

Humane Society of Berks County

Program Proposal: Mobile Veterinary Hospital

The Problem

Increasing evidence is mounting that previously accepted reasons for animals ending up in shelters or facing abuse and neglect are false. Research by the Humane Society of Berks County and others animal welfare and academia shows that among the most important factors determining whether an animal is relinquished to a shelter is access to high quality, affordable veterinary care and an ongoing relationship with a veterinarian from the very beginning of the caretaking relationship with a pet.

Too often, the state of a family pet's health depends on the size of a family's wealth. For those in economically challenged communities, urban, suburban and rural, lack of access to vet care greatly increases the risk of surrender to a shelter or withholding of needed care. Simple health problems escalate to major ones, basic behavioral issues grow into significant and dangerous ones, and lack of proper education can lead a well intentioned pet caretaker to neglect and inflict harm.

The result is a significantly higher likelihood of giving up a pet within the first one to two years of its life (when the vast majority of pets enter our two shelters), of a pet facing euthanasia due to injury, illness or disease which could have been treatable if addressed early, and dangerous behavioral issues such as serious dog bites. If these preventable issues could be addressed, the HSBC projects we could prevent as many as half the animals entering our shelters each year from doing so and drastically decrease the number of the thousands of animals euthanized each year in Berks County for avoidable reasons.

The Solution

The Humane Society of Berks County has begun to implement the solution through the creation of the first full service veterinary hospitals in Pennsylvania based in an animal welfare organization which provide high quality health care to the public. There is a significant difference between HSBC hospitals and those of other organizations, which focus on low cost vaccinations and spay neuter services almost exclusively, or in the private sector, which provide high quality care for any who can afford it and little if any for those who can't. We provide high quality care to all with sliding scale rates based on income. The goal is not just to spay, neuter, vaccinate, and move on to the next client. It is to develop an ongoing veterinary relationship with the pet and create the expectation and "habit" of the delivery of care with the caretaker.

However, our ability to deliver these services is limited by the ability of our clients to reach our two locations. Often, those most in need of services have the least ability to get their pets to our locations. Public transportation is either unavailable or pets cannot be taken. The problem can be especially acute in the suburbs and country side because even walking with a pet for a mile or more as our urban clients often must is not an option. The Humane Society of Berks County requires the ability to bring veterinary services directly to those who need them and continue to return to clients on a regular basis.

The creation of a Mobile Veterinary Hospital would allow us to bring vital services directly to those most in need. Unlike standard low cost vaccination clinics and sterilization programs, a mobile hospital would allow clients to see a veterinarian on a regular schedule, not simply based on the random scheduling of local one day clinics. A mobile hospital would be able to target specific neighborhoods in need of

services (for example, in 2008 Reading faced a deadly parvo epidemic which was concentrated in certain neighborhoods). It could also go to high density rural areas such as trailer communities which are the least likely to have access to veterinary care for those with transportation challenges.

Additionally, a prominent, highly visibility mobile hospital, could schedule regular stops at high traffic areas, providing immediate walk in vet services for those in need. Like the Bookmobile model, this not only provides access to services, it begins to build a relationship with clients and an increasing opportunity to move the unskilled caretaker along the continuum toward being a competent, qualified caretaker.

As the lead agency for the Berks County Animal Response Team (Berks CART), the HSBC also serves as part of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). A mobile unit would allow for more effective emergency response. A true mobile hospital, which does not exist in Pennsylvania, would be able to serve throughout the state *and* as a replicatable model for other organizations.

The need and the benefits for a program like this in Berks County and Pennsylvania is evident. Because of the Humane Society of Berks County's existing human/pet oriented programs such as PetNet, Ani-Meals on Wheels, and Berks CART, we already have a strong community presence and the organizational capacity to manage a "remote service delivery" program. The HSBC's current veterinary staff (three full time vets, and multiple part time vets, plus full support staff) allows for immediate ability to begin this project. The HSBC's unrivaled use of technology and data collection will ensure this mobile unit will be a state of the art and fully integrated part of our veterinary program. The Humane Society of Berks County is eager and prepared to implement immediately, and is committed to ensuring its ongoing implementation

The Goals

The goals of the HSBC Mobile Veterinary Hospital will be:

- 1) Provide high quality veterinary care, both general wellness and surgical/emergency services, to target underserved populations in Berks County and surrounding communities at free, reduced, or standard rates, based on need.
- 2) Provide regular and predictable access to veterinary services to those with limited access.
- 3) Work with local organizations, government, and school districts to identify neighborhoods in need to provide mobile veterinary resources.
- 4) Partner with local and State emergency response and management agencies to develop action plans for emergency response requiring mobile veterinary services.
- 5) Partner with statewide animal welfare affiliations, local shelters, University of Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical School, and others to identify regions throughout the state in need of mobile veterinary services.
- 6) Utilize evaluation methods to measure the effectiveness of the mobile veterinary services, with specific analysis of efficacy of delivery of services to those who would otherwise not receive them and the impact on relinquishment of pets to area shelters.

The Action Steps

- 1) Consult with Penn Vet School to develop the most effective and efficient internal design for the Mobile Veterinary Hospital.
- 2) Retrofit RV, identify service areas, and begin immediate delivery of veterinary services to target populations and regions.

Mobile Veterinary Budget

RV for Retrofitting for Mobile Veterinary Hospital

Purchase of 30 to 35 foot vehicle = \$35,000 - \$50,000
Internal retrofitting for veterinary services = \$10,000 \$45,000-\$60,000

Wellness Clinic Supplies*

Basic wellness clinic supplies including scales, microscope centrifuge, lift table, etc. (complete listing attached) \$8,000

Surgical Capability Supplies*

Surgical table, anesthesia equipments, surgical supplies (complete listing attached) \$15,000

Radiography Capability*

Portable X-Ray unit, digital developer, general equipment = \$47,000
Dental X-Ray unit, general equipment = \$14,000
(complete listing attached) \$61,000

General Supplies and Pharmaceuticals

\$67,000

Total Cash Cost \$196,000-\$211,000

Supplemental Overview of the Humane Society of Berks County

Founded in 1901, the Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC) is among the oldest in the region. For over 100 years, the HSBC has provided homeless pet sheltering and adoption services, sterilization programs, education, and cruelty investigation and prosecution to the Berks County area.

For the past five years the HSBC has been identifying the *reasons* for cruelty, neglect and overpopulation of pets in our community and creating solutions which attack the core causes. We did this in recognition that the efforts of the animal welfare community for the past 100 years have been reactive and, while laudable in their intent, did not serve to stem the tide of the problems. They may, in fact, have helped lead to the continuation of the cycles of cruelty and over population.

These revised approaches include recognition that animals enter shelters or are a victims of cruelty and neglect for several key reasons: lack of access to affordable veterinary services, lack of a regular relationship with a veterinarian, lack of awareness of the requirements of pet ownership and the law, a punitive approach to cruelty policing, and a general lack of resources (educational, veterinary, training) which empower pet owners to be the caretakers we want them to be.

Most pets enter shelters because of economic, education or service access issues. These can combine to make a simple illness progress to a major one, a basic behavioral problem escalate to a dangerous one, mere economic hardship to lead to true neglect and cruelty, or a lack of basic pet ownership skills to result in something as basic as house breaking becoming an crisis situation. Any of these issues could be addressed early and avoid an animal from ever entering our shelters to face euthanasia and a family facing giving up a beloved pet, which can have a profound, long-term impact, particularly on children.

The programs which we have created have become nationally recognized and modeled. Our *Ani-Meals on Wheels program*, which actively partners with Meals on Wheels (MOW) providers to distribute pet food to MOW recipients with pets, is being modeled in seven states. Our *PetNet program*, which provides temporary pet foster care services for the victims of domestic violence, illness or personal catastrophe was recognized for its innovation by Harvard's John F. Kennedy school of Government. Our *Free To A Great Home Emergency Adoption Program* won a national "Best Industry Standard: Adoption Program" award in 2006 and is now being modeled around the nation and throughout Pennsylvania.

All of these programs are based on our effort to look outside the normal model of animal welfare. We particularly employ our belief that the way to best help animals is to help the people who care for them. It is for this reason that our organization has moved from being a single location shelter at near collapse five years ago with massive operating deficits to one with two primary adoption and veterinary centers, multiple satellite adoption partnerships, a budget in the black despite the economy, and we have not **euthanized a single healthy animal in the past two years** (and counting). Our staff represents the HSBC on several Statewide boards, including the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team and Pennsylvania Federated Humane Societies, and we have been asked to present at every major animal national and regional animal welfare conference.