

Drop Boxes: The Benefits of Dropping Drop Boxes

Introduction

As an animal shelter, providing the resources our community needs is essential. At face value, allowing patrons to drop pets off overnight may seem like a positive around-the-clock service to offer, but that is not the case. Although shelters often face challenges posed by limited public access hours, the use of unattended “drop boxes,” where the public can place live animals in receptacles for later intake, may result in animal suffering or death and should be avoided [1]. Many shelters have ceased the use of these drop boxes because of those concerns for the animals’ well-being, as well as a decrease in productive conversations with members of the public. When those conversations are bypassed, it reduces the amount of resources we can provide to the public and options for the animals in the shelter’s care.

The Reasons Why Shelters Shouldn’t Utilize Drop Boxes

Background. Obtaining a pet’s background information is essential to effectively route the animal through the shelter and finding positive placement. Without the in-person, face-to-face interaction, drop boxes obtain little to no pertinent information regarding the animal. For instance, having an address can help reunite found pets with their owners or allow for the return of community cats to their neighborhoods. In animal welfare, the more information gathered about a pet, the better options there are for a positive outcome.

Resources. Drop Boxes restrict the amount of resources and counseling shelters can offer an individual. When staff are able to have conversations with individuals surrendering their pets, they not only get information on the pet but they also have an opportunity to provide alternatives. The way for shelters to provide the best level of service for their communities and the animals, is to restrict drop off hours to when these conversations and alternatives can be offered.

Safety of the Animals. Being left in an unattended, drop box overnight can pose significant health risks to the animals. With a limited amount of spaces for animals to be dropped off, it is not uncommon for animals from different households to be left in these spaces overnight, this has been known to sometimes result in animals fighting and even dying. There are no regulations for these spaces and in many cases, they are not temperature controlled, which poses significant risks to animals during times of extreme weather. Sick, injured, or fragile animals such as neonates, are unable to receive care they need for survival in a timely manner. Additionally, there have been situations where drop boxes have been broken into, resulting in animals being injured or stolen, as well as theft of property and vandalism from access to the shelter via these entrance points.

Animal Flow and Intake. The inability to know how many animals will be dropped off on a given day makes adequate staffing and the flow of animals difficult to plan for and predict. Additionally, there is

no way to prevent individuals from outside of the shelter's jurisdiction from dropping of animals, increasing intake and negatively influencing budgets. Shelters who have ceased using night boxes have noticed a trend in intake decreasing [2].

Alternatives that Benefit the Community

Managed Intake - [Managed intake](#) is the process in which shelters implement a limited window of intake hours or by appointment. Implementing managed admissions allows shelters to maximize the bandwidth of staff to spend time talking with the pet owners and better plan for animal flow.

Surrender Counseling – One-on-One counseling time between the patron surrendering their pet and the staff that allows opportunity to discuss other avenues to prevent surrender or to gather detailed background information.

Safety Net Program – Resources and programs that can be offered to the community to assist in keeping pets out of shelters.

Partnerships with 24-Hour Vet Clinics – By partnering with local 24-hour clinics and offering this as a resource instead, patrons have a place to bring animals in need of urgent attention.

Conclusion

Drop boxes do not benefit the shelter, the community, or the animals. Ceasing the use of drop boxes and implementing humane alternatives will assist in reduction of intake, add additional safety measures for pets and people, and help shelters find the best outcome for pets in their care.

References

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[2] Johnson, K., Hill, N., & Levy, J. (2012). *Beyond the Box: Closing After-Hours Drop Boxes* [Slides].

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