



## City of Los Angeles Animal Services



### Meeting Reminder

Board of Animal Commissioners

Tuesday, December 11, 2012

7 PM

East Valley Shelter: 14409 Vanowen Street, Van Nuys, CA 91405

### *Meet Your Match/SAFER Questions and Answer*

A number of questions have been raised about the proposal to accept ASPCA's offer to bring their "Meet Your Match" and "SAFER" programs to Los Angeles for a pilot test in one shelter. Here, in no particular order, are some of them, with responses following each one.

#### **1. Is SAFER a "temperament testing" program?**

We don't agree with those who call it "temperament testing." According to the dictionary definition of "temperament," that word - when applied to an animal - is about its inherent nature, character and/or disposition. SAFER is about identifying behaviors that can be described and/or, when necessary, addressed to help an animal be successfully placed in a good home, either directly from the shelter or via a foster or rescuer with the aid of behavioral training.

#### **2. Would this program cost LA Animal Services \$1 million to implement as some have claimed?**

Not a chance. The pilot test in one shelter will involve a small number of staff (and only a portion of their work days) and as many volunteers who are willing and able to participate. LAAS may have to purchase a video camera (unless someone would like to donate one). Training and initial supervision will be provided pro bono by the ASPCA. If the program leads to more animals being adopted, it will reduce holding and euthanasia costs and increase the revenue we receive from adoption transactions.

#### **3. Would this program enable shelter employees to label cats and dogs as scared or unfriendly?**

No. Meet Your Match has a variety of friendly-sounding labels it applies to animals after they are assessed to help staff, volunteers, rescuers and the public better understand what kind of animal they're looking at. They are geared to helping an animal get out of the shelter more quickly (and alive). If an animal needs help with a behavioral issue, the assessment can lead to help/training being provided (preferably outside the shelter environment).



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Furthermore, shelter employees ALREADY sometimes label cats and dogs but most of them do so without having had much professional training in the field of animal behavior and without utilizing any kind of systematic assessment techniques. LAAS believes this is not optimal for animals in our shelters and we want to adopt a new paradigm.

### **4. Would thousands of animals be immediately killed upon intake as a result of SAFER and Meet Your Match as some are alleging?**

Of course not. LAAS continues to support and comply with state laws requiring that animals be held at least five days upon intake. There is nothing about SAFER or Meet Your Match that would justify killing animals sooner even if that were our preference, which it is not.

### **5. Would SAFER be used by shelter the department to change statistical reporting to make results look better than reality by labeling animals as “unadoptable” and thus able to be killed without being counted?**

No on both counts. SAFER does not label any animal “unadoptable” so that is not part of the equation. And LAAS statistics report all animals in the system and all outcomes, and that will not change.

### **6. Is labeling an animal “healthy or treatable” the same as labeling it “adoptable” as one activist is asserting?**

No. “Healthy and treatable” strictly refers to physical and medical condition. “Adoptable” in the shelter context is an amorphous term that can mean different things to different people.

### **7. What problems is the Department is trying to solve with this proposal? Is increased adoption the main goal? Increased retention? Establishing better relationships between the shelters and the public?**

Yes, yes and yes, amongst others. The rescues have been asking for more information so they will better be able to allocate their resources and this is one way to help them.

### **8. What all is LAAS getting out of this from ASPCA?**

ASPCA would be donating training and supervision for staff and volunteers and help in administering and monitoring the program. If the program were to be successful LAAS would be



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aided in achieving its life-saving and policy goals on behalf of

the City and its animals and people.

### **9. What is ASPCA getting out of it?**

According to its website, ASPCA's mission, as stated by founder Henry Bergh, is "to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States." It goes on to state that the ASPCA works to rescue animals from abuse, pass humane laws and share resources with shelters nationwide.

Like many animal welfare organizations (including LAAS), ASPCA raises funds based on the appeal of its mission and programs and, to the extent that supporting a public animal agency such as LAAS in its efforts to save more animals, ASPCA's interest in helping us appears to be consistent with its standard practice.

### **10. Is there grant money forthcoming from ASPCA?**

The donation of training and supervision personnel would constitute an in-kind grant. In addition, LAAS recently has received two monetary grants from ASPCA for purposes unrelated to Meet Your Match. It is not known at this time whether any additional grants will be made available for Meet Your Match or any other LAAS programs or projects, but we don't intend to be shy about applying for additional grants when the need or opportunity arises.

### **11. Is ASPCA donating money that can free up more resources for LAAS department staffing?**

Not for the proposed pilot program, though it's an idea worth discussing with them should the pilot prove successful and a decision is made to expand the program to more shelters.

### **12. Will ASPCA supply "volunteers" to participate in the program?**

We expect the pilot test to utilize LAAS volunteers who are committed to helping our shelter animals. To the best of our knowledge ASPCA does not have a volunteer operation in Los Angeles.

### **13. Does LAAS have animal behaviorists on staff and will one be at the shelter where the pilot program is being used?**

LAAS has some staff members who have some experience in animal behavior, but the pilot test would involve a small number of staffers whose skills would be enhanced by the training they would receive. And, if going forward with the pilot is approved, we won't be able to specify which staff would be involved until we know which shelter is hosting the pilot. Our intention is to involve the most appropriate and enthusiastic staff available in the pilot test.

### **14. Who will handle the responsibilities of the staff while they are engaged in the MYM/SAFER program?**

Management would closely monitor workloads to determine if



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such issues actually arise. Since this program would be intended to be an integral part of the department's adoption program, it would be considered a normal part of the responsibilities of any staff who participate in adoptions. To one degree or another the majority of kennel staff already is involved with helping animals get adopted. This program would add focus to those efforts.

### **15. Does LAAS currently have the staff and resources to run a program like this correctly?**

Yes, with the generous involvement of ASPCA and our great volunteers in a one shelter pilot. We are confident that the pilot program will answer this question – at least to some degree better than any speculation we or anybody else can offer at this time.

### **16. Can we be assured that a consistent standard of assessments is replicable by different teams of evaluators?**

That is the goal of the program and depends both upon ASPCA's training and supervision and the abilities and commitment of those conducting the assessments. This is another reason for doing the pilot program.

### **17. Will ASPCA offer free training forever or just for some defined time period?**

That remains to be determined. It seems reasonable to suggest that, once members of LAAS' staff would become sufficiently experienced in conducting the program, they could assume at least some of the training responsibilities.

### **18. Will all animals be assessed? Just dogs? If not, how will you choose? If not all dogs, for example, how would you determine success?**

As ASPCA has pointed out, sometimes it is impossible to assess all the animals, but the goal is to assess all dogs and cats to the extent possible. ASPCA has worked with other shelters participating in MYM/SAFER to statistically track and compare outcomes between assessed and non-assessed animals.

### **19. The ASPCApro.org website says "The SAFER Aggression Assessment can help supervisors make euthanasia decisions..." Can you assure us that "false positives" won't result in incorrect decisions and needless deaths?**

The Department's intention is to NOT use SAFER to inform euthanasia decisions, but rather to make us all more intelligent in the process of facilitating live releases of animals, especially those who might otherwise be euthanized based on informal, spur-of-the-moment conclusions drawn by people with little or no training in animal behavior. Because assessing animal behavior is not an exact science, it would be disingenuous to offer assurances. However, we believe MYM/SAFER would improve our assessment process over what it is now, and the experience of other shelters in implementing it suggest that is a fair assumption to make.

### **20. Is ASPCA offering behavioral modification training?**

Not for the animals, just for the humans. We intend to encourage the participation of local experts and resources in providing the training needed to help animals identified as having issues.



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**21. How (and where in the Department's list of priorities) does the MYM/SAFER program fit into your plan to bring LA to No-Kill? What are the other components of that plan?**

LAAS' priorities are clear and simple: Use adoption and spay-neuter to reduce euthanasia, and combat animal cruelty. If implemented, this proposed program would be a component of the adoption program.

**22. Will you be assessing reproducibility and applicability in multiple shelters of the pilot program?**

Yes. That is a key purpose of a pilot test.