

ANIMAL SHELTER DONATIONS

“WAIT A DOGGONE MINUTE!”

Introduction

A County’s Animal Services brochure lists “make a donation” as one of the ways citizens can help the three animal shelters in Santa Barbara County. But where does money donated to the shelters go? The Grand Jury received a complaint that the routing of such donations went into the County General Fund and were not used at the shelters. The Jury found that if money is donated to the shelter, it goes into the County’s Animal Health and Regulation (AH&R) shelter programs in the Public Health budget. It then helps support general operating expenses such as maintenance, salaries, veterinary care, and food. The donations cannot be designated for a specific purpose at any shelter. However, money given directly to volunteer organizations can be used for special needs at the shelter of donation.

Background

There are five volunteer organizations that help support the animal shelters: in Santa Maria, Shelter Animal Volunteer Effort (SAVE); in Lompoc, County Animal Placement Assistance (CAPA); in Santa Barbara, Animal Shelter Assistance Program (ASAP) for cats, Bunnies Under Needed Shelter (BUNS) for rabbits, and K-9 Placement & Assistance League (K-9 PALS) for dogs. Other volunteer organizations exist, and the Santa Barbara County Animal Care Foundation also raises funds for the shelters. The main purpose of these organizations is to facilitate the adoption of the animals, assist with education programs, and improve living conditions for the animals. They increasingly help pay for veterinary care and medical services. Donations from volunteer organizations supplement the county’s budget allocations for the operation of the shelters.

Members of the Grand Jury looked into the routing of donations by visiting the various shelters and interviewing employees and volunteers, as well as the County Auditor-Controller and the Director of the Public Health Department.

Observations

As a result of inquiries with the Auditor-Controller’s Department, the Internal Audit Division reviewed the process of revenue collection, including donations, at the shelters. They found that donations were allocated into a Special Revenue Fund for the three county shelters. However, such donations become part of the expenditures for operating expenses and cannot be earmarked for any specific purpose. In fact, the

donations help offset budget deficits that the shelters run. Because of this, the staff at the Lompoc shelter informs people that if they want to directly help the animals at that shelter, they should donate to the volunteer organization and not to the county shelter. This process has provided the volunteer organization at the Lompoc shelter more money for immediate use to address special needs at the shelter.

In a memo dated December 4, 2003, the Auditor-Controller and Internal Audit Division recommended that the Public Health Department train shelter staff regarding the routing of donations and that signs be placed at the reception counter to inform the public that donations will be used in the general operations of the shelters. As of this writing, no signs have been posted.

Conclusion

While the complaint initially seemed one of fiscal tracking and accountability, the problem of donations turned out to be more a matter of clarity and openness, both at the shelters and in the County Audit Department.

Finding 1

Donations made directly to the animal shelters in Santa Barbara County go to Special Revenue Funds within the county's budget, and the funds cannot be re-directed for specific shelter uses.

Recommendation 1

The County should proceed with the posting a sign at each shelter clarifying that money donated to the shelters goes to the county's budget for shelter general operating expenses if not written to a charitable or volunteer organization.

Finding 2

The shelters are not self-sustaining and run at a considerable cost to the County. Volunteer organizations contribute funding and hours which help offset these costs. Given current county deficits, care for the animals can be improved only as to the extent as volunteer organizations can raise money.

Recommendation 2

To meet specific needs at the shelter, donations should be made to such organizations as SAVE, CAPA, ASAP, BUNS, or K-9 PALS, or the shelters' Animal Care Foundation. They will help provide the volunteer staff, the supplies, the medical care, and even housing to make it possible for stray and unwanted animals to survive and live better.

Affected Agencies**Santa Barbara County Animal Health and Regulation (Animal Shelters):**

Findings	1, 2
Recommendations	1, 2

County Audit Department:

Finding	1
Recommendation	1