

Attended:

Sarah Cohn, Community Empowerment Fund (CEF)
Lauri DeSilvester, person who has experienced homelessness and bird owner
Mary Dow, Independent Animal Rescue (IAR) Board
Steven Frasca, Community Empowerment Fund (CEF)
Sarah Furman, Chapel Hill Police Department
Chief Walter Horton, Carrboro Police Department
Birnettiah Killens, Durham VA Medical Center
Thava Mahadevan, UNC Center for Excellence in Community Mental Health
Bob Marotto, Orange County Animal Services
Tara May, Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness
Todd McGee, Orange County Community Relations
Judy Miller, Orange County Animal Services Advisory Board
Andi Morgan, Orange County Animal Services
Corey Root, Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness
Jacky Rosati, Independent Animal Rescue (IAR)/New Hope Presbyterian
Molly Rowe, Orange County DSS, Prevention Unit
Aviva Scully, Orange County Animal Services Advisory Board
Debra Vestal, Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC)
Sunny Westerman, UNC PAWS

Minutes

Background:

Animal Services background by Bob: The OCAS shelter is not designed for medium or long length care. Bob went to Corey because of the sad situations encountered with people facing losing their pet related to life situations, including where they were losing their home. Budget considerations are underway from OCAS to the County Commissioners include waiving of licensing fees and boarding fees for individuals facing homelessness.

Homelessness background by Corey: Orange County is undergoing major system changes regarding approaches to homelessness. System is looking at very rapid turn-around to get individuals/families out of homelessness and into permanent housing, instead of just looking at shelter, and using trauma-informed care. The goal is to put more work on service providers to coordinate resources and care rather than individual navigating the system themselves.

Q&A from participants about background:

Conditions of Homelessness – broad definition adopted. Includes those with loss of home, those living with others, those living in shelters or motels, or those undergoing treatment programs that will involve months.

Frame the work of the Task Force

- Task force Executive Team has met over last 6 months & clear that the work needed to be focused, time limited & with deliverables.
- Meet 3x, approx. 2hrs each, possible work between; work completed in June.
- Deliverables
 - #1. Defining the problem
 - #2. Map community resources (including a gap analysis of resources and services)

#3. Develop an infographic/brochure outlining community process and resources for community members and providers

- The “next steps” of filling in the gaps of needed services identified in #2 would be in “next workgroup 2.0”, not the outcomes of this Task Force.

Deliverable #1

- Lack of available housing for people with pets & especially for those with limited finances and/or needing public assistance
- Very few accept pets if Section 8. A few will accept if identified as support animals. Fair housing/legal aid ruling (separate from Section 8): If have letter of reasonable accommodation & documentation of support animal, property owner may resist but will accept if client has a strong advocate
- Affordable housing market is a major problem, yet this time is a good opportunity to push for affordable housing that also will accept pets, as affordable housing does have the attention of county commissioners and city planners
- Landlord/realtor/property owner who don't want to rent – Need to be sensitive to their needs. Ensure won't have additional damage to units, and that pet owner will take care of the pet. May be based on landlord's prior experiences & assumptions that those who needed public assistance wouldn't care for their pets.
- County/town public housing doesn't accept pets.
- Collect “census” from agencies here today & others as to how many clients experience problems with homelessness and pets. May be those we don't know about – i.e.: animals surrendered to shelter and either just told “moving” or no reason given.
- For next meeting, to further define the problem (#1), need better understanding of Disability Rights of N.C. Legal aid could help us understand fair housing rights/regulations.
- Very limited availability of individual/family shelters that allow clients with pets.
- Those trying to escape domestic abuse are reluctant to enter shelter as would need to leave pet.
- Very complicated as even if service animal, not uncommon that animal is not socialized to being in group situation (multiple people in room), animal may not have received vet care, other residents may be fearful of dogs, allergic to cats...Katrina triggered change in emergency shelter requirements to accommodate animals. Now have PETCO team to open pet accommodations in designated Red Cross shelter with crises in NC.

Deliverables #2/3:

- Map format (flow chart)
- Will utilize tech/communication resources
- Include public brochure (#3)
- Be sensitive to language used – wording (SPMI) & bilingual
- Future resource: O.C. affordable housing coalition of developers. Corey sits on coalition.
- Give people seeking housing the script and written tools they need to get housing (i.e.: sheet clearly stating what is reasonable accommodation)
- How to assist those trying to escape domestic violence that have pets.
- How to word/ask the question when surrendering pet so can better give assistance (i.e.: if surrendering because homeless), obtain resources (i.e.: homeless fund).

Orange County Pets & Homelessness Task Force Meeting Notes

February 17, 2017, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Orange County Animal Services, 1601 Eubanks Rd, Chapel Hill

- Develop a Resource Pet Bank: vet care, boarding, food, kennels, bedding, leashes. Bank would be for #2, so don't over utilize resources. Have some resources that don't want to be public or available under certain circumstances or through specific contact person.
- Use of existing kennel facilities who would house a pet for period of time at no/reduced cost or work payoff (i.e.: in exchange for services, like cleaning kennels).
- Long term fostering (see Vegas & Seattle models). Some people may be willing to do but not where they are ongoing members of rescue group. Don't want to overburden the rescue/foster network as would be keeping from rescuing others. Sense is that there are more people that want to help, but List of apartments that would take federal, county, or local funds, including Section 8. In addition, list of apartments from above that would accept pets.
- When is housing a pet in animal shelter appropriate-short term for a few weeks, so don't limit ability to help other animals and also given the negative consequences of animal being in institutional environment (health risks to animals).
- Identify motels that might accept pets.
- Remove barrier for chronically homeless (might be for "2.0"). If person needs to go into shelter because of cold weather, can they bring the pet to animal shelter and get back the next day? (cost, transportation)

For future work group ("2.0")

- Strategies to help landlords take risk with affordable housing especially given crisis in housing shortage – i.e.: risk fund pool so that if damage to property, they can be reimbursed.
- Provide information and assistance to help landlords understand why providing housing to those needing affordable housing (or Section 8) and having pets could be beneficial to their community and work.
- Help landlords take small steps – i.e.: designate 1 apartment for homeless and/or pet to trial & that they can speak to their particular interests (i.e.: for an individual with mental illness, for a veteran).
- Education that pet ownership is for life; start with the schools (Kids for Kindness).
- Payment of pet security deposits. Neither Orange nor Durham counties will pay security deposit for pets. In Durham County can find agencies to pay for utility deposits etc., but not for pet deposits. For future, consider adding contribution/fund options such as what OCAS does with sponsors for pets: deposits, such as at shelter with sponsors.
- For next round of RFP housing bond, try to get change in scoring matrix to include accepting pets.

For next meeting:

- To pursue before next meeting: Add to RFP for housing; will they accept pets?
- Try to have representative from Disability Rights of N.C (Legal Aid) that could help us understand fair housing rights/regulations.
- Invite Compass Center for Women & Families to participate.

Corey will send out dates of next meetings. Disregard dates previously distributed.

Respectfully submitted by Judy Miller