



OC Animal Care

OC Animal Care Fact Checker – *Summer 2022*

Addressing concerns and misperceptions raised about the OC Animal Care Shelter

General Questions

- ***Is OCAC responsible for every animal in Orange County?***
 - No - OC Animal Care is fortunate to be part of a vibrant and caring network of municipal animal shelters, non-profit organizations, and animal rescues that meet the needs of un-homed animals in Orange County.
 - OCAC serves 14 cities and the unincorporated area, sharing the responsibility of caring for Orange County animals with 20 other jurisdictions.
 - For a list of cities OCAC serves, please visit ocpetinfo.com/about-us.
- ***Do all shelters have the same operational model?***
 - No. Just like each animal has its own story, each shelter has its own pathway to success. The operational model at OCAC is based on a compilation of industry best practices and the efficacy of this model is reflected in our metrics and the dedicated work of our staff.
- ***Why does OCAC euthanize healthy dogs?***
 - Public safety is a top priority at OC Animal Care. As such, the shelter does not turn away any behaviorally challenged animal even if another shelter has. Our intent is to find responsible placement for the animals in our care if possible. To do this, we have a consistent behavior evaluation process in place to help find the most successful placement possible for the animals in our care.
 - OC Animal Care is committed to finding responsible, life-saving outcomes that benefit the community and pets we serve whenever possible. We focus on balancing safety in the community with programming that assists some of our most vulnerable and at-risk animals with finding a positive path out of the shelter. Programming includes our rescue adoption partner program, foster program, volunteer program, daily enrichment initiatives, and so much more. We are truly in this together for the animals.
 - While we regret the need to euthanize, we accept it as our responsibility as a municipal shelter charged with the priority of public health and safety. It is critical we keep in mind the safety of the animal, shelter staff, and the community.
 - Our nearly 95% save rate for dogs exceeds the benchmark called in the OCAC Strategic Plan and employs a behavioral dog review process that considers the individual circumstance of high-needs dogs that come to the shelter.

- ***Do animals in the shelter receive any in-kennel or out-of-kennel enrichment programming?***
 - All animals in the shelter receive responsible and individualized care.
 - OCAC provides in-kennel enrichment daily for dogs. OCAC strives to have every eligible dog receive out-of-kennel time every other day.
 - Not all dogs are eligible or safe to be handled outside of the kennel except for medical evaluation. Enrichment is critical for the dogs, but our staff and volunteer safety are a priority.
 - OCAC staff is experienced in dog handling. Every effort is made to enhance a dog's stay at the shelter and place it quickly into an adoptive home.
- ***Why isn't a TNR program implemented in Orange County?***
 - TNR is a leading discussion topic in animal care agencies across the nation. Locally, it is OCAC's understanding that the release of unowned cats into the community is prohibited. At this time, the managed intake of healthy cats which does not bring them into the shelter is an industry best practice. We continue to monitor litigation processes happening around the state for rulings that may impact the penal code.
- ***Are there specific challenges facing the shelter post-pandemic?***
 - Yes. We are thankful that many people adopted animals during the recent pandemic but, as the world opens back up and people resume in-office work and normal travel routines, OCAC is seeing an increase of animals coming to the shelter. Additionally, OCAC's inventory consists of mostly large breed dogs, many of which have medical or behavioral challenges. Currently, over 95% of our available dogs are large breeds and nearly a third of our available dogs, including those with our longest lengths of stay, have medical or behavioral challenges impacting their adoptability. OCAC is proud to serve as a weigh-station for sick, stray, injured or aggressive animals but the placement of these animals takes time, consideration and the collaboration of our staff, our rescue partners, and the community at large.

Shelter Hours and Adoption System

- ***Is the Shelter open?***
 - Yes. The shelter is open for redemptions, license renewal, intake, and adoptions by appointment.

- ***Why did the Shelter start using an appointment system?***
 - Our new adoption-by-appointment system:
 - Is similar to the appointment-based and personalized service models of neighboring animal care service organizations such as Los Angeles County
 - Features over 400 appointments per week plus walk-ups
 - Provides a concierge-level of customer service to adopters
 - Minimizes wait times and promotes a positive adoption experience
 - Increases chances of matching the right pet to the right adopter
 - Minimizes stress on animals and lets staff see an animal's true personality
 - Allows staff more time to know the animals in-shelter and care for them
 - Avoids in-shelter customer altercations
 - Has reduced the in-shelter bite rate which protects the safety of our adopters, volunteers, and staff
 - All of this, while maintaining our terrific save rate
- ***Why can't I shop for a dog by browsing? Why do I need an appointment?***
 - Adopting a pet is an important decision and should not be made on impulse.
 - In the adoption-by-appointment system, our trained and experienced staff offers a concierge-style adoption experience from the time someone calls to make an appointment until they leave with their new best friend.
 - The adoption-by-appointment-based model helps decrease impulse adoptions and prioritizes matching pet-to-family as evidenced by our return rate for dogs decreasing by 23.8% (2020 vs. 2019) and 18.6% (2021 to 2019¹).
- ***Are walk-up appointments available?***
 - Yes. The doors are open at OCAC. While scheduled appointments are available for the convenience of potential adopters, the public is welcome to visit the shelter and sign up for a walk-in appointment during our hours of operation seven days a week from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

¹ Comparison made to 2019 as last full pre-pandemic year.

- ***Are potential adopters being turned away from the shelter?***
 - No. OCAC offers over 400 adoption appointments per week. Potential adopters are welcome to schedule an appointment by calling (714) 935-6848 or they can visit the shelter for the first available walk-in appointment.
- ***Does the adoption by appointment model limit an adopter's ability to visit with animals or does it limit an animal's chance of being adopted?***
 - No. The adoption by appointment model is an industry best practice designed to increase the adoption success for both the potential adopter and the animal involved. Each appointment features an individual visit between the potential adopter and the animal, supervised by a trained OCAC kennel attendant. During that visit, the adopting family can evaluate whether the animal is a good fit and if it is not, the kennel attendant can use that feedback to recommend a different animal for consideration. Adopting a forever friend should not be left to impulse or appearance, and our staff is well-versed in counseling adopters to make the best choice for their lifestyle. This careful consideration and investment of time in the adoption benefits the adopting family and results in the best possible placement for the animal.
- ***But I like to walk through the shelter and see the cute animals.***
 - We agree. Our animals are adorable; however, constant foot traffic through the shelter increases kennel stress and makes visiting pets less likely to show their true personality, which in turn delays them from finding their forever home.
 - Additionally, after implementing the adoption-by-appointment model the shelter bite rate to visitors decreased by 87% when comparing 2021 to 2019.
 - Not only is it critical that we keep our visitors and staff safe but, when a dog bites a visitor or staff member, that behavior is considered in adoption placement and will extend the animal's stay at the shelter.
- ***OCAC's appointment system keeps animals at the shelter for much too long.***
 - Not true. While across the nation the average length of stay has skyrocketed, the average length of stay for animals at OCAC is 11 days. This is consistent with the guidelines set forth by the Strategic Plan.
 - The adoption-by-appointment system has decreased the animal rate of return, demonstrating that the focused attention on each adoption is making the right match for both the pet and the forever family.

- ***Shouldn't less staff be needed if we are using the adoption-by-appointment system?***
 - No. Our staff members are crucial to OCAC and facilitate much more than adoptions.
 - OCAC's essential programs include 24/7 emergency field response; cruelty investigations; rabies program for the County; in-house clinic to provide high-quality care to the animals in our shelter; full shelter care services for our animals including cleaning and sanitization of animal housing, feeding, and enrichment; pet licensing assistance; a robust foster and volunteer program; special events like our monthly Pet Pantry for families in need; and so much more.
 - Nationwide, many shelters already worked off an appointment system. OCAC was able to replicate pieces of that programming and found numerous benefits, both to our customers as well as the animals in our care.
 - The adoption-by-appointment model is not intended to reduce work. Instead, it offers a concierge-style of service, reduction in wait times for customers interested in adopting, reduction in return rate through improved pet-to-family matching, and reduced bite rate to visitors.
 - During the pandemic it allowed for the ability to scale up or down based on any staff-related quarantine issues and modify traffic flow through the shelter, allowing OCAC to remain open for business.
- ***Has euthanasia increased tenfold since implementing the appointment system?***
 - No. Despite taking in some of the most challenging of pets, OCAC is proud to report our save rate for 2021 was 81.05% for cats and 94.81% for dogs.
- ***Why is an animal only scheduled for three appointments?***
 - Our adoption-by-appointment system is based on a first-come, first-served basis to provide a fair opportunity for everyone in the community to adopt, and preference is given to those who can visit at the next available appointment time.
 - Once an animal has a first appointment, we will accept up to two backup appointments.
 - Typically, highly desirable pets are adopted by the first family visiting with them. Highly desirable dogs like small breeds and young puppies can frequently have dozens of people wanting to adopt.
 - Once we have up to three appointments for the animal, staff assist in helping the interested party find another animal to visit with who is still in need of a family.

- ***Who decides that the appointment system will continue?***
 - The decision to maintain the appointment-based adoption model is made based on data and facts.
 - Data continues to prove that the adoption-by-appointment model:
 - Provides a much safer adoption process for the community as well as our pets as evidenced by our reduced bite rate to humans.
 - Allows for our trained staff to better match pets-to-families as evidenced by our reduced animal adoption return rate.
 - Does not impact the save rate as evidenced by maintaining a save rate consistently in the mid-90s percentile for dogs and low 80s percentile for cats.
 - **Fact** – Potential adopters would previously argue and fight (including physical altercations) over animals. The new appointment-based model removes this from the equation.
 - **Fact** – Families often waited several hours in the past to be helped when wanting to adopt. The adoption-by-appointment model allows us to control the flow of traffic and facilitate visits in a manner that ensures a positive experience for all.
 - **Fact** - Our team can facilitate up to 58 scheduled appointments each day with the ability to accommodate walk-up visitors as staffing allows.

Volunteer and Donation Management

- ***Is OCAC currently taking volunteers?***
 - Yes. OCAC is currently onboarding volunteers in a modified capacity. Much like the OC Zoo, volunteers at OCAC must go through an application process, background check, and specialized training as we care for live animals with a variety of temperaments, behaviors, and medical concerns. Currently, we focus our onboarding to fill specific volunteer opportunities based on our needs for the animals that require some experience and availability for certain time slots – cleaning, grooming, enrichment for large dogs, etc.
 - The safety of OCAC staff and its volunteers continues to be a priority to the County and, as we onboard new volunteers, health guidelines are being strictly adhered to including but not limited to increased sanitary measures, masking during min-COVID outbreaks, social distancing as possible, etc.

- ***Volunteers are asked to "scoop the poop" and do other messy tasks.***
 - True. Our animals are adorable but sometimes in a messy way. Volunteers assist with a variety of tasks and are asked to pick up after any pet when they are walking them or visiting with them in play yards. We also have volunteers who help groom or bathe our visiting pets to make them ready for adoption.
 - The primary responsibility of shelter cleaning is accomplished by paid staff. While volunteers may assist with light cleaning or picking up feces when walking a dog, OCAC staff is proud to care for the shelter and its pets, cleaning to a level consistent with industry standards.
- ***Are donations being accepted?***
 - Yes. At the height of the pandemic, we asked donors to use our Amazon Wishlist which allowed a safe, touch-free donation delivery method to help slow the spread.
 - Currently, we accept donations by mail or in-person drop-off.
- ***Is there a restriction on OCAC participating in community events and programming?***
 - No. During the pandemic, community programming was suspended due to state and local health restrictions. OCAC is thrilled that current COVID protocols now allow for re-engaging in community events and programming, and staff has been actively engaged this Spring in local pet fairs and school presentations. The safety of OCAC staff continues to be a priority to the County, and health guidelines are strictly adhered to including but not limited to increased sanitary measures, masking during min-COVID outbreaks, social distancing as possible, etc.

Collaboration with Municipal Shelters and Rescue Organizations

- ***Does OCAC network with other shelters and rescue groups?***
 - Yes. OCAC staff have experience in networking and know who to call - this can be based on breed, size, behavior, medical needs, etc.
 - Just last year, OCAC collaborated with hundreds of rescues and shelters resulting in the successful placement of over 4,000 various animals both in our state as well as across the nation and includes placement of a variety of species like dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, reptiles, livestock, and birds.
 - Networking is a specialized skill and the unique needs of the animal and the adopting entity are reviewed carefully.

- ***How does OCAC ensure a placement is a good fit for an animal with special needs?***
 - We rely on our trained OCAC staff who have years of experience in finding positive placements for our special needs animals.
 - We provide written documentation, pictures, and videos to anyone interested in pulling an animal from our shelter with special needs. This occurs through OCAC's networking program called Rescue Track which you can find [here](#). Rescue Track is well-known in the shelter world and considered to be an excellent networking system facilitating communication between the shelter and adoption potential partners.
- ***OCAC relies heavily on rescues.***
 - True. We are all in this together. OCAC partners with rescue organizations and sister shelters to find responsible, positive pathways out of the shelter when adoption to the public may not be feasible. Working with rescue organizations is just one of many innovative programs at OCAC to assist animals in need.
 - Partnering with shelters and rescues is a leading, industry best practice utilized across the country by municipal and non-profit animal shelters.