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Animal Shelter Volunteer: ‘Finders-Keepers is Good Idea’ ... Here’s Why

Jeffrey Mausner
08 June 2017



TALKBACK--I’m a Volunteer at the LA’s West Valley Animal Shelter. I think this new policy, allowing finders of stray dogs and cats to keep the animals they find in their homes during the hold period, is a good idea. Since I work with dogs at the Shelter, I’ll direct my comments to dogs, but I think the same applies to cats. *(This is in response to Phyllis Daugherty’s CityWatch column “Finders-Keepers: LA Doesn’t Want Your Lost Dogs or Cats in City Shelters.”)*

Rather than have a dog spend a week or more in the Shelter during its holding period (the time within which the owner can come in and claim him/her), I think it is much better to allow the dog to be in a home. In the vast majority of cases, the conditions in a home will be much better than in a kennel. I've seen instances where the finder of a dog will come into the Shelter day after day, and sit outside the dog's kennel for hours, waiting for the holding period to expire and they can take the dog home. Why not let the dog be in a better environment during that waiting period?

There are also organized groups being formed in neighborhoods to care for found animals; much better than the animals having to go into the Shelters.

As far as doing a home check for the person who found the dog, unfortunately, the City does not have the resources to do that in any case. Adopters are never home checked because there is not enough staff to do it. If the person who found the dog takes the dog after it is in the Shelter for a week, they will have the same home environment then. The dog just had to unnecessarily be in the Shelter for a week or more before going to that home. It's unfortunate that Los Angeles Animal Services cannot do home checks; it would need more money and staff to do them.

Contrary to what was stated, dogs do not get exercise during the holding period. Volunteers cannot take dogs out of the kennels during the hold period unless they get special permission from the Animal Care Technician Supervisor. Permission to take these dogs out is only given to the most experienced Volunteers. And even if they get permission, the dog cannot be taken off the Shelter premises for a walk. The dog could only be taken out to the exercise yard, which is usually occupied by other dogs who can only be taken into the yard, or by a potential adopter interacting with a dog. So those dogs on hold sit in their kennels 24 hours a day for a week or more.

That is the worst time for a Shelter dog -- they are thrown into a new and very difficult environment, with little opportunity for human interaction and exercise. I've seen dogs whose personalities changed during that period of time -- depression, agitation, aggression. Not to mention what it does to a person who has to leave a dog he or she wants to care for in those conditions.

Even more important, those dogs unnecessarily occupy kennels that could be used for other dogs who do not have a person who is willing to care for them at the time.

The Shelters are almost always crowded and this sometimes still results in animals being killed for lack of space. So this new policy will save the lives of dogs.

It is similar to the Temporary Foster Program that was instituted at East and West Valley and some of the other Shelters, which has saved the lives of hundreds of dogs, particularly during high influx periods like around the 4th of July. I hope this new policy of allowing finders of dogs to care for them in their homes will go into effect very soon, in time to help alleviate overcrowding this Independence Day.

Concerns that this policy is just a bookkeeping method to help achieve No-Kill are not valid. If a kennel is left open so that another dog is not killed, that is a real, precious life saved; it is not a statistical or bookkeeping trick.



And the math stated in the article and comments on this concern is just not right -- if a dog is logged into the Shelter and then it goes out after a week or so that would increase the live-save rate rather than lowering it. Ascribing evil motives to Brenda Barnette for approving this new policy is simply wrong. She, and the Board of Animal Services Commissioners, should be thanked for instituting this new policy.

I think all of the supposed problems raised in the article and comments, regarding implementation of the new policy, can be dealt with. The most important one -- making sure the owners can locate their dogs if they are looking for them -- can be handled.

I suggest that any person finding a dog and wanting to temporarily keep it in their home be required to come into a Shelter. At the Shelter, the dog would be scanned

for a chip and photographed. If there is a chip, of course the owner would be called. The photograph would be posted on the lost dogs pages of the LAAS (Los Angeles Animal Services) website. (Contrary to what is implied in the comments, pictures of lost dogs are not just posted on a wall at the Shelter; they are posted on the publicly accessible website so owners can easily search for their dogs at all the Shelters.)

I suggest that when this policy is implemented, Shelter employees be instructed to help any owners who come into the Shelters to conduct a search for their dogs on the LAAS website. Volunteers could help with this as well; the computer in the Volunteer Room at each of the Shelters could be given access to the LAAS website, so Volunteers could help owners conduct searches. If this is done, I think it would be easier for dog owners to locate their lost dogs, including those at a finder's home, than walking up and down the rows of kennels looking for their dog.

(Note: We always need more Shelter Volunteers, to make sure all of the dogs and cats get out of their kennels for some exercise and companionship, and to help with adoptions. Anyone reading this, please consider becoming a Volunteer. You can even specialize in helping people find their lost pets.)

I don't understand how this policy would result in more dog thefts, as stated in some of the comments. What dog thief would give his name and address to the Shelter, risking arrest?

Thank you to Brenda Barnette and the Board of Animal Services Commissioners for implementing this humane policy.

(Jeffrey Mausner, photo left, is a West Valley Animal Shelter Volunteer.)

-cw

- 16 comments
- **CityWatch Los Angeles**
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lowell1 • 12 days ago

1. they admit they don't verify the quality of the "finder's" home. so asserting that the animal is going to be better off is nuts. Shelters at the least are subject to public view and inspection and have at least some minimal standards -- if the LA area doesn't want to do that, maybe they should just come out and say that they don't want to bother with proper care and management of animals. 2. They have no way to ensure that the actual owner can meet with the "finder" -- hours when the one is home and available? Shelters have known addresses and hours of operation. 3. safety of EITHER party? (what happens if the "finder" objects to the owner taking the animal? the "found" animal escapes? does something like knocking over the elderly mother?) And why then, are the people who own animals paying a LICENSE fee which supposedly provides for if the animal gets loose inadvertently? NO.

Jeffrey Mausner • 13 days ago

I want to start out by saying that I didn't call this new policy "Finders Keepers," as stated in the headline above. That was written by the headline writer, not me, as detailed below.

I suggested in my original comment above that in order to utilize this procedure, a finder of a lost dog has to come into a City Shelter. At the Shelter, the dog would be registered and the finder would provide identification with the finder's name, address, and contact information. This procedure is not going to encourage theft of dogs, as claimed in some of the comments, since criminals are not dumb enough to utilize this procedure. I was formerly a Federal Prosecutor; there are dumb criminals, but not that dumb. And if, in the off chance that someone who steals a dog is actually dumb enough to come into the shelter and provide his/her name, address, contact information, and identification, he/she would be arrested and the dog would be returned to its person. In order to further assuage concerns expressed in some of the comments, I suggest that the finder of the dog also be required to sign a contract agreeing to bring the dog to the Shelter if the owner comes in for it; however, this is not even necessary since the General Manager has the statutory authority to demand return of the dog even without a written contract.

Under this policy, the owner does not go to the finder's home to get the dog; the finder is called and brings the dog into the Shelter. As stated in this policy:

"1. Failure to release the animal to the shelter if owner is identified could result in an officer going to the location and attempting to seize the animal and possible charges for

theft against the finder.

2. If an owner identifies the animal by photo, arrangements will be made for the finder to bring the animal to the shelter so the shelter staff can show the animal to the possible owner to see if it is his or her animal."

As pointed out by Mary Cummins below, the misconceptions regarding this new policy come from the misleading name that Phyllis Daugherty assigned to it: "Finders Keepers." That is a misnomer. If you read the article above instead of just going by this misleading name, you will see that it actually makes it just as easy, or even easier, for a person to find a lost dog. When the dog is brought into the Shelter by the finder, if the dog has a chip or other identification, the owner will be called immediately. If the dog does not have a chip or other identification, its picture will be posted on the publicly accessible Animal Services website and the owner can check the website every hour without having to go from Shelter to Shelter looking for the dog. If the owner comes into a Shelter looking for a lost dog rather than checking the website, Shelter employees, (and as I propose above, Shelter Volunteers as well), can help the owner search for the dog on the website, at all the Shelters. Furthermore, it is my understanding that under this new policy, the owner has 30 days to claim the dog if it is at the finder's home; in the Shelter, the dog may be held for as little as a week before it is available for adoption. So if people misunderstand this new policy and think they can just keep a found dog without going through this procedure, blame the people who misleadingly call it "Finders Keepers." I did not call this new policy "Finders Keepers;" that label in the headline of my article above was put on it by the headline writer, not me. This name, and any misconception people have from it, comes from Phyllis Daugherty's article.

This policy (let's call it by its true name, Policy Allowing Community Members to Care for Found Dogs and Cats Under Certain Policy Guidelines), will allow the dog to be in a home rather than locked in a noisy, scary kennel at the Shelter, with little human contact, while it is awaiting its owner. I urge those who oppose this policy to come to the Shelter some time and watch these poor lost dogs being locked into a kennel; come back in a few days and see some of these dogs cowering in a corner of the kennel whenever a person comes up to the kennel door. Why not let some of those dogs stay at a person's home for a week or two rather than be traumatized in the Shelter? The proposed policy provides safeguards to assure that Animal Services knows where the dog is being kept and that the dog will be returned to its owner if the owner shows up. There are lots of really good people out there, like Mary Cummins and groups being formed in different neighborhoods, who will provide good care for lost dogs if given the chance; this policy gives them the chance.

Additionally, this policy will free up kennels for other dogs, potentially saving their lives. Especially as we come up to the 4th of July period, when hundreds of lost dogs come into the Shelters, it is important that some of these found dogs have a comfortable place in someone's home if that person is willing to care for them until their owner shows up. It is important to have kennel space for the dogs who aren't lucky enough to have someone care for them outside of the Shelter at that time, while they wait for their turn.

I want to thank City Watch for hosting this discussion; you can learn a lot from reading people's comments.

Sincerely, Jeffrey Mausner

LovesDogs2012 • 13 days ago

As the shelter does less and less for animals, its funding should be cut accordingly. Why should taxpayers fund a shelter if it's not sheltering animals? We shouldn't.



Jeffrey Mausner • 5 days ago

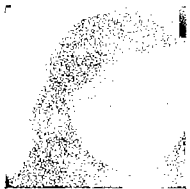
The Shelters are actually doing more for animals now, as No-Kill is implemented. Some healthy adoptable dogs and cats will be kept at the Shelters longer, so that they will not be killed. Cuts in funding will lead to more dogs being killed. Sincerely, Jeffrey Mausner, Volunteer at the West Valley Shelter

Kmarrie • 13 days ago

Thank you for providing a volunteer's perspective on this important issue. It is always good to hear everyone's ideas that would be directly affected by change.

mckky • 15 days ago

It's a HORRIBLE idea! What about stolen pets? How about those that got loose by complete accident? How about those that were in a vehicle in an accident? What about those deliberately set free by someone with a grudge? Dogs belong to their owners. This would just be wholesale encouraged theft.



Mary Cummins mckky • 13 days ago

If someone were going to steal it, they wouldn't take it to the shelter. If people take it to a shelter, staff checks it for chip, takes a pic, description, they take the finders information and drivers license. All the animal info goes on the website and in the book. I wonder who all these anonymous comments are really from?

mccky Mary Cummins • 13 days ago

Finders Keepers? What do you think people are going to think that means? It means if you find a dog and want to keep it, it's yours. There is already a big problem with this - people find a dog running loose and automatically assume it's abandoned or abused when it has an owner desperately looking for it. A friend recently had her dog bolt through the door during a storm. She looked for two days, posted on facebook and signs in the neighborhood. She started going door to door and asking everyone if they had seen her dog. One house took her several tries but she finally caught one of them on the way from the car to the house. This dog was chipped, groomed and well-fed. They had him. they said "well, he was running loose so we figured he had been dumped." They had done nothing to find his owner and had ignored the signs posted around the neighborhood looking for him. All any policy called "finders keepers" is going to do is encourage more of this.

Sorry, but the dogs need to be in one central location where their owner can find them. And just because it doesn't have a microchip doesn't mean it does not have a caring owner - there are still too many who either do not understand the value of them, or do not understand that it has to be registered somewhere to be of any value. I can just see far too many things that could go awry with a policy like this - all of the unintended consequences of "good intentions."

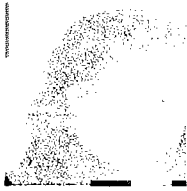


Mary Cummins mccky • 13 days ago

"Finders Keepers" is what Phyllis Daugherty falsely named the policy. It's called fostering. The policy would not have prevented that woman's dog being stolen. The policy didn't exist yet that woman stole a dog. Totally different thing. If someone wants to steal a dog, they will steal it. This policy doesn't encourage stealing. In fact if anyone wants to go to South LA and steal all the homeless, sick, ungroomed, flea infested dogs and cats on the street, go for it.

al smith Mary Cummins • 13 days ago

nice bigoted reply dogs have owners.. this will allow people even if they "check in" with the shelter to keep pets that are not theirs.. BAD idea..



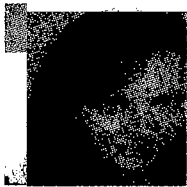
Mary Cummins al smith • 13 days ago

You post anonymously then call me a bigot for no reason? You're too funny!



Anne M Hier • 16 days ago

Sorry,dogs are property of the owner. Owners pay taxes to support municipal shelters and have every right to expect their lost dog will be temporarily housed at a central location. Is the rightful owner then expected to go to the finder's home and try to get the dog back? And what if the finder refuses to return the dog upon demand? Or demands a "reward"? Or is someone who actually stole the dog? This type of free-for-all shelter management will make it extremely difficult for the rightful owners to retrieve their pets. And it will encourage theft and refusal of the "finder" to properly report the found animal to legal authorities. Further, the author mischaracterizes the lost pet as a "shelter dog." No, it is a lost pet being temporarily held in a municipal kennel. The minimal amount of time it will be there for a hold period while the legal owner of s diligently searching for it is not likely to have harmful effects.



Mary Cummins • 16 days ago

Great response. The shelter has had a similar policy since at least 2000. When I find a stray dog I check for tags and chip. I photograph the dog and put up signs near where I found the dog. I have been able to reunite all the dogs I've found in my home area with their owners within 24 hours. This is much better than taking the dog to the shelter to become terrified and possibly get kennel cough. There are responsible and caring people out there. I doubt there will be huge numbers of these situations but it's a great option.

al smith Mary Cummins • 13 days ago

better kennel cough than never being returned or sold to another person horrible idea



Mary Cummins al smith • 13 days ago

If someone wanted to steal a dog, they would just steal it. They wouldn't take it to the shelter to see if it has a chip, have a photo taken, description made. The shelter takes the ID of the finder. The program doesn't encourage theft. People can steal dogs right now.

al smith Mary Cummins • 13 days ago

looks like you did not bother with taking these dogs to the shelter so why would anyone else? finders keepers..and there are already many stories about dogs NOT being returned.. or poor owner never knowing where their dog is after even years of searching.. you also assume that every lost dog is "abused" and that all homes are like your