



# OC Animal Care



An open letter to our community,

August will mark my one-year anniversary as the Director of OC Animal Care. As is often the case for anyone approaching an important annual milestone in their life, the upcoming arrival of this one-year mark evokes a variety of thoughts and actions. Anniversaries can be a time for reflection, a time to be reminded of what drove you to make the original commitment, a time to celebrate the wins, and a time to look forward to the future and what may be needed to make the next year even more successful. Anniversaries are about coming together to honor a shared commitment, and to bolstering that commitment for years to come. As August draws near, I've been thinking a lot about this, and I'd like to let you all in on these thoughts.

*What drove me to OC Animal Care?* When I applied for the Director position, I had a vision. A vision of leading the staff and the community to implement programs that benefit pets and people. A vision of supporting staff to create a shelter that can successfully achieve quality of life, lifesaving, and public safety and refuses to accept that these are mutually exclusive concepts. A vision of OCAC becoming a shelter *where every pet gets a fair chance of a live outcome*. A vision that would ultimately result in OCAC becoming a regional and national model for high-volume municipal animal sheltering. During the interview process I learned that I was not alone in this vision.

Months before I ever even applied for the role, staff at OC Animal Care worked with a national animal welfare consultant to develop a Strategic Plan that would serve as the roadmap for the future of the organization. A Strategic Plan that contained pages of national best practices and had all the same ingredients as the vision I had. Programs like kitten fostering, Dogs Playing for Life playgroups, community cat programs, individualized pathway planning for at-risk and long stay animals, community intervention programs...page after page of tried and true animal sheltering solutions. The Orange County Board of Supervisors had the foresight to invest in the success of the shelter by approving the implementation of the Strategic Plan and building a new campus to support these important initiatives. It was made clear to me that the role of the new Director was to lead the shelter and its staff to bring this Strategic Plan to life, and it was clear to me that Orange County was poised for greatness.

*What are we celebrating?* SO much! Too much to even list it all! As you've seen in our recent posts, we've reached record high save rates over the past year, despite a kitten/cat season to end all kitten/cat seasons. Our canine save rate is 96.29% which is up 5.69% from the year before, our feline save rate is 81.41% which is up 16.47% from last year, which all adds up to a total save rate of 87.83% and an 11.52% increase. That's 842 more animals that left our shelter alive, and this is absolutely worth celebrating. It's also worth celebrating that while we're saving more lives than ever before, we're also doing it safely. We've seen a decrease in bites and other injuries in the shelter compared to the previous year, and there has been no increase in adopted dogs who have bitten. And, only 5% of all our dogs have been with us for over 60 days.

We're also celebrating the power and generosity of our community, as we have seen more community support than ever before. Our foster program took in 2,055 animals in the last year, and our volunteer program clocked 33,236 hours. Our online satisfaction ratings continue to increase, and our rescue partners

have taken in 887 animals. The recent hoarding case of over 140 shih tzus was the perfect example of shelter staff and our community coming together in the most heroic of ways. Very soon we will have achieved a live outcome for every single dog from this case, and we will have done so without affecting the lives of the other dogs in our care that depend on us to do the same. We know we haven't solved it all, but we are absolutely making good on our vision of achieving lifesaving, public safety, and quality of life for our animals and our community.

*What can improve? What threats exist to our future and what do we need to do to ensure each year is more successful than the next?* At the beginning of this letter, I mentioned how anniversaries are not only a time of reflection and celebration, but also a time for the people involved to renew their commitment and to work together to achieve a bright future. I've been thinking a lot about this part lately and have talked with staff and our stakeholders about their ideas. Programmatically, we know there are several areas that need to improve. Most notably, we want to see improvements in programming to find homes for our small but important group of long stay pets, more enrichment resources, increased partnerships with rescue groups for at risk and long stay pets, more resources to help people keep their pets, and the opportunity to develop targeted spay/neuter efforts to reduce kitten intake. These are all critical components of our Strategic Plan and areas of focus for us in the coming months and years.

I believe that our future is bright, and our data and our year of success proves that. But, there are still clouds, and some of them are dark. For several weeks and months, a few damaging and misguided voices have materialized, and they are currently threatening the progress our shelter and our community has made. They are misrepresenting themselves and they are making earnest attempts to disparage our organization. While this is disappointing, it is not unanticipated. OC Animal Care has been through significant changes in a short amount of time. A new building, a new Director, and a new Strategic Plan.

Change is difficult. Change is uncomfortable. And for some, change can be seen as a criticism of how things have always been done. While we can all sympathize with the discomfort of change, we can all likely agree that change is necessary. Change is progress. Change is innovation. Change is how we end up with the shelter our Board envisioned, and our community deserves.

Our future *is* bright. But we must fight for it. We must come together to protect our shared vision for OC Animal Care. If you support our staff, if you support our vision, if you support the path that we're on to making Orange County the safest place for pets and people, I ask you to support our shelter. I ask you to share our data and facts, to share your passion and belief in what OCAC is trying to accomplish, and to simply not allow our organization be driven backwards. With your support, we *will* be celebrating another record year together next year, and for many years to come.



Mike Kaviani  
Director