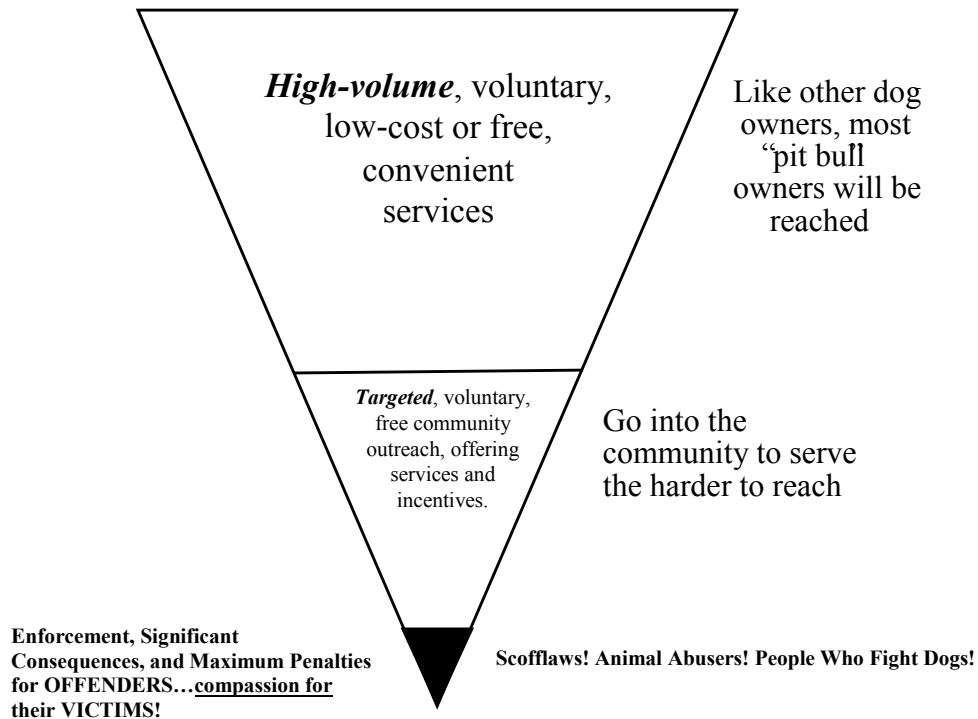




SPAY-NEUTER PARTNERSHIPS: COOPERATION EDUCATION AND COMPASSION NOT COMPULSION

The service and support triangle: To decrease euthanasia rates, encourage responsible ownership, and support the human-animal bond.

Animal welfare organizations best serve their communities when they develop strong partnerships with stakeholders, utilizing each organization's strengths to deliver to every member of the community: low-cost or free, accessible spay/neuter, dog training; education; and owner support.



Strengthen your community, don't divide it

Breed-specific mandatory spay/neuter laws divide the community and break the human-animal bond:

In 2005, San Francisco, California, implemented a mandatory spay/neuter law for pit bulls and pit bull mixes. As soon as the measure passed, some San Francisco pit bull owners faced landlord ultimatums: keep the dog and move, or be evicted. Although pit bulls were still legal, the law's designation of pit bulls as a special “problem” had stigmatized both the dogs and their owners. Breed specific mandates endorse discrimination and profiling of all kinds, including by landlords and insurance companies.

Breed specific mandatory spay/neuter laws miss the owners they were designed to reach:

- San Francisco’s breed specific mandatory spay/neuter did nothing to lower the overall dog population in its shelter. While the pit bull numbers dropped, non-pit bull shelter intake increased. Furthermore, while the number of pit bull bites went down, the number of non-pit bull bites increased 13.4% dogs. Most dog bites in SF were attributed to spayed/neutered dogs, which helps demonstrate that reproductive status alone cannot make dogs 'safer'. Owner management and responsibility will always be the key to bite prevention.
- Kansas City, Missouri’s breed specific mandatory spay/neuter resulted in a steady increase in not only its pit bull euthanasia, despite the mandate, but also the number of all dogs euthanized as well.

Rather than criminalize a dog’s sexual status, communities must call owners to account, educate, and when necessary enforce leash and licensing laws, anti-cruelty laws, and anti-dog fighting laws; and offer a variety of services, including spaying and neutering, along with advice and support for proper pet care and training.

Community Partnerships: Targeting the right end of the leash

- Over a period of 10 years, Berkeley Animal Services reduced impound numbers by 50% and euthanasia numbers by 90%, euthanizing only 50 dogs in 2007. Berkeley managed to do so using available local resources: working with rescue groups, providing educational materials and support to potential adopters, and partnering with local groups to provide training for its dogs.
- Shot fairs in lower income communities offering affordable and easily accessible vaccinations and spay/neuters, as well as education about responsible dog ownership, have had a positive impact on dogs and owners, and have resulted in fewer shelter intakes and euthanasia. Over a period of 2 years, at shot fairs in Oakland, California, over 2500 canines were vaccinated; and more than 1700 dogs identified as pit bulls or pit bull mixes were spayed or neutered. At the most recent fair, not only did pit bulls make up less than 25% of the clientele, but so-called “hard to reach” and “irresponsible” pit bull owners were educating other owners about the benefits of spaying and neutering, as well as offering pet care tips.
- The harder to reach are reachable with voluntary, breed-specific programs that make special offers where there are special needs, and offer services designed to make the dog part of the family. Operation Spot (OPSPOT) North St. Louis offered “love your pit” services for Valentine’s Day, and altered 280 pit bull dogs in only two weeks.
- In 2006, Calgary, Alberta, a city of over 1 million people, enacted its Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw. Calgary’s breed-neutral approach is built on its “four principles of responsible ownership”: licensing and permanent identification; spaying and neutering; proper care and training; and appropriate management and control. Through outreach, licensing discounts for altered pets, and appropriate enforcement of licensing and nuisance provisions, Calgary has increased licensure compliance to 93%, increased its return-to-owner rate to 88%, and reduced dog bites and shelter intakes. Its canine euthanasia rate is now 6%, and confined to dogs with significant health or behavioral issues!

“Not only are proactive programs . . . cost effective, in the end they are our only hope to end pet overpopulation. Bitter experience has shown that we cannot adopt our way out of pet overpopulation or build our way out. A system that continues to spend upwards of 95% of its resources on reactive programs is doomed to failure and frustration. . . . Investing in proactive programs allows the increasing reallocation of resources to proactive programs, building momentum to the day when shelters will realize their century-long mission--to rescue and rehabilitate homeless animals and find a loving home for each and every one.”

Peter Marsh, Esq.