Six Tools for Conquering Crowding

Crowding is a serious concern and should not be taken lightly. It is a direct cause of compromised physical and behavioral health and welfare in shelter animals and results in fewer lives saved. Embracing these six tools can help any organization unwind the crowding and save more lives!

1. **Identify a population manager**. This person is the key to maintaining the population within the shelter's capacity for humane care. They are responsible for tracking daily population numbers, tracking average length of stay by species and age, prompt evaluation and movement of animals to the appropriate location, planned co-housing of compatible animals if necessary, investigating increases in daily population and participating in daily rounds.

2. **Perform daily rounds**. The daily rounds team physically evaluates each animal in the shelter each day, asking (and answering): Who are you? How are you? Are you where you should be? Do you need something today? Do you need something to be scheduled? The team should be made up of a shelter manager or supervisor, a veterinarian or veterinary technician, an adoption coordinator and the population manager. The executive management team should also periodically participate in daily rounds.

The key to conquering crowding and increasing live releases is moving animals through the shelter system as quickly as possible. These six tools will help almost any sheltering organization do just that!

3. **Embrace "fast track" adoptions**. Identify animals that are excellent candidates for adoption (i.e. puppies, kittens, small breed dogs, etc.) at intake and move them to the front of the line for things like spay-neuter, behavior evaluations, etc. to ensure they get out as quickly as possible.

4. **Ensure timely transfer to pet placement partners**. Know your transfer organizations and what they are good at! Identify animals that are good candidates for transfer and get them to those organizations as soon as possible – ideally before they ever enter the shelter. Registering pet placement partners as foster groups may help make this a smooth process.

5. **Institute a policy of "open selection."** Allow all animals in the shelter, even those in their legal holding period, to be seen by the public and pet placement partners. Interested parties can indicate which animal they want and it can be prepared to leave as soon as its holding period is over. First-come, first-serve – don't hold out for a "better" option that may never come!

6. **Divert intake whenever possible.** Institute a spay-neuter and return to owner program, develop a behavior counseling service, encourage owner re-homing of unwanted pets, restrict owner relinquishment to times when space is readily available, schedule owner relinquishments, encourage relinquishers to keep litters until they are 8 weeks old, institute TNR of all feral cats as a matter of policy, etc., etc. The possibilities are endless!

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