

Employee Spotlight: Namiko Ota- Noveskey



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I've been with Kent County Animal Shelter since May of 2019. Before joining the county shelter, I worked for Humane Society of West Michigan for 13 years. My specialty is behavior by education. I am fascinated by what animals can do. I try to keep up with the current research in animal related topics. Since I relax better by moving, I love to hike with my Rottweiler, Aggy.

What is your position at Kent County and what individuals do you work with?

I am a Program Supervisor with Kent County Animal Shelter, which means I am responsible for daily operations. One of the hardest areas to manage is maintaining or improving the mental health of animals in our care so we can achieve a positive outcome for them. We work with various community members from first time adopters to returning rescuers. We also work with people in different circumstances including hardships that force them to give up their companion animals. We offer low cost euthanasia for the residents so that their animals do not have to suffer inhumanely. We also care for livestock, fowls, reptiles, small mammals and exotics.

What are two or three things that staff should know about your role?

My role is only a fraction of what we accomplish as a team. First and foremost, we don't just help animals, we help people. We care for animals when no one else could, and we get them ready for a new adventure with new guardians. We serve people by sharing the joy of having animals in our lives. It sounds simple, but we are exposed to secondhand trauma, witness injustice, experience heartbreak and emotional drain. I heard people say many times how it must be nice to pet cats and dogs all day, but working in an animal shelter involves knowledge of disease control, preventive care, triage, animal behavior, low stress handling of animals, defensive handling and risk assessment. The staff must also complete a state mandated certification to perform euthanasia.

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What is the most rewarding part of your job? What is the most challenging?

The most rewarding part is watching an adopted animal gain a new family and be happy. The most challenging is the opposite – watching animals treated like products or less. We learn that people generally want to do the right thing and they do care about their animals. It takes a lot of empathy and awareness of own biases to help both people and animals in these situations.

Do you have any interesting/ fun stories about residents you have worked with?

It always surprises me when people come up and tell me how I helped them adopt the right dog or helped them through behavior challenges. I am so grateful for people who open up their mind and think about the happiness of their animals.

Is there anything else you want to say/talk about?

The use of symbolic language is what sets us (humans) apart from other animals, but animals can do amazing things. As dogs and cats demonstrate to us daily, animals can learn to communicate with other species, and they manage to convey their feelings and emotions. Instead of getting stuck on a breed or appearance, we really should get to know the individual.

