

Fort Bend County Animal Services – Lifesaving Impact Plan

Grant Amount Requested: \$150,000

About us:

Fort Bend County Animal Services is an open admission municipal facility in Rosenberg, Texas, west of Houston. On average, we take in approximately 4,500 homeless pets from our community which consists of the unincorporated area of Fort Bend County. Our coverage area for our 7 animal control officers is 875 square miles and we have a population of over 800,000 people and continue to be one of the fastest-growing counties in the United States. While there are 4 other shelters in Fort Bend County, they are managed by the individual cities within the County and are their own separate facilities and jurisdictions.

History:

While some progress had been made at FBAS towards improving the adoption rate, up until late 2014, FBCAS was still operating, for the most part, under the old “catch and kill” animal sheltering model. The save rate for the shelter at the end of September 2014, hovered around 30%.

However, in the third quarter of 2014, changes were made to the management team and new people were brought on board into the shelter to begin to create a more lifesaving-focused facility. At that time, Chameleon software was also introduced to the shelter and a more aggressive adoption event schedule and social media presence was pushed. In November of 2014, Commissioners Court agreed to allow FBCAS to vaccinate our pets on intake for the first time ever, a clear step in the right direction to change the culture of the County officials towards focusing the animals in our care.

In 2015, FBCAS began to contract more effectively with outside veterinarians to ensure that pets being adopted from the shelter were spayed, neutered and microchipped. Without the presence of a staff veterinarian, all Rabies vaccines, emergency medical needs and surgeries were contracted out. While we did try to have as many spay/neuter procedures done prior to adoption, we were relying on those adoption fees to pay the contract vets so the process to have pets sterilized was an arduous one. But we persevered and by the end of 2015, the save rate had increased to 65%. It was also the first year where staff was given funding to attend Animal Welfare conferences including APA, HSUS and Best Friends, we participated in our first Clear the Shelters event as well.

In 2016, we were able to reach out to Commissioners Court and begin the process of presenting a plan to them to hire a veterinarian and vet technician. Finally seeing the benefits and cost

effectiveness of having a medical team at the shelter, our budget was increased to hire the staff for the 2017-2018 budget year. We were a larger presence in the community, visiting schools, HOAs and community meetings and we were featured several times in the local media, something we had not had before. We also had several successful transports to Wisconsin and Colorado with a local 501c3 but it became cost prohibitive for us. We became Network Partners with Best Friends Animal Society and Our save rate for 2016 was 72%

2017 was a year of adjustment and change with bringing a new medical team on board. We were able to now have a majority of our pets ready to be adopted the same day, Rabies vaccines were done in-house and our minor medical procedures were also taken care of. We continued to increase our adoption event and our presence in the community. In June we were assessed by Best Friends Animal Society and we received a number of recommendations that we implemented in 2018. In July we were fortunate to have the team from Dogs Playing for Life spend a week with us and our staff and volunteers, this program has been instrumental in helping us give our dogs the opportunity to play and learn from each other while we learn about them.

In August though, we were faced with Hurricane Harvey, we did see the absolute best in our community and from other welfare organizations like the Petco Foundation and the subsequent grant which allowed us to kick-start the biggest lifesaving program that we have initiated to date with our Community Cat Program and both Austin and San Antonio Pets Alive that came immediately when asked to rescue all of the pets in our shelter (over 180) so that we would have room for the displaced pets from the storm. Our save rate for 2017 was 79%.

2018 was a transformative year for us at Fort Bend County Animal Services. We had tremendous success with our adoption and rescue program and reaching out to our community through social media.

Out of all of the amazing things that happened in 2018, we feel that our single biggest lifesaving achievement happened on June 5th. On that day, Commissioners Court agreed to amend the leash law in place to exclude community/feral cats to allow FBCAS to implement a Pilot Community Cat TNR (Trap Neuter Return) program in the cities of Needville and Richmond.

Until this change was made, all feral or fractious cats were euthanized on intake and we knew there had to be a better way so over the course of two years, several attempts were made to lobby for the ordinance to be amended, but they failed.

We were so fortunate that this time, we had the support of the Court and national animal welfare organizations like Alley Cat Allies and Best Friends Animal Society to guide and support us through the process and to help educate our community on the benefits of a TNR program. We have always felt that implementing a TNR program for our community/feral cats would be a huge step in saving more lives in Fort Bend County and we were not wrong.

We would not have been able to have this success without the Petco Foundation and their \$75,000 grant as well as a \$5,000 Innovation Grant from Maddie's Fund. All of our Community Cat Program is funded through grants and donations, the County does not fund the program does

As of July 31, 2021, 4519 community/feral cats have been successfully spayed or neutered, given a Rabies vaccination and have had their ear-tipped. If we are asked how would we define success for the program, we would answer we were successful with the very first cat that was spayed or neutered.

The Fall of 2018 also brought us our new 501(c)(3) partner, Fort Bend PAWS (fortbendpaws.org). Based on the recommendations from an assessment by Best Friends Animal Society, Fort Bend PAWS was formed by Vincent Morales, Pat Hebert and Elaine Dietz to be the fundraising organization dedicated to helping fund those projects not currently covered under the county budget. We are looking forward to working with them on ventures that will help our pets and our community.

Due largely in part to our community/feral cat program, FBCAS reached an overall 91% save rate for the first time in its history in August 2018. Since then, we have maintained a 90% or greater overall save rate and we ended 2018 with a save rate of 85%.

In May 2019, our new Intake facility and medical building opened and we now have a more comprehensive area for our veterinarian and a second veterinary technician. We also hired a new Community Involvement Assistant to work on increasing our social media presence and additional projects. This position works on continually improving and expanding our volunteer program. We ended 2019 with a save rate of 92%

We all know that 2020 was a challenge in almost every way for virtually everyone. For us at FBCAS, we began the year with high hopes of implementing a number of new programs and initiatives. We started strong, but quickly had to learn to adapt to the COVID-19 normal and we continue to evolve as a shelter as the animal welfare landscape changes.

In early March, we transitioned to curbside services with our Dog Dash and K-uber (Kitty Uber) programs to deliver dogs and cats to adopters and foster homes and we asked our Fort Bend community to help our pets by offering to foster through the initial stages of the pandemic. Our community responded – in amazing numbers – and we ended the year with 1046 dogs and cats going through our foster program – an unprecedented number for our program.

We were also very fortunate to have the support of our 501(c)(3) partner, Fort Bend PAWS, who fully funded our heartworm program with purchasing Proheart 6 for all of our dogs in the shelter for the second year in a row. We also worked with our Fort Bend County government officials to begin working on our long-awaited garage door project for our outdoor kennels.

Like every animal welfare organization in the Country, we were overwhelmed by the support from our community and our shelter population remained low throughout 2020. The pandemic gave us the opportunity to forge new partnerships with transport organizations like Houston PetSet, Rescued Pet Movement and some agencies in Oregon and Washington State. Through a very generous grant from the Petco Foundation, we were able to purchase a new van for potential new transport opportunities (a long-awaited dream) which is what we are working on for 2021.

Through the pandemic, we strengthened our relationships with our local and national animal welfare partners like American Pets Alive!, Austin Pets Alive!, Best Friends Animal Society, Houston Humane Society and Houston PetSet. We became a Tier 2 pilot shelter for the HASS Program and a pilot shelter for PetGiving. We received grant support from Adopt-a-Pet, ASPCA, Maddie's Fund, and the Petfinder Foundation to keep up with the demand for supplies and medical needs for the number of fosters that stretched our already thin budget and staff further than it had ever been before.

Our staff showed beyond a shadow of doubt how resilient they are and deserved recognition. From the time pandemic restrictions were placed, our shelter remained open to the public every single day and we continued to operate our shelter to the best of our ability and in the best interest of our pets and of our community. Our 2021 ended with FBCAS having an overall save rate of 96%

2021 began with us having a reduced shelter population and making plans for reduced cost microchip/vaccine clinics and spay/neuter mobile visits from our veterinary partners at Cy-Fair Animal Hospital.

We were also able to complete our garage door project to keep our dogs in the outside kennels protected from the weather elements. Through additional county funding, we were given permission to order cattle fans to keep those kennels somewhat cool during the long summer months and hopefully, we can have those ordered and installed soon.

However, in May we began to see an increase in our kennel population and before long, we were back to being at or over capacity for dogs, both strays and owner-turn-ins as well as neonatal kittens, with and without mamas. Hoping to stem the tide of owner surrender pets, we implemented an appointment system (while giving out information on resources for rehoming or rescue) and currently we have appointments stretching out until January, 2022.

Our goal moving forward is to provide opportunities for basic veterinary services to our community to try and encourage people to keep their pets with them, especially if they are turning their pets in because they cannot afford their care. We feel that having access to free and reduced cost microchip/vaccine clinics, increasing the number of food distribution opportunities for the pet-food insecure and bringing in our veterinary partner to provide low-cost spay/neuter opportunities may help us stem the tide of pets coming in.

Particularly important to us is to provide those low-cost spay/neuter opportunities. Fort Bend County currently provides 12 mobile clinics for free spay/neuter surgeries for those members of the community who meet certain criteria. When those opportunities come up, the number of people who do not meet the criteria, yet want to have their pets fixed overwhelms us. Currently, there are no low-cost options in Fort Bend County and we want to be able to provide this service to those pet owners who want to take responsibility and have their pets fixed but cannot pay the fees being charged by the local veterinary offices.

We are also interested in being able to go the extra step with the new garage doors and while waiting for the County to purchase and install fans, we are looking ahead to the winter (especially after last year's freeze) to install heating elements in the kennels, which the County has decided they will not cover the cost of.

Finally, we have had such success with our fledgling transport program that we would like to look at having a part-time employee that can focus exclusively on reaching out to potential transport partners, arranging fosters for the pets going on transport and coordinating the logistics of the actual transport. For the last two years, we have asked the County to fund a new position and with all of the funding being directed towards COVID programs, we have not been able to have that position approved, either part or full-time.

This year, we have redefined some of our job descriptions, roles and responsibilities to reflect our dedication to becoming a lifesaving center and not just a "shelter". Our Community Involvement Coordinator is now the Assistant Director and Lifesaving Programs Manager and our Community Involvement Coordinator Assistant is the Lifesaving Programs Assistant. We hope that we will be able to implement new programs through these two positions for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022.

Lifesaving Impact Plan - \$150,000 request

Vaccine/Microchip Clinics

Our goal is for us to conduct 36 Vaccine/Microchip clinics at \$1600 each for a total of \$57600 (100 dogs/50 cats per clinic).

Dogs

DHLPP	\$3
Bordetella	\$3
Rabies	\$2
Microchip	\$5

Cats

FVRCP	\$3
Rabies	\$2
Microchip	\$5

Add \$50 for materials/disposal.

Low-cost Spay/Neuter Mobile Clinics

Our goal is for us to conduct 18 low-cost spay/neuter clinics at \$3000 each for a total of \$54000. The team at Cy-Fair Animal Hospital will bring their mobile unit to the shelter and provide all surgical services through their staff of 4 per clinic and fix 30 pets per mobile unit visit.

Heating Units for Outdoor Kennels

The County has agreed to purchase fans and run electricity for our outdoor kennels but has declined to provide heat. Given the freeze of 2020, we are hoping to be able to have the heating elements purchased and installed to help protect those dogs that are in our outdoor kennels.

Heating elements for outdoor kennels \$16000

<http://www.perfectkennelheater.com> (estimating 32 @\$500 each)

Transport and Foster Coordinator (Part-time)

Given our moderate success with our current transport program, we feel that we can do more if we had the personnel resources to dedicate to this program on a part-time basis. Our goal is to be able to fund this part-time position over the next two years and track their success to then be presented to Commissioners Court for full funding by County for the 2023-2024 budget year.

\$10 per hour, 24 hours a week for 50 weeks is \$12000 over 2 years for \$24000