

Spring 4-24-2022

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For the Animals: A Case Study on the Effects COVID-19 has on Programming for

Nonprofit Animal Shelters

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Spring 2022

April 24, 2022

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Abstract

Nonprofit programs have been drastically changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for animal shelters. There has been some short term- benefits but these changes cause downfalls in the long term. This research project surveys how animal shelter workers in DeKalb Illinois examined their shelters' current response to COVID- 19 as well as how they believe the pandemic will impact the future of programming and operations at their shelter. To determine the impact the pandemic has had on shelter programs this research is a case study on Tails Humane Society in DeKalb Illinois. This was done through an in-depth interview with the Executive Director, Michelle Groeper and Program Director, Leah Enderle, that asks questions regarding how they balanced increased need with the limit of face-to-face interaction. The result of this study is that operations of nonprofit programs did not change drastically on a day-to-day basis. However, changes in Center for Disease Control guidelines had the most impact on their operations, and even required the Tails Humane Society to temporarily close. A key factor of this is the trust they had in their staff and community to operate in a safe and healthy manner. There are implications to this research. The research may differ based on the location and community, as there are different regulations and needs to take into account. Based on this information it can be determined that this study can lead to further research.

Introduction

The COVID -19 pandemic has drastically changed programming for nonprofit organizations. One reason for this is that it has decreased the number of face-to-face interactions

with the populations they serve. As a result of this, nonprofit organizations have had to get creative in how they provide the resources, and opportunities needed. By doing this it has been difficult to keep up with these needs as the pandemic occurred. One of these sectors is the “environments and animal” sector specifically for animals. The research questions this case study serves to answer is to what extent have animal shelter programs and operations been affected by COVID19. This case study surveys Michelle Groeper (the Executive Director), and Leah Enderle (Program and Marketing Coordinator), to examine Tails Humane Society, in DeKalb, Illinois and their current response to COVID-19 as well as how they believe the future of programming and operations will be impacted by the pandemic.

During the pandemic there were many short-term benefits that occurred for nonprofits. For starter’s there was a lot of uncertainty during the pandemic. As a result, many individuals adopted companion animals as emotional support. Along with that due to the stay-at-home orders and quarantines, many of these individuals had more free time during the pandemic. In addition to this many individuals have been transitioned into a work from home environment. This allowed them to have the opportunity to watch and care for their companion animal during the work week. While this has made the COVID-19 pandemic easier for the owners as well as the nonprofit organization itself it is predicted to have downfalls overall. As a result of this many nonprofit organizations have been looking into their programs to see where they can make improvements. In doing so, it will allow for them to continue to recruit individuals to adopt, retain current adopters and provide services and supplies needed for the care and health of their companion animal.

There have been numerous studies that have come out that covered the topics of programs for nonprofit animal shelters. However current research has covered regions or states

of the United States. To get the most accurate viewpoint on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to have participants who are involved in these efforts. As a result of this the most ideal participants for this research are Program Developers, and Executive Directors in DeKalb County. Program Developers would be beneficial to this study because they are the ones who organize and execute programs. As a result of this, they are consistently working with individuals to achieve their mission. In doing so, they would have a better insight into what they are currently doing, and how that may impact the short and long term of the organization. Program developers may have a slight bias as they are discussing their jobs and the results of it. As a result, it may be beneficial to have an outside leader evaluate the success and downfalls of the program. The better option for this is the Executive Director of the organization. This is because they see the direct results, as well as how it may be impacting them on the operational side. In addition, the Executive Director focuses on the day to day of the organization. As a result, they may have more information regarding funding, and resources than a program developer would.

DeKalb Illinois is a population that would be beneficial to this study. The population of DeKalb, Illinois includes various demographics of individuals. These include college students from Northern Illinois University, families, lower income, and middle-class individuals. As a result, this is a unique case study because it covers needs for various lifestyles. This changes how their programs are operated. Based on these changes they are impacted differently from the pandemic than other communities, so it gives a different perspective.

Literature Review

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused concern that American's may not be capable of adapting to the cultural and social norms that have occurred as a result. The issue that caused the most uncertainty is interactions and communication in their professional and social lives. These concerns required adaptations, including the rise in social platforms. Social platforms were successful in the short term, but not in the long term. The most prominent long-term effect is loneliness. To prevent loneliness, Americans have utilized non-human animal as a source of interaction. There has been an increase in fostering and animal adoptions. This increased rate in fostering and adoption of animals has benefits and issues. Primarily these benefits and issues are related to the programs they offer and how they were adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For nonprofit animal shelters they must make their decisions at an individual level. While there was a wide range of differences there were various similarities. By analyzing nonprofit animal shelters, it can be determined that COVID-19 has impacted nonprofit programs.

Nonprofit Operations and COVID-19

Similarly, to the rest of the world, nonprofits organizations were uncertain of the impact COVID-19 would have on their organization. As a result, they had to rapidly change how they operated. While there are many ways they had to adapt, there are many similarities in the problems. In 2021, there was an article by Lederer, Basso, et.al., that explained the main struggles that nonprofit organizations had to consider when adapting their programs. According to the article "COVID-19 triggered greater transparency into the challenges and consequences that arise when funding structures are inequitable, underfunded, and not outcomes-centered to deliver services that bolster community health and well-being" (Lederer, Basso, et.al, 2020, p. 22). This means that COVID-19 acknowledged the lack of funding that nonprofit organizations

tend to receive. This became prevalent because the needs that communities needed during the pandemic skyrocketed. As a result, nonprofits needed to operate in ways that met these needs as effectively as possible. In a lot of cases, many nonprofits could not afford to accommodate their operations and services, especially with the constant changes. The reason for this, is that many nonprofit organizations did not have a lot of money saved for these kinds of emergency situations. Most nonprofits in this situation, temporarily closed. Unfortunately, this led to many nonprofit organizations permanently closing. Overall if there was transparency of funding, among nonprofit organizations they would have been able to excel in their operations

A nonprofit sector that was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic is the arts. The organizations in this sector that were highly impacted are theatres. One article that describes the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on theatres is by Weinert in 2020. In the article it highlights theatre closures. This is done by highlighting the federal protection loans that were created to help theatres pay their workers. As time went on, it became evident that theatres require thousands of dollars to stay open without performances or events. For many organizations, it was near impossible to keep open during this time. To combat this, many organizations would find other ways to bring the arts in to the community while still operating in a way that followed the Center for Disease and Control's regulations. Similarly, to theatre's, animal shelters tend to have expensive operation costs. Along with that they typically have a wide range of clients coming in and out of the shelter. With this mass group of people in a smaller setting, they need to be extra careful regarding the health and safety of clients. In doing so animal shelters, needed to find ways to quickly adapt their operations so they could meet the needs of their clients.

Nonprofit Services and COVID-19

At a global level, the need for nonprofit services have increased rapidly. One country that has been particularly impacted is Canada. An article by Olawoye-Mann in 2021 focuses on nonprofit programs that impacted health of workers and their clients. As health care workers are the individuals who are most exposed to COVID-19, it is evident that they would be the most impacted. The article highlights the ranges of the effects it has had on the health care workers. Along with that it does describe the potential impacts this will have on other types of organizations. A direct result of these impacts has drastically changed how nonprofit programs are viewed. Many have taken a virtual model. Healthcare organizations have tried different program models to ensure health and safety. However, this is not always possible. Whereas in other organizations, such as animal shelters, they have the capability to create virtual programs. This has enticed people, which in turn rapidly increased need for programming.

There are different stressors that nonprofit organizations are affected by. In an article in 2020 by Nolan it addresses these different stressors as well as how it may impact their organization. For animal shelters, it was evident that providing pet food became a major concern. As a result, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to **Animals** launched the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Initiative which provided “\$2 million in grants to animal welfare organizations in critical need of funds and pet food to pet owners who face challenges providing food for their animals” (Nolan, 2020). This initiative is one example of how programs were effective in to adapting to the concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Common Theme of the COVID-19 Pandemic

There are a few common themes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these themes are a direct result of interactions. Research regarding interactions tend to focus on human interaction. In 2021 Piguet examines human interaction and how it was impacted due to COVID-19 in to

three different parts. The first part describes the common factors. These include language, place of origin, education, and shared social norms in the second part all these factors are analyzed further by determining how they impact our social networks. Finally, the article describes how COVID-19 changed these interactions. For this study, participants were dementia patients in Australia. The findings showed that the COVID-19 resulted in disruption of physiological wellbeing. Piguet concluded that the changes that occurred in interactions was due to social isolation. Social isolation is an issue that individuals from all countries faced, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, it can be concluded that social isolation has changed communication and will play a role in future interactions.

Influence of Companion Animals

During the pandemic, humans turned to companion animals for support. One reason for this is that there was a lot of uncertainty. Initially, the pandemic was thought to only last a few weeks. However, as it continued, and we were put in to stay at home orders many individuals were concerned. As a result, many turned to adopting a companion animal. According to the Kogan, Currin et.al., article in 2021, this had positive and negative results for adopters. Not only did it allow for them to feel more bonded towards their companion animal, but it increased negative feelings such as: depression, anxiety, isolation, and loneliness. Along with that they “also helped increase feelings of self-compassion, their ability to maintain a regular schedule, feel a sense of purpose and meaning, and cope with uncertainty” (Kogan, Currin et al, 2021, 13). While these skills are beneficial, companion animals have caused negative effects. For starters, the impact of companion animals is different for others. Some of these individuals were in situations where they were not capable to take care of their companion animal in the long term. As a result, they would return these animals or put them in harmful situations. In addition to the

factors this study analyzes the effects for cat and dog owners. These are split up into age categories. It was found that young women were most likely to adopt an animal. The reason for this is that young women may not have the coping skills of older adults, so they decided to use their loneliness to care for another living thing. Overall, the influence of companion animals has helped to keep a sense of normalcy and responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evaluation of Animal Shelter Programs

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on animal shelters. This is because the adoption rates have caused for an increase in services. One reason for this food insecurity. Food insecurity is an issue that impact families as well as their pets. As a result of this, animal shelters have created programs to provide pet food for families. Some animal shelters have provided pet food and other necessities at their local food banks. In 2017 Rautkins, Rose, et.al, 2017 did a case study on Chow Wagon, a pet food distribution program by surveying the staff of participating food pantries and banks. In doing so, they found that pet owners appreciated these programs, especially for ones who struggle to afford dog food. For the future of CHOW Wagon, they hope to expand the program to high poverty areas, particularly in rural and suburban Pennsylvania. As a result of this case study, it can be determined that partnerships, like CHOW Wagon are beneficial to lower income pet owners.

Veterinarian Care is a concern for most pet owners, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many communities would have low price community clinics in their area. This study analyzes fifty-one different publications about these low price and community clinics and the impact they have had on communities. Through the analysis five barriers were addressed, these five barriers include: cost of veterinary care, accessibility of care, problems with or lack of veterinarian-client communication,

culture/language, and lack of client education “(LaVallee et al, 2017). Once the COVID-19 Pandemic occurred, the usage of these clinics increased dramatically. As a result of this many animal shelters have taken the initiative to create similar programs themselves. Along with that, they would help to provide medical education for pet owners. While these programs are new there is limited research on the structure and effectiveness of these programs. Overall, these programs help to give additional resources for pet owners so financial issues do not prevent an animal from getting the care they need.

Some Studies of Animal Shelter’s Response to COVID-19

Animal Shelters have had varying responses to COVID-19. In 2021, Reinhard and Watson addressed animal shelters response to COVID-19 pandemic. This study focuses on differences among the animals entering and exiting animal shelters, in Northeastern United States. By examining these numbers, it has helped animal shelters to determine the changes they would need to make. In addition, the study highlights the potential options they had for their operations. These included keeping their programs as is to permanently close. Many shelters were required to adapt their programs to fit the community needs, while still meeting their required guidelines. For many shelters, this meant temporarily turning adoption services to a by appointment basis. This helped to prevent multiple people from entering and exiting the shelter. Along with that foster programs expanded. As they had limited opportunity to market in person many shelters relied on online marketing as well as word of mouth. It is important to note, that this is preliminary and anecdotal research. This means that most of the data is meant to give perspectives for conclusions to be based of in the future.

A final issue that animal shelters noticed is an increased rate in relinquishment of pets. Relinquishment is an issue that can occur for multiple reasons. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

relinquishment was more likely to be related to animal abuse or domestic violence issues. However, as the adoption rates have increased, so has relinquishment. This is because of Companion Dog Retention. Companion Dog Retention is when dogs get returned to the shelter due to inadequate care. Animal shelters have examined the issues in their community and have created community resources to prevent these issues. Some of these issues include veterinary, behavioral, and pet friendly housing. Many shelters have tried to provide at least one program to fit these needs. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many shelters have lost staff and resources. This has made it difficult to continue these programs so some have gotten discontinued. effectively provide these services. One article suggests that “Given limited resources, animal welfare organizations should strategically develop programs for their individual communities and actively work to partner with the veterinary and the canine behavior profession to provide necessary medical and behavioral resources” (Russo et al.,2021,1). This response has been the most beneficial for animal shelters, specifically ones that were hit hard by the pandemic. Overall, these partnerships are valuable because it prevents relinquishment of dogs, but other animals as well.

Conclusion and Needs for Additional Research

At this point, the evidence is mixed concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and how it impacted programs for nonprofit animal’s shelters. This is a result of the laws and regulations that animal shelters are required to follow. These regulations tend to vary at the federal, state, and local levels. Along with that some regulations are the choice of the individual shelter. When combined with the uncertainty of COVID-19, it made it challenging for nonprofit animal shelters to adapt to these changes. Many of these changes directly affected the adoption, volunteer, and other programs that each individual shelter designed. As a result of this, many shelters had to

adapt their programs, quickly. This has resulted in less evaluation of these programs. Along with that these programs were consistently changing. This is because they had to follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines as they were set in place. This means that that they would consistently have to adapt these programs with limited to no notice, causing it to be difficult to meet the needs that these programs served. In some cases, it even required some shelters to temporary and permanently close.

Methodology

This specific case study analysis focuses on the nonprofit animal shelter Tails Humane Society in DeKalb Illinois. Animal shelters have adapted to the limited face to face interactions, as their adoption rates increased rapidly. Tails Humane Society was chosen as the subject of this case study research because of the direct programming they provided and their increase in adoption rates during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Founded in 1999, Tails Humane Society works to build a compassionate community through the care of companion animals in DeKalb County. They were formed by a group of local animal advocates, who wanted to bring an animal shelter to the DeKalb County area. They started in a farmhouse and have expanded to a two-building facility, one for shelter and the other for veterinarian services for their animals. They are a registered 501 c (3) organization. The organization is governed by a board with fourteen directors. As a result of their transparency within the community and hard work to achieve their mission they are classified as a “Socially Conscious Animal Welfare Organization, supported by the Petco Foundation, as well as proud members of the DeKalb and Sycamore’s Chamber of Commerce’s” (Tails Humane Society, 2022).

Size

Tails Humane Society operates through volunteers, their seven staff members, and an intern from Northern Illinois University. They serve approximately, “3,350 animals a year” (Tails Humane Society, 2022). According to their most recent IRS 990 financial information return (2019), their total revenue was \$ 1,245,691 while total expenses were \$1,141,801 for a loss of \$103,890. Tails Humane Society usually makes a profit, (revenue versus expenses) over the years, and occasionally have had small deficits. The last time they had a deficit was 2018. However, they have estimated to have 3-6 months’ worth of cash that has kept them out of debt. They are a financially strong organization, as they have remained out of debt.

Programs

Tails Humane Society currently runs five separate programs: a foster program for at risk animals to have a temporary home, especially when shelters are full; Homebuddies, a partnership that provides pet food to qualified individuals in Voluntary Action’s Center Meals on Wheels program; Safe Pets, which is a partnership with Safe Passage and Hope Haven to provide temporary shelter and care to animals as their owners are getting out of abusive relationships; Transport Program, that provides shelter to animals in different states who are in fear of being euthanized due to overpopulation in their local animal shelter; Working Cat program, which provides jobs to cats who are unadoptable so they can work at farms, houses, businesses, etc., instead of being euthanized. These programs operate within the organization and focus primarily on serving DeKalb County, and their partnerships across the Midwest and southern states. Despite the pandemic all five of these programs were offered by appointment through a face-to-face format.

Case Study Design

There have been numerous studies that have come out that covered the topics of programs for nonprofit animal shelters. However current research has covered regions or states of the United States. This research project focuses primarily on programing and operations of nonprofit animal shelters at a local level. This case study will utilize qualitative methods to analyze the impact COVID-19 had on program development for Tails Humane Society. The method used for this case study is an interview. In the interview the participants were asked different questions regarding Tails Humane Society's five main programs: Foster, Homebuddies, Safe Pets, Transport and Working Cat. There will be questions for each program regarding how they have changed during COVID-19. As this case study is an interview it is meant to survey the organization, so it would be considered primary data. In addition, any of the specific documents or records Tails Humane Society included with the interview would be considered secondary data.

To collect this data, an interview was done virtually via the platform ZOOM, with both Michelle Groeper (the Executive Director), and Leah Enderle (Program and Marketing Coordinator), of Tails Humane Society. With the consent of both participants the interview was recorded. During the interview, important and interesting topics were taken note of. After the interview, it was transcribed. This helped to ensure all information was addressed. Along with that this data was then used to determine that information utilized was accurate. Each participant was sent a follow up email to thank them for their participation as well as ask for any additional documents or resources that were discussed in the interview.

Data Analysis

The interview is considered an anecdotal report. In an anecdotal report, it examines the experiences/ responses of reactions, participants have. As a result of this anecdotal reports can be difficult to quantify as the topic is not universal to all. In this case study the research focuses on how TAILS Humane Society's programs have changed prior and during the pandemic, as well as how that may impact the future of the organization. To analyze this, the data will be supported from other sources that they have provided about the organizations or the animal sector.

There are a few studies that have been done as preliminary research on how a world pandemic has impacted animal shelters and their operations. One case study that was done surveyed fourteen animal shelters in Northeastern United States. The case study was meant to be a "pilot for future research" (Powell et al., 2021). This case study is designed to mimic the topics and questions this survey included. To further this research the answers will be compared to the pilot survey to determine similarities and differences between TAILS Humane Society and the organizations in the survey.

Results, Implications, and Recommendations

This research project had some unexpected results associated with it. The initial questions that were asked quickly deviated. This was due to the idea of constant comparison or comparing data from one sample to the next. Each program did not have any drastic changes to how the program was set up. Any changes that were made to each program, were made due to positive results of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the programs, Foster, Homebuddies, Safe Pets, Transport and Working Cat, all had increased in their services. This has helped to put animals into homes and situations that would best fit their needs. In addition, this has provided families and individuals by allowing for their animals to have all the supplies and items that they need for survival, especially when they are in situations that make them temporarily unfit to take care of

their pet. Also, it is important to note that animal adoptions have increased during COVID-19. The beginning of the pandemic led to a large surge for most shelters and Tails Humane Society is not an exception. As the pandemic continued there was an increased adoption rate, however it is slowly dropping. Currently the shelter is estimated to still be at an increased rate of adoptions. Along with that, it has been estimated that the time between when an animal is brought into a shelter and adopted has decreased. This has allowed for more turnover of animals. This helps to keep bringing animals in and creating new opportunities for their animals. That way they are not stuck at the shelter for the rest of their lives. In addition, it is estimated that there are more likely to be an increased rate of adoptions for both dogs and cats. It is most likely to be a handful for both dogs and cats. As a result, it can be estimated that as the pandemic comes to end, less animals will be adopted, filling up their programs at a faster rate. This may cause long term concerns in the future. Based on this data, it can be determined that the programming and operations of Tails stayed consistent before and during the pandemic, which has led to an increase in benefits for the animals and the communities that they serve.

There are a few differences that have come out of these programs. One difference is the setup of the organization. Four of the programs have been operating primarily on an in-person basis, with occasional virtual meetings where applicable. The only program that has not been on this set up is adoptions. They have been scheduled to be by appointment only. That way, they are preventing large amounts of people from entering and leaving the shelter. This was in direct result of the beginning of the pandemic. As there was a lot of uncertainty in these situations, they decided to implement this. It worked well, so it became a regular part of the adoption program process. After the first year of the pandemic Tails Humane Society attempted to return to their original model. As time progressed it was efficient and effective, so they decided to keep the

model. Currently, they are back to in person adoption. They are ready to return to the model in case of an emergency in the future. These accommodations were made because of the Center for Disease Controls guidelines and regulations for those times. This means that if regulations were to change, they would adapt the other programs where needed. As a result of this, the differences that are made for the adoption program are meant to help ensure safety and health overall, and they are well prepared to make these accommodations for other programs if needed.

Tails Humane Society has done their best to fit the needs of the community that they serve. During the pandemic, one of these needs was to keep the shelter operating so that individuals could adopt animals. In addition to this, they kept their veterinarian clinic open so that all the animals could be as healthy as they could prior to adoption. As a result of this, they would have to work to fit these needs. This has prevented them from having to close during the COVID-19 pandemic. The only times they temporarily closed were when the government required them to do so. Typically, this happened during the first year of the pandemic, with occasional ones throughout. These closings were commonly a few days to a week; however, the longest closing was approximately six weeks. During this time, the staff at the shelter and the clinic would continue to come in, and care for the animals. In addition, they would try to provide as many services as they could so that everything continued to run smoothly. As a result of this hard work, they were able to keep on track with their roles and responsibilities, making them ready once they got all clear to reopen their doors to the public. The work that they have put in speaks volumes about the staff at Tails Humane Society. Shelters in similar locations across the United States, would have closed their doors during the pandemic. However, the staff at Tails Humane Society felt confident in their programs that they could ensure safety while keeping their doors open. As a result, they needed to make limited adaptations to ensure short term

safety. Overall, Tails Humane Society is a fantastic case for this project because they show the perseverance that is required to handle the change that needed to be made to nonprofit programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has impacted each individual person, animal, and organization differently. One reason for this is that there is not much background data on the effects of the pandemic. This is because, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to have different outcomes. This means that there are factors that need to be considered. At a basic level it can be determined that COVID-19 has impacted the operations of nonprofit programs. Many countries have done similar studies on animal welfare and the impact of certain environmental factors. These include demographics, politics, health, need of programs etc. Further research can be done to determine how these factors have played a role for animal shelters in the United States. By doing additional research it can help to generalize conclusions. This is because it is hard to gather quantitative data on these topics. As a result, this data will not have concrete statistics to back up the evidence. Primarily many of the studies on these topics are perspective base, which means that it is difficult to get a true understanding of the programs and their impact. Along with that, this data only focuses on the perspective of the Executive Director, and the Program and Marketing Coordinator. This means that limited perspectives are considered. If future studies are done it would be recommended to interview other staff, volunteers, and clients, across the animal shelter. As a result, it prevents skewed data, which could make the data invalid. By increasing the amount of research studies done it can help to better generalize the conclusions about COVID-19 to better serve nonprofit organizations.

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