

12-2019

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Supporting Pet Ownership of Vulnerable Populations

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November 25, 2019

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Abstract

Peace of Mind Dog Rescue (POMDR) is a program that provides supplies and support to vulnerable populations to help with the care of their pets. This program is very successful at partnering with organizations and individuals for fundraising and to obtain supplies, but it frequently has a large inventory that needs to be distributed where it is needed most. There is a need to identify if outreach to vulnerable populations could be improved, resulting in a more efficient use of the programs resources. This capstone project focused on active marketing and outreach throughout Monterey county through multiple tabling events in front of discounted spay and neuter buses. POMDR supplies distributed included free flea treatment, dog food, leashes, harnesses, collars, and dog beds. Additional to supplies, business cards and brochures describing the services provided at POMDR were also handed out. Findings and recommendations are that outreach via partnering with discount spay programs to vulnerable populations who may need additional supplies and services was successful and resulted in distribution of a good amount of flea medication and harnesses. Surprisingly, dog beds were not as popular. Repeat usage of the program is expected based on feedback from clients. Future outreach is recommended.

Keywords: Helping Paw Program, low-income, supplies, vulnerable, outreach

I. Agency and communities served

At Peace of Mind Dog Rescue (POMDR), the “mission is to be a resource and advocate for senior dogs and senior people on California’s Central Coast.”(POMDR, 2017). Monica Rua is the president as well as co-founder of the Peace of Mind Dog Rescue organization. She has also co-founded Animal Friends Rescue Project (AFRP) in Pacific Grove, which is also a dog rescue organization that provides temporary foster care as well as medical care for cats and dogs. Monica Rua and Executive Director, Carie Broecker, had co-founded POMDR together in 2009. Since then there is now a team of 5 staff, including an Executive Director, Operations Manager, Adoptions Coordinator, Helping Paw Coordinator, and Volunteer Coordinator.

Although there is a small number of staff at POMDR there are over 700 volunteers who are active with the agency. Volunteers can provide services such as temporarily fostering dogs, providing transportation, helping out at fundraising events, tabling events, walking dogs for those who are no longer able, as well as providing any specialties that the volunteer has to offer such as grant writing, photography. The volunteers at POMDR are extremely active and devoted to the mission.

The goal at POMDR is to “find loving homes for dogs whose guardians can no longer care for them and for senior dogs in shelters. Peace of Mind Dog Rescue also provide volunteer and financial assistance so seniors can keep their pets with them as long as possible. In addition, Peace of Mind Dog Rescue makes pre-arrangements to take in dogs should their guardians become unable to care for them.” (POMDR, 2017). This guarantee is very important because it empowers older populations to commit to pet ownership in spite of fear about what will happen to their pets after they are no longer able to care for them.

The Helping Paw program is one of the many wonderful programs POMDR has to offer. The Helping Paw program not only provides financial assistance, but it also provides volunteer assistance. This program is generously funded by a grant from Animal Welfare and Assistance Group. Some of the financial assistance the Helping Paw program can provide is urgent medical needs that will alleviate the animal's suffering. Contrary to the agency's name, Peace of Mind Dog Rescue also covers expenses for cats as well. The volunteer assistance that is provided, includes activities such as dog walking, emergency foster care or boarding, transportation to vet or groomer. A keynote to make about the volunteer assistance, is that there is no income restrictions for their services.

II. Problem Description

Marketing and outreach of the services provided by the Helping Paw program can be improved. The program has been very successful with fundraising. It has many partners who collaborate with the agency and help with providing services. But unfortunately, marketing and outreach has not kept pace with this success. As a result the agency has a surplus of many supplies that could be utilized. Currently there is a surplus of flea treatment, medicine, dog food, and pet supplies such as leashes, harnesses, collars, and dog beds. Due to POMDR's strong relationships and infrastructure, many of the supplies are items that are regularly donated. POMDR can sustain increasing its client base due to the relationships and support it receives from the community.

The target populations of the Helping Paw program include senior citizens, low income, disabled, and homeless people. Even with this wide array of people who potentially qualify to be served, the resources of the agency are still underutilized as compared to its capability. Because

the range of services provided by the Helping Paw program are also very wide, the programs appeal and attraction to its target population should make it a sought after resource.

Contributing Factors

A contributing factor to the problem the agency is facing is the lack of in person outreach. In person outreach could attract potential candidates who qualify for this program. It is fairly typical that those who do not have internet access are not able to apply for the financial assistance offered since the advertising is typically done all online. This can be an issue, especially because, "11% of U.S. adults do not use the internet" (Pew Research Center, 2018). It is common for the populations Peace of Mind Dog Rescue serves such as elderly people, and low income to not have access to internet. A study found that "32% of non-users said the internet was too difficult to use, including 8% of this group who said they were "too old to learn." Cost was also a barrier for some adults who were offline – 19% cited the expense of internet service or owning a computer" (Pew Research Center, 2018). The main populations who are served by POMDR are the same populations who may not be as computer literate or may not have access to the internet, so the fact that this organization relies on internet presence implies that they may not be reaching their target populations as effectively as expected given the valuable services they provide.

An additional contributing factor the agency faces is the lack of outreach to spread information about these amazing services throughout Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito county. This has led to a few number of people who know about the services, even though the agency could withstand serving a larger population. One of the reasons for this, is because most volunteers focus on providing services, not outreach. As of today, there are currently only two

volunteers out of the 700 who do outreach for the Helping Paw program. The type of outreach they do, is going to the homeless shelters. By doing this, the agency is able to provide services to those who are in desperate need, but two people is not enough to make a big impact, which is why there needs to be a larger team to spread this information about the services POMDR's Helping Paw program provides.

Consequences

One of the consequences that have resulted from the problem described above is that vulnerable populations who may need assistance in keeping their pets may not be providing the care to their pets that they can. And they may also choose to relinquish their pets, when in fact, they could be supported to keep their animals. The Helping Paw program could provide these individuals the support they need to keep and care for their animals. According to the ASPCA, "Approximately 44% of all households in the United States have a dog, and 35% have a cat." (APPA 2015-2016). This is a large percentage to consider in order to fully understand how many people could potentially receive services.

Many of Peace of Mind's clients gain emotional support from their dogs, so it is important to the agency to make sure the owner and their dog(s) are not separated. In one of Harvard's recent studies, they have found that having a dog helps the owner feel more calm, and present in their life. An additional benefit is that dogs typically improve the lives of older individuals in particular. (Harvard, n.d.)

According to a financial report regarding owning a dog, "the total first-year cost of owning a dog is \$1,270." After the first year's costs of dog ownership, each additional year costs on average \$695 (Weliver, 2018). This amount of money can prove prohibitive to many of the

populations who would most benefit from having a dog. The Helping Paw program is available to alleviate the financial difficulties of owning a pet.

Capstone Project

The Capstone project identified as the most beneficial for this agency was to provide marketing. Marketing was provided by reaching out to different agencies and organizations that potentially served similar populations throughout Monterey county, and providing POMDR's services to their clients. The goal was to increase POMDR's presence and recognition. As stated above, the Helping Paw program, "Provides services to those who are low income, homeless, elderly, or disabled. The program provides financial assistance and many other services such as dog walking or temporary housing for their pets so that they can keep their companions." (POMDR, 2017).

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Everything is digital and needs to be accessed online	Marketing and outreach of the services provided by the Helping Paw program is low.	Populations in dire need of these services are unaware that this program exists
Lack of outreach to the community from volunteers/staff at the agency		Owners surrender their pets, even though the pet offers emotional support
		The inability to pay for veterinary bills can lead to the owner surrendering their pet

Capstone Project Description and Justification

A. Project Implementation

a. Existing agency plans

At Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, the Helping Paw program is quite successful, but it is still a fairly new program, so there are still many areas to explore and to develop. My goal was to help further develop the Helping Paw program through outreach, since there is an excess of supplies that can be given to serve more clients.

b. Implementation

This project was implemented by coordinating with organizations in Monterey County who specialize in serving low-income clients. Organizations identified for collaboration included entities that provide discounted spay and neuter services.

c. Participants

Each spay and neuter event provides care to 20-30 clients, each of whom is a potential client of POMDR. The participants of this project were clients of the discounted spay and neuter services. Outreach to these clients was provided by myself and Jessica Esparza, the Helping Paw coordinator. My mentor, Allison Mckee, the POMDR Operations manager provided oversight and guidance.

B. Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase the number of people served by POMDR's Helping Paw program, to support those who need financial as well as volunteer assistance, and to facilitate distribution of surplus of supplies. The benefit of the project to the agency was to determine if outreach is what was needed to make a bigger impact within the community. If the

project was unsuccessful, meaning if we find out that the agency was not gaining additional clients, then this will also be beneficial, because it will let the agency know that outreach is not a weakness for them, so then they can focus on different areas to strengthen instead.

C. Project Justification

Outreach and marketing is a crucial step to getting any agency's mission well known throughout the community. "Marketing is important because it allows businesses to maintain long-lasting and ever-present relationships with their audience" (Gross, 2019). Developing a strong marketing team for POMDR, will help get the message out in the community that they are able to provide financial and volunteer assistance as well as supplies for the pets of vulnerable populations. Lacking a strong marketing strategy may reduce the number of potential clients who might desperately need services.

D. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes would be that available supplies will be given to clients, as well as more clients will be helped through financial and volunteer assistance programs. If the results do not show any change in client recruitment, then this will also be valuable information, so that the agency can shift their focus elsewhere.

E. Assessment plan

Data was gathered from this project by analyzing and keeping track of the rate of clients who reached out to the program. There is currently a list that keeps track of every client, and how many people are helped per week/month. I measured the results by comparing the data after implementing my project with data that was gathered prior to my project, and analysed the data for an upward trend.

Scope of Work

a. Primary activities that took place before, during and after the implementation of the project.

The tasks that took place before the implementation of the project was a measurement that kept track of the number of clients that received services from the Helping Paw program before, during and after the project was completed. The data collected included information on whether or not outreach had been successful. Peace of Mind Dog Rescue maintains a record of clients, so I was able to measure the number of clients who came in after outreach, and then compare it to what the number of clients were previously.

b. Main deliverables that were completed as a result of each activity.

The main deliverable of the project was to meet up with the different discount spay and neuter agencies, and to check in with them every week or month to see if they were willing to have our pet supplies handed out at their events along with our contact information.

c. Timeline of each activity.

The timeline of this project began in April 2019, with a group meeting with the staff members involved. The first meeting resulted in generating a list of the organizations to reach out to for partnering to provide services. During this meeting it was decided that it was best to send emails to the organizations, and to have the executive director approve of it before sending.

d. Completion dates for each deliverable

Curate email for approval May 2019, send out emails in August/September, confirm date and attend tabling event September-November, quantify results in December.

B. Scope of Work:

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines
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Curate email to send to agencies, get it approved by Executive director	This is the communication piece to partnering with other organizations	May 2019
Meet with agencies to talk about our program	Spread information about our program to gain more clients who can benefit from financial or volunteer assistance	August-September 2019
Keep track of # of clients and supplies before the project, and during to see if outreach is necessary	Quantify results	August-November 2019
Measure results	-	Late November-December 2019

Project results**A. Project activities****a. Program activities conducted**

The activities that were conducted included handing out supplies and information in front of a Snip Bus. A Snip Bus is “a mobile, low-cost spay and neuter clinic serving Monterey County and surrounding areas, has now ‘snipped’ over 2,000 dogs and cats since its inception in fall 2018! The 26-foot bus travels to Salinas, Prunedale, King City, Soledad, Hollister and beyond offering low-cost spay and neuter clinics by a highly trained veterinary team! The bus works to actively prevent the suffering and death of unwanted animals due to overpopulation. The SNIP Bus’s volunteers and Board of Directors receive no compensation for their services and 100% of proceeds are used to purchase supplies to operate the bus at full capacity. The bus is independently funded through generous sponsors.” The Helping Paw coordinator and I decided that it would be quite useful to team up with the mobile spay and neutering bus to further our outreach to those who may need additional assistance of supplies.

b. Overall implementation process.

Part of the Capstone was to reach out to the coordinator of the discounted spay and neuter Buses, and organize a date to table at one of their events. On September 30th I partnered with Peace of Mind Dog Rescues, Helping Paw coordinator (Financial and Volunteer assistance) to set up a table in front of the Snip Bus in Salinas. Since the population that is targeted by Snip Bus are typically low-income, we took this as a perfect opportunity to offer additional supplies and services. Some of the supplies handed out and kept track of included flea treatment, dog food, harnesses, collars, leashes, and dog beds. From this single tabling event, it was discovered that the biggest request was typically flea treatment and harnesses.

B. Project outcomes

a. The achieved project outcomes

The project outcome was to achieve outreach to vulnerable populations, provide supplies and promote program participation. Additionally, information was obtained that enabled the program to gauge the needs of the community and determine if this type of event was beneficial. Along with handing out supplies, brochures and business cards were also distributed to encourage further use of POMDR's services in the future. Feedback provided at events conveyed that many of the clients were interested in receiving future assistance from POMDR and were also motivated to spread information about POMDR to friends or relatives who might also benefit from the program.

C. Findings/results

1. Outcome measures used to assess the effectiveness of the project.

The effectiveness of my project was measured by comparing supply and service levels before and after the events. For example, flea treatment was a big success at the events so now

we know to order and request more flea treatment for the future instead of dog beds. We have a current stock measurement for each month of our supplies, so it was easy to compare levels from before and after the tabling events.

2. Data collection method used to gather evidence to measure the project outcome:

The Helping Paw program keeps track of every supply, and every dollar given to clients. Leading up to my project, there was an up to date record every month of the status of the supply stock. At the tabling event we recorded every supply that was handed out, and kept track of our donated supplies. There was one tabling event conducted October 1st, and an additional event on November 18th. Results were measured for October and were compared to previous months. November's final numbers were not available from the agency because the month's values were not complete at the time of the writing of this paper.

Monthly Counts of Key Items Distributed:

	Flea Treatment	Bags of food	Cans of food
May	5	40	49
June	0	2	18
July	2	3	3
August	4	1	18
September	9	3	0
October	15	20	10

3. Project Outcomes

The project was a success in that it resulted in distributing supplies to vulnerable populations. By comparing the data collected in October, it appeared that more flea medicine was provided than previous months. Bags of dog food were also more heavily favored than previous months average. Also, subjective feedback was favorable that potential clients would continue to use POMDRs services and would share POMDRs information.

4. Unexpected Project Outcomes

Though outreach was successful, one finding was that dog beds were not something that was generally sought after by clients. Also, it was interesting that success of tabling events was so dependent on the schedule of the mobile spay and neuter providers.

Supplies handed out at the two tabling events:

Item	# supplies handed out October 1st	# supplies handed out November 18th
Leashes	3	3
Harnesses	4	6
Beds	2	-
Bagged food	2	-
Flea treatment	8	5

Conclusion & Recommendations

My recommendation is for the POMDR organization to continue partnering and tabling with discounted spay and neuter events. This could include the Helping Paw Coordinator, who may partner with a volunteer at the events, which can eventually lead to the event being managed solely by volunteers. The tabling event has been quite effective at handing out supplies to low-income clients, as well as providing marketing for the agency. Through the event we found

that it may be beneficial for future events to take place in the afternoon once the owners come to pick up their pets, instead of scheduling the event to take place when the discount spay and neuter bus opens. We found it difficult to hand out supplies to pet owners at 7-8AM in the morning due to them typically being in a rush to drop off their pets and get to work. It might be more beneficial in the future to set up the table when clients are expected to pick up their pets when they are no longer in a rush to get to work.

Personal Reflection

I learned that projects shift and change over time, and that it is beneficial to be able to adapt to new opportunities that come your way. My agency was extremely flexible with the potential routes I could take for my project, which made the process much more smooth. I received endless support from my mentor and colleagues which paved the way for a successful project.

One of our strengths at the event, was that we were the only organization tabling in front of the bus, so clients were able to focus on the table and supplies while they waited for their pets to be checked. At both events the workers were greatly appreciative of the supplies that were provided by POMDR for their clients, which showed them the dedication POMDR has to the mission.

Some of the challenges that I faced during the implementation of the tabling event was based on the fact that it is an outdoor event. The first event that was conducted, we had received unexpected rain so many of the animals and clients stood in the rain, while a few never showed up due to the weather. Another challenge was that the tabling event is dependent on the mobile

spay and neuter bus being present. If the bus became unavailable, then we would need to reschedule our tabling event.

The project addresses the need for support amongst pet owners who may struggle to keep their pets. By providing the owners with flea treatment, and harnesses this ensures a higher quality of life for the pet while also providing assistance to the pet owner.

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