

2020 CVNL Heart of Marin Nomination for Excellence in Innovation: Marin Humane

1. Nominee's mission and services offered

Marin Humane's mission is to transform lives through exceptional animal care, humane education, and advocacy. Every day, we inspire compassion and positive relationships between people and animals. For over 100 years, we've been here to adopt, foster, and advocate for animals, but we do so much more. We help low-income families care for their animals, train people to be better pet parents, and educate the next generation of compassionate community members. Our groundbreaking programs utilize the love of animals to help teach kids to read, build confidence for people with autism, and help rehabilitate inmates at San Quentin. We're also responsible for 24/7 animal protection and rescue for domestic animals and wildlife for the whole of Marin County. Our officers stop abuse, bring animals to safety, and reunite lost pets with their worried families. Our devoted staff and volunteers transform the lives of over 10,000 animals a year (and countless humans, too).

2. How has the nominee elevated the field by advancing new approaches, concepts, initiatives, strategies and/or structures that inspire breakthrough thinking and serve as a model for others?

Marin Humane is being nominated for its excellence in innovative efforts both before and during the pandemic. There are four main ways Marin Humane's innovation has elevated the field in the last year:

First, Marin Humane demonstrates the benefit of setting ambitious goals and achieving them. Marin Humane has an audacious goal to end pet homelessness by 2030. Our success depends on becoming less reliant on the need to operate an animal shelter and instead, expands our work with people and partners to prevent the need for animals to enter a shelter in the first place. From our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan Report: "As we face a new era in sheltering, we recognize the importance of looking outward, collaborating with other animal welfare groups, and embracing new and innovative approaches to sheltering. We want to end pet homelessness, not just in Marin, but across the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond."

We began by adopting a new shelter management model from the UC Davis Veterinary Shelter Medicine Program called "Capacity for Care." This required several months of training and implementation. The Capacity for Care model incorporates new ways to manage our "bed capacity" (like a human hospital's capacity), staffing ratios, lengths of stay in the shelter, in order to better manage the maximum numbers of animals in our care. With new approaches based on a matrix and data points, we reduced the animals' length of stay, increased the number of animals adopted, and improved the wellbeing of our dedicated and hard-working staff.

Perhaps our greatest transformation was the realization that animals are generally happier in foster homes than even the best animal shelter. As if changing most of our programs to virtual wasn't enough, Marin Humane is in discussions with another nonprofit animal organization to acquire their successful foster-based program. The Oakland-based organization serves the Bay Area and approached Marin Humane to strengthen its own infrastructure. Since Marin Humane needed to expand its foster program to achieve our goals, it became clear this would be a mutually beneficial alignment! The two boards of directors approved the plans in September and integration planning is underway (full integration will be complete in 2021).

Second, Marin Humane works collaboratively within and across sectors, and even more so during the pandemic. Our Pet Safety Net (PSN) program (*providing resources from pet food supplies to assist pet*

guardians/owners struggling financially) works with 13 food banks and pop-up food pantries throughout the county. Since 3/17/2020, Marin Humane staff and volunteers have delivered more than 18,000 pounds of pet food to pet guardians and food banks. Private veterinary hospitals in Marin are important partners to our Pet Safety Net (PSN) program, too. Our PSN has funded a portion of 250 veterinary bills for sick or injured pets when the family was experiencing financial hardships (compared to 195 in 2019).

Disaster response also requires innovation with each type of disaster. Marin Humane is chairing a new state-wide disaster planning committee for the California Animal Welfare Association (Cal Animals). During the recent set of wildfires, the committee assisted in communicating needs between government agencies, humane societies and animal services, established an emergency contact list among Cal Animals members and is formalizing a partnership with a California Coalition of CARTS (County Animal Response Teams). And we're an active member in the Marin County COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster) which has in the past year become more focused and energized (thanks in large part to CVNL's role with it!).

Third, Marin Humane put new approaches, concepts and initiatives into practice before and during the pandemic. Like many nonprofits, we had to quickly adapt our programs and services to remote and virtual platforms. Our dog training program created ways to effectively teach classes via Zoom for a three-month period (before in-person classes resumed), we produced 68 training videos, and behavior consultations also became virtual. We changed our popular Humane Summer Camp programs to virtual and included "visits" to other humane camps across the United States. Most significantly, we converted our adoptions program to remote. Picking your next four-footed family member by video, photos, emails, and phone calls was unprecedented, but we found ways to make it work! In fact, our individualized match-making process is giving our adopters more personalized attention, resulting in strong adoption numbers and low adoption return rates.

A family pet going missing is a heartbreaking experience, especially when regular services at the animal shelter are not immediately available. Marin Humane swiftly changed its services to incorporate 24-hour reporting mechanisms to enable lost and found animals to find their families. We utilized technology through multiple platforms (Zoom, Facebook, etc.) to bridge our service gaps, from in-person to remote. Just a simple text back and forth along with a lost or found pet photo has been instrumental in keeping pets out of the shelter and on their way back to their families even quicker. Using these technologies helped us develop deeper connections with the community.

Fourth, Marin Humane shares lessons learned and aims to be a model for others. Staff is serving on newly formed national committees to share ideas and experiences on managing an animal welfare organization in the time of COVID-19. Marin Humane leadership has presented webinars on its Pet Safety Net program during national and international conferences, as well.

3. Describe how the innovation reflects responsiveness, good management practices, and effectiveness.

Marin Humane's innovative approaches this past year show how it can adapt and respond to the daily needs of animals and people in Marin, even during a pandemic. Our community's desire to work with us, albeit remotely, indicates animals continue to have an important role in our lives. As an example, during the first quarter of this year, we had six cat classes with 93 attendees (compared with three classes and 19 attendees for the same period, prior year). Responses to questions (calls/emails) regarding cat

behavior are also much higher than last year, with 142 for this first quarter compared to 79 for the same time last year.

Our focus on our strategic initiatives as well as acquiring another division through a future merger with another nonprofit, illustrates our growth and adaptability and puts Marin Humane in a stronger position for the future.

The effectiveness of being more innovative these past eight months literally saves lives. Marin Humane's live release rate has continued to increase, and the humane euthanasia rate has decreased from 4.2% to 3.0%. During the Shelter-In-Place order, we greatly increased our utilization of foster homes for animals. This contributed to a further reduction in length of stay.

As demand for our Pet Safety Net has grown during the pandemic, the fact that not one single animal has been surrendered from families who have asked for assistance from us is remarkable. It demonstrates how invaluable Marin Humane's philanthropy-supported Community Outreach programs have become.

4. What makes it innovative? Provide a specific example or story that demonstrates utilization of innovation in this practice.

Of all our examples mentioned in this nomination, the major shift in our adoption and behavior/training programs illustrates how the entire organization pivoted to provide services and meet our community's needs without having the shelter building open to the public. Our adoption staff had to create a system and process for tracking animals that were moved into foster homes, how our behavior department could provide remote training support if needed, which animals people were interested in adopting, and how to connect everyone while working from home. Our staff also created a way for adopters to purchase their pet supplies from Marin Humane online and have it ready for pick up when the animals meet their new family outside our doors. Since they have become so successful, many aspects of how we are operating due to COVID-19 era operations will very likely continue post-pandemic. Since 3/16/2020, we have found homes for 1,361 animals.

5. Explain how the level of excellence is assessed and measured: include emerging evidence or results if possible.

Marin Humane regularly reviews results and adjusts as a critical component of tracking our progress. Every quarter, a dashboard report is shared with staff and board members as well as a quarterly review of the budget and finances with the Board Finance Committee. Six and 12-month progress reports on the strategic plan are also provided to the staff and board.

The No Place Like Home program is another innovation proving to be a success for animals and people. In the past year, 59% of the 159 families who posted an animal on our free No Place Like Home site found alternative placement, 13% decided to keep their four-footed family member, and 12% had to resort to surrendering to a local shelter or rescue organization for assistance. This indicates the benefit of enabling pet guardians to find other ways to rehome their pet, thus reducing the numbers of unwanted animals coming into shelters. Additionally, for the months July through September, the customer service team handled 6,962 phone calls. They were instrumental in coordinating the return of 54 lost pets to their guardians/owners. These pets never had to come to our shelter because our team members worked to support the finders of these pets and utilized many tools to help them become safely reunited with their families.