the dogs prior to conducting the assessment.

For example, a dog may have a negative reaction to the person who gave the dog a shot when he arrived at the shelter.

14. Streamline the logistics of the evaluation process.

Staff spends a lot of time walking back and forth to retrieve animals from their kennels and taking them to the evaluation space.

ACTION ITEM: The Chair asked staff to analyze the recommendations from the Behavioral Assessment subgroup and present ideas regarding how the assessment and disclosure process can be enhanced to give the dogs more appropriate outcomes but is still manageable in the Chameleon system. The members will decide which recommendations of the behavioral sub-group get added to the formal list of developing recommendations at the next meeting.

A member asked what do staff see as the barriers to improving the behavior assessment process? Bob Crough said that staff see time, travel distance to retrieve an animal from a kennel, and problems with Chameleon as the biggest barriers to improving the process.

A member asked about customizing Chameleon to speed up data entry or perhaps using iPads during the evaluation process so the information is automatically loaded into Chameleon. Other committee members and staff warned that if they make too many changes to Chameleon the system may not be compatible with future software updates...essentially causing more problems than it solves.

ACTION ITEM: Ms. Valerie Beckett will distribute the behavioral subgroup's recommendations to the subcommittee.

The members then reviewed the remaining items on list of developing recommendations.

26. Develop an inspection process to insure proper cleaning throughout the day. A checklist has been developed but more frequent spot cleaning would require additional staff.

27. Construct separate metal-framed buildings with 30 kennels each for quarantine. The East Shelter remodel includes 12 isolation kennels.

28. Consider having staff perform evaluations near the play yards at the East shelter. Implemented.

29. Review ASPCA guidelines on food guarding during evaluations. Implemented.

33. Develop formalized closing procedures to ensure that all animals are inside and that the bedding is not saturated. Staff ensures that all animals are in for the night, but checking the bedding cannot be implemented without additional staff.

ACTION ITEM: At the next meeting, Dr. Rodrigo Silva will tell the committee how many additional staff would be needed to check the bedding.

34. Consider other watering solutions to reduce overspray at East. The subcommittee determined that this was not a major issue and decided to remove this recommendation.

37. Make incident reports more readily accessible to volunteers and staff.

Forms are available throughout the shelter for volunteers to write their suggestions and concerns and submit them via a lockbox to Dr. Silva. Dr. Silva's assistant retrieves the cards from the lockbox on a weekly basis. The incident report is currently available for all volunteers to view on the public drive. The subcommittee suggested that the process be better communicated to the volunteers.

38. Use Walkie-Talkies. Implemented.

The Chair recapped that at the next meeting, staff will provide their thoughts on the Behavioral subgroup's recommendations, the Medical subgroup will finish presenting their recommendations and then the members will discuss the strategy for finalizing the list of recommendations.

A member said that she saw the story on the news about an emaciated dog that was spayed by MCACC. Some members of the community were outraged and felt that the dog was too sick to be spayed. Staff said that per state statute all dogs must be sterilized prior to adoption. MCACC does make exceptions for dogs that are too sick or too old to be sterilized. This is done on a case-by-case basis and a veterinarian makes the decision. Adopters of these types of animals, usually put down a \$100 deposit and will get the money back once the animal is sterilized.

The subcommittee ended the meeting by discussing what can be done immediately to make a difference. A member raised a concern that dogs with red Mylar tags aren't moved from the stay ward to the adoption ward quick enough.

ACTION ITEM: Staff will investigate if there is a way to move dogs from the stray ward to the adoption ward more quickly.

Summary of Action Items for next meeting:

- Staff to present thought on the recommendations from Behavioral Assessment subgroup.
- Report additional number of staff needed to check bedding.
- Continue reviewing recommendations from the Medical Triage subgroup.

Next meeting: Wednesday, Mar. 4, 2015