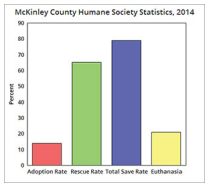
Partnering saves lives: Rez Dawg a lifeline to Gallup's unwanted pets

Written by Rachael Merilatt Sun Correspondent
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The Gallup-McKinley County Humane Society is in a class of its own.

Not only does it serve the entire west central New Mexico community, it's the only shelter in the area.

Responsible for everything from receiving animals in Gallup and the surrounding areas to

proving low cost spay and neuter clinics up to three times a week, things can get pretty hectic.

Kris Gruda, transport coordinator and foster for the shelter, has been with the organization for three years. She explained that while the animals receive proper care once they come into the facility, such as being vaccinated, assessed for adoption suitability and spayed or neutered, space is often limited.

Fostering and adoption is a crucial part of not only GMHS's ability to care for new rescues who need treatment, but animals who are ready for adoption.

Sadly, if the pets are not able to be fostered, adopted or taken by a rescue organization, they are euthanized.

"That's the hardest part, not being able to save all of them," Gruda said.

One positive is that the save rate has steadily increased over the past few years, which shows promise.

The assistance of a rescue organization can make a huge impact. A prime example is Tuffy, an injured dog who the community had trouble bringing in for treatment. When he was finally brought in, the injury was much worse than originally thought.

"His leg was in terrible shape with a wire wrapped so tightly that it had cut through the skin and tissue, almost to the bone," she said.

Unfortunately, Tuffy had to have one of his legs amputated from the injury. An Arizona-based rescue organization took him in, and he was eventually adopted.

For this reason, the the shelter has implemented a transport program, which works with several rescue organizations to find the animals at GMHS homes in other cities and states, including Albuquerque, Colorado, Utah and Arizona.

"There are many more lives saved with this program," Gruda said.

It also creates vacancies for more rescued pets to be housed in the humane society's facilities.

One such organization is Rez Dawg Rescue, Inc. in Colorado. Founded by Angela Cerci, a former New Mexico resident, the non-profit organization provides transport services, medical care, adoption services, free and low-cost spay/neuter services and education programs.

Rez Dawg provides transports to Colorado for shelter animals. They also send down regular donations to Gallup, including food, crates, leashes, toys and more. Gruda credits Cerci and the members of Rez Dawg with saving thousands of pets from the reservation and surrounding areas.

Marisa Kim, a member of Rez Dawg Rescue, assists in the transport and rescue of animals. She shared that most of the animals are housed in Boulder, and there are guidelines in place for people interested in adopting the rescued animals.

"Some people have a different idea than ours of what a pet owner should be," Kim said.

If the organization doesn't think the animal will receive the proper attention and treatment it deserves, the adoption won't be approved.

Back in New Mexico, Gruda believes that proper treatment and regular care for pets can heavily reduce the number of stray pets in the area, with emphasis on spaying and neutering. "Even though we may get 15 dogs fixed in one day, it only takes two mama dogs to have litters that same day to undo all our efforts," she said.

GMHS put great effort into saving animals via rescue transports, spay/neuter clinics and adoption. But they also rely on the community to aid them in keeping things under control by getting their pets spayed and neutered.

"The cycle has to be stopped, or the animals will continue to suffer because of it," Gruda stressed.

The shelter offers spay and neuter services for low income pet owners every Wednesday and some Saturdays, and are encouraged to call to set up an appointment for their pets.

For more information on the Gallup-McKinley County Humane Society, visit www.galluphumanesociety.com or call (505) 863-2616.

To learn more about Rez Dawg Rescue, visit www.rezdawgrescue.org .