

# Maddie's Fund® Final Report

## Co-Sheltering People and their Companion Animals: An Exploratory Study

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## Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Maddie's Fund®, a national family foundation established by Dave and Cheryl Duffield to revolutionize the status and well-being of companion animals, for the generous grant that made this project possible. We are also indebted to the four organizations that opened their doors to us: one in Toronto, Canada; two in Los Angeles, CA; and one in San Diego, CA. Their dedication to helping both people and their animals is inspiring as is their commitment to improving and expanding co-sheltering policy and practice. Finally, we are grateful to the staff and clients at each of these organizations who shared their experience and insight. We hope these findings contribute to the continued development and refinement of animal-friendly policies and practices in homeless shelters nationwide, reducing the likelihood that animals will be relinquished simply because their caregivers are experiencing a period of homelessness and making communities safer and more compassionate for people and animals alike.

### **Maddie's Fund**

Maddie's Fund® is a family foundation created in 1994 by Workday® co-founder Dave Duffield and his wife, Cheryl, who have endowed the Foundation with more than \$300 million. Since then, the Foundation has awarded more than \$225.7 million in grants toward increased community lifesaving, shelter management leadership, shelter medicine education, and foster care across the U.S. The Duffields named Maddie's Fund after their Miniature Schnauzer Maddie, who always made them laugh and gave them much joy. Maddie was with Dave and Cheryl for ten years and continues to inspire them today. Maddie's Fund is the fulfillment of a promise to an inspirational dog, investing its resources to create a no-kill nation where every dog and cat is guaranteed a healthy home or habitat. #ThanksToMaddie.

The Animals & Society Institute (ASI) in collaboration with My Dog is My Home used a generous grant from Maddie's Fund® to explore and describe current approaches to “co-sheltering” of people experiencing homelessness with their companion animals.

The lack of animal-friendly policies and practices in many shelters means people experiencing homelessness are often asked to choose between their companion animals and a warm, safe place to stay. As recognition of the importance of the human-animal bond has grown, some homeless shelter providers are beginning to rethink their “no pets allowed” policies. Yet there is little documentation of co-sheltering strategies and even less information about the effectiveness of these efforts.

The aim of this project was to assess animal-friendly homeless shelters' current approaches to handling animals accompanied by people experiencing homelessness, documenting challenges, key issues, and lessons learned. Our goal is to use the project findings to inform development of animal-friendly policies and practices in homeless shelters nationwide, reducing the likelihood that animals will be relinquished simply because their caregivers are experiencing a period of homelessness. Further, the project intends to lay the groundwork for more intensive outcome-based research on the effects of such policies and practices on the well-being of pets and people alike.

This qualitative study of homeless service providers used a comparative case study approach to provide an in-depth understanding not only of the providers' policies and practices, but also the context in which those strategies have been implemented, the rationale for the strategies, barriers to and facilitators of implementation, lessons learned, and clients' perceptions of and experiences with them. The sample included four organizations that serve people who are homeless and their companion animals, one in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; two in Los Angeles, CA; and one in San Diego, CA. A total of 16 staff members, 23 clients with animals, and 14 clients without animals participated in the study. Qualitative data collection methods included individual interviews with the director and staff at each of the organizations and focus groups or individual interviews with clients living in the homeless shelter with and without companion animals.

Key findings include:

- Shelter policy that allowed accommodation of animals was a critical factor in people's decision to leave the street and seek shelter.
- Despite some shelter administrators' concerns that accommodating animals would result in animals flooding the shelter, only about 5-10% of the clients at each shelter had animals. In some cases, the shelters rarely accommodated more than one or two animals at a time.
- There is significant confusion about assistance animals among both staff and clients, including the legal definition, federal requirements regarding reasonable accommodation, and how an animal is deemed a service or support animal. Three of the four organizations that participated

in this study had a stated policy only to accept service or emotional support animals, although it was likely that a majority of the animals in their shelters were actually companions or pets. Education about what constitutes an assistance animal and frank conversations about the animals coming into the shelter would facilitate development of policies and practices that reflect the actual role of the animal in each client's life.

- Ensuring the welfare of animals in co-sheltering environments is important, though fraught with a host of practical, moral, and ethical issues with which both staff and clients reported struggling. Defining adequate care, ensuring it is provided, managing cases in which it is not, educating staff and clients around this issue, and helping to elucidate biases that arise from culture and socioeconomic status are no doubt challenging issues. One of the key themes noted by both staff and clients was the question of whether or not people who are homeless should have animals. These are difficult topics, but they must be more proactively addressed by all shelters that accept animals—in the interest of the well-being of clients, animals, and staff alike.
- Maintaining the minimal requirements of a low barrier shelter while at the same time ensuring the health and well-being of people and animals can pose significant challenges. Topics that should be considered by organizations offering co-sheltering include the role of partnerships with animal welfare organizations, effective strategies to help clients meet daily expectations around hygiene and safety, and the role of clients in the care of animals that are not their own.
- The benefits of having animals in the shelter were widely acknowledged, even by those few clients and staff that expressed concerns about the appropriateness of having animals in a shelter environment and the capacity of some residents to care for them. The animals provided emotional support and promoted motivation, responsibility, and a sense of community. They were described by staff and clients alike as being therapeutic not only for their people but for others in the shelter.

While these four organizations have made strides in developing strategies to accommodate people experiencing homelessness with their animals, there is much more to be done to ensure that policy and practice protocols are robust, implemented consistently, and refined as we learn more about what works—and what doesn't—in co-sheltering. Staff at all four organizations described an incremental approach to development of policy and practice guidelines. Protocols are developed as issues arise or new information becomes available. Of note, directors and staff alike are open to learning from other agencies and adapting the way they do business. This openness offers the opportunity to assist in crafting—and testing—new protocols that address emerging issues, particularly those noted here. By drawing on this study's findings and the work of other organizations and groups, including My Dog is My Home and the Co-Sheltering Collaborative, we are well-positioned to improve the provision of homeless services and enhance the well-being of both people and their animals.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of the human-animal bond, there is little documentation of co-sheltering strategies and even less information about the effectiveness of these efforts. As such, this project sought to assess animal-friendly homeless shelters' current approaches to accommodating animals accompanied by people experiencing homelessness, documenting lessons learned and best practices. Our goal is to use the project findings to inform development of animal-friendly policies and practices in homeless shelters nationwide, reducing the likelihood that animals will be relinquished simply because their caregivers are experiencing a period of homelessness. Further, the project intends to lay the groundwork for more intensive outcome-based research on the effects of such policies and practices on the well-being of pets and people alike.

The project addressed three primary research questions:

1. What policies, practices, and procedures have been implemented by homeless service providers to address the needs of people and their animals?
2. What are the similarities and differences across providers in these policies, practices, and procedures, and how do these similarities and differences affect the perceived quality of services?
3. What are the emerging issues and practices homeless service providers should consider and/or address as they are developing co-sheltering strategies?

People experiencing homelessness often find security, comfort, and companionship with their companion animals. As shown by a small but growing body of literature, animals who accompany their humans who are experiencing homelessness help to lessen feelings of loneliness and depression, promote a daily routine, and encourage sobriety. In addition, people who are homeless may be less likely to engage in other risky behaviors out of concern for who will care for their animals if they pass away or are incarcerated (Blue Cross, 2001; Irvine, 2013; Lem, et al., 2013; Lem, et al., 2016; Rew, 2000; Singer, Hart, & Zasloff, 1995; Taylor, Williams, & Gray, 2004). Moreover, research shows that people who are homeless not only love their animals but are capable of caring for them (Irvine, 2013).

When companion animals accompany people experiencing homelessness, they often face barriers to accessing shelter and housing due to a general "no pets allowed" culture within social services. This leaves people with the dilemma of either leaving their companion animals or remaining homeless. Often people will refuse housing or shelter because they are unwilling to stay in a place without their animal (Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Kim, 2019; Lem et al., 2013; Singer, Hart, & Zasloff, 1995).

There is growing recognition of this problem in both policy and practice arenas, from government agencies to grassroots groups. However, there is little research or evaluation informing the practice of co-sheltering. In fact, such simple questions as “How many people experiencing homelessness have pets?” cannot be answered with confidence. Pets of the Homeless, a national organization dedicated to feeding and providing veterinary care to companion animals of the homeless, estimates 5-10% of the homeless have companion animals, and up to 24% in certain areas of the country (Pets of the Homeless, n.d.).

In order to address this gap in understanding of current and emerging practices in co-sheltering, this project sought to document and describe existing programs that are creatively meeting the housing and shelter needs of people experiencing homelessness with companion animals. By documenting emerging practices, including lessons learned and challenges, we aim to advance the co-sheltering field and provide feedback to co-sheltering service providers that celebrates their strengths and offers suggestions for improvement.

## Participants

The sample included four organizations that serve people who are homeless and their companion animals: one in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; two in Los Angeles, CA; and one in San Diego, CA. The initial sample was recruited from members of the Co-Sheltering Collaborative, a national collaborative led by ASI's partner My Dog Is My Home that is working to raise awareness of the need for co-sheltering alternatives and build knowledge around emerging practices for meeting the needs of people experiencing homeless with their companion animals. Using snowball sampling, Collaborative members suggested other providers that might be interested in participating in the study. We also conducted an Internet search to identify additional organizations. While the final sample included four organizations, one less than the five we had originally intended, one of the organizations had three separate service sites serving three distinct geographic areas. Site visits were conducted to each of these locations resulting in a final sample that includes four organizations and six sites.

As described below, at each site individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with program staff and shelter clients. Table 1 presents an overview of study participants. The racial breakdown was: 1) Service providers: 69% White, 31% Black, 2) Clients with animals: 87% White, 13% Black, and 3) Clients without animals: 71% White, 29% Black.

**Table 1. Study Participants**

Site	Service Providers (n=16)	Clients with Animals (n=23)	Clients without Animals (n=14)
Toronto	Director, 2 staff	5 <sup>1</sup> (3 females, 2 males)	No clients without animals volunteered to participate.
LA Site 1	Director, 4 staff	6 (2 females, 4 males)	5 (1 female, 4 males)
LA Site 2a	Director, 2 staff	6 (3 females, 3 males)	5 (all female)
LA Site 2b	1 staff	1 female	No clients without animals volunteered to participate.
LA Site 2c	1 staff	2 females	No clients without animals volunteered to participate.
San Diego	Director, 2 staff	3 (1 female, 2 males)	4 (2 females, 2 males)

<sup>1</sup> An additional male was interviewed but he declined to be tape recorded and was not included in the analysis.

## Design and Procedure

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This qualitative study of homeless service providers used a comparative case study approach to provide an in-depth understanding not only of the providers' policies and practices, but also the context in which those strategies have been implemented, the rationale for the strategies, barriers to and facilitators of implementation, lessons learned, and clients' perceptions of and experiences with them. Qualitative data collection methods included individual interviews with the director and staff at each service provider site and focus groups or interviews with clients who had and did not have companion animals.

Interviews with directors (or their designees) of homeless service providers focused on three areas:

- Context and Background: Rationale for the co-sheltering approach and process by which it was adopted, including the extent of the need for co-sheltering services
- Policy and Practice:
  - ❖ Infrastructure to accommodate animals
    - ✓ Space, equipment/supplies
    - ✓ Policies (e.g., "pets allowed", complaint/grievance protocols)
    - ✓ Procedures (e.g., initial screening, protocols for working with people and their animals)
  - ❖ Collaborative relationships (e.g., formal and informal relationships among homeless service providers and animal welfare groups, mental health providers, animal behaviorists)
  - ❖ Training and oversight (e.g., training topics, supervision, extent to which service providers have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work successfully with people who are homeless and who have companion animals)
- Challenges and Benefits

Interviews with frontline staff explored their:

- Knowledge (e.g., human-animal bond, animals' needs, laws regarding animals and reasonable accommodation)
- Skills/behavior (e.g., ability to interact appropriately with animals, use of consistent assessment strategies/protocols, provision of supplies/resources to help people and their animals)
- Attitudes (e.g., openness to accommodation of people's animals, respect for the human-animal bond, openness to accommodation of people's needs)

Focus groups or individual interviews with the service providers' clients who had and did not have animals explored:

- Their experience in the shelter
- Benefits and challenges of accommodating animals

The four organizations that participated in site visits were recruited in the summer and early fall of 2019 with site visits conducted in October and November 2019. In preparation for each site visit we worked with a liaison at each site (usually the organization's director or designee) to communicate study procedures, including our interest in conducting interviews with the program director and at least one staff member and doing focus groups with approximately 10 clients, half of whom had animals and half of whom did not. The liaison identified the interview participants and made clients aware of the opportunity to participate in the study. Due to the transient nature of the client population, in all cases the list of client participants was not finalized until the day of the site visit. At the Toronto site, only clients with animals volunteered to participate. Due to logistical challenges, it was not possible to hold a focus group at that site, so individual interviews were done with clients. Individual interviews were also done with clients at LA sites 2b and 2c.

Prior to beginning all interviews and focus groups, information on the study was read aloud and study participants were asked to sign a consent form.<sup>2</sup> All participants received a \$20 gift card in appreciation of their participation in the project. With the respondents' permission, interviews and focus groups were tape recorded. The recordings were subsequently transcribed and analyzed using QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative analysis software program that facilitated coding of the data from each site and identification of cross-site themes.

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<sup>2</sup> All study materials were reviewed by the Institute for Global Learning Institutional Review Board, which approved the study on July 25, 2019.

Separate data collection protocols were used for staff and clients. While there was some overlap in findings, there were also some unique themes. For that reason, below we present findings separately for staff and clients (both those with and without animals).

The findings are organized by the overarching areas addressed in the interviews. For staff those included: 1) context and background, 2) shelter policy and practice, 3) co-sheltering challenges, and 4) co-sheltering benefits. For clients, the areas are: 1) experience at the shelter, 2) co-sheltering challenges, and 3) co-sheltering benefits. Within each area, themes are identified and compared by organization (and site where applicable). Quotes illustrate the themes identified and the perspectives of study participants from the four organizations. Quotes are identified only by site, not by name, to protect respondents' anonymity.

## Program Staff

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### Context and Background

**Co-Sheltering Policy Development Process.** All of the organizations visited began their co-sheltering programs in response to clients requesting accommodation of animals and the lack of other facilities that would accept clients with pets. One of the organizations specifically noted accepting pets as part of efforts to make the shelter as “low barrier” as possible. Two of the organizations had been accepting animals for a decade, one for more than three years, and the fourth for about three years.

In each of the organizations, policies developed incrementally over time and continue to evolve. Two organizations began in 2010 to put policies in writing but both noted that work was needed to promote consistency and additional protocols still needed to be developed. One of the organizations did not have a written policy on animals until 2018 despite having accepted animals for more than a year before that. As the organization grew and merged with another organization in 2016, it was necessary to standardize policies among the new shelter locations.

The fourth organization started a formal program in 2017 to support people with companion animals but had few written policies or protocols. Their approach has been to handle issues on a case-by-case basis. As issues have arisen, strategies to address them have been developed, although they have not generally been codified in a written policy. For example, one of their residents who had a dog (who had also recently given birth to four puppies) disappeared and they had no way to contact him. The dogs had been left behind at the shelter, which prompted the realization that there was no policy to deal with such a situation. As a result, they

developed a policy on abandoned animals that states they will care for the animal for 24 hours. If during that time they cannot make contact with the person, they will surrender the animal to the Humane Society. If contact can be made, they work on a case-by-case basis to provide temporary care for the animal at the shelter or place the animal in a foster home with the understanding that the animal would be returned when the person returned to the shelter (most often from jail or the hospital). Similarly, a public health inspection resulting from a client complaining about animals in the dining area prompted efforts to begin keeping more animal-related records. As a result of the incident, the organization discovered that clients could have animals in the dining area if they had a note from a doctor saying the animal was needed for “supportive purposes.” As a result, they began to keep copies of such notes.

**Extent of Need.** Three of the four organizations (San Diego, LA site 1, and Toronto) reported 5-10% of their clients have animals in the shelter at any point in time. The San Diego site did an exhaustive count and reported 20 animals on-site just prior to the site visit, which was much lower than they expected as their shelter accommodates 850 people, though many of those are children. LA site 1 noted that the female wing had more animals than other parts of the shelter.

The Toronto site was the only organization that actively advertised accepting companion animals but that did not affect the proportion of clients reported to have animals in the shelter. They have a grant to run the PAWS program, a pilot program that covers the cost of veterinary services. They are tracking requests for help with companion animals and intend to use the data collected to demonstrate the need to build resources for people with companion animals into homeless shelter budgets. They also want to use the data to dispel assumptions that offering shelter and veterinary services to companion animals in homeless shelters will open a floodgate of requests for help. Their experience over the last three years is that there is a need but “it's not such an overwhelming need that the costs are so prohibitive that people shouldn't be considering it.”

There was variability among the three LA 2 sites visited. At LA site 2a, 5-10% of clients typically have animals but at the LA 2b and 2c sites only one or two animals were typically present. The LA 2b director did not think the outreach teams were avoiding people with animals so was not sure why there were fewer animals there than at the LA 2a site.

## Shelter Policy and Practice

**Shelter Requirements.** All clients with animals at the San Diego site are required upon entry to sign a Service Animal Agreement Form, but do not have to show any documentation of vaccinations. Their stated policy is that only service and emotional support animals are allowed but no questions are asked to verify the role of the animal. Their goal is to remove barriers to shelter: “We also know that pet restrictions are a barrier to people coming into shelter, so

unless the animal is a problem, we really don't raise our eyebrows or ask any questions." They are considering asking clients to get documentation of vaccinations within a certain time period but recognize this may put a burden on clients. They do allow clients who are already in the shelter to acquire service and emotional support animals.

LA site 2 requires clients to sign an Animal Agreement Policy that lists rules and expectations, including the requirement that animals should be with the person at all times and that other shelter residents and staff should not pet or care for the animal. Clients complete a second form that lists vaccinations and other needs the animal might have. The goal is to have the animals' vaccinations recorded in each client's chart within one week of intake but they are very flexible on timing. Clients are also referred to free services. For example, LA site 2a has a relationship with k9 Connection, which provides on-site vaccination and veterinary clinics throughout the year. LA site 2c refers clients to a nearby free clinic for veterinary services. Overall, LA site 2 allows clients to acquire animals after intake and does not have a cap on the number of animals they can accommodate at the facility or the number each client can have.

At LA site 1 every client must sign a policy and procedure document that describes his/her responsibility for the animal. They also require vaccination records, city license and tags, and a letter from a health care provider saying the animal is an "emotional support." If the client does not have these items at intake they work with him/her to get them, including directing them to services offered by their partner Bark Avenue. They allow only service and emotional support animals but documentation of the latter can be—and most often is—obtained after entering the shelter.

Almost all of the animals are considered emotional supports and are expected to be with their people at all times, including sleeping in their rooms with them. However, animals are prohibited from going into the cafeteria. People with animals are provided an outside area in which to eat with the animal. The director emphasized the importance of flexibility in the shelter's requirements: "It's not that black and white and nothing will ever be that structured, especially for emotional support animals. Being flexible is the main reason why this was able to work for us." She gave the example of accommodating a mastiff who could not be expected to be crated if the participant had to run an errand. She continued, "And for every specific animal, just like we are with the participants, we're extremely flexible." One staff reported that although they don't "technically" allow people to get animals after coming into the shelter, if the client lets the staff know beforehand, it is allowed assuming they get a letter from a physician or mental health professional saying the animal provides emotional support.

At the Toronto site, they are "mandated to allow people with pets." They are a respite center as opposed to a shelter, which means they have fewer restrictions. As the director described, "The main difference being that the respite centers were designed to have fewer impediments to

people coming inside and staying inside. So the spaces were coed, the spaces were pet-friendly. There was instruction to be more lenient towards complicated behaviors that were brought on by either mental illness or substance use. There were fewer time restrictions like in a traditional shelter.”

The Toronto site does not currently have an intake form other than a notation that the person has an animal. No vaccination records are required at intake but they do encourage clients to use their PAWS program to get veterinary care. They do not ask about whether the animal is a service or support animal: “We just say that's fine if that's how you describe them, it's not our place to make you prove it. I don't care that much. If it's a service animal in your mind, then it's a service animal in our mind.”

**Daily Expectations of Residents.** While there is a great deal of similarity among the expectations of residents at the co-sheltering sites visited, there is variation in the stringency with which those expectations are monitored and enforced. Three of the four organizations have a written list of expectations that is shared with clients when they come into the shelter.

At the San Diego site the expectation is that the client keeps the animal with him or her at all times. However, allowances are made to leave the animal in an appropriately-sized crate for a “reasonable” amount of time or to have another shelter resident watch the animal (i.e., “pet sit”).

Staff at LA site 2 described expectations, including keeping dogs on a leash, not having food in cubicles, picking up after the animal, and making sure the animal is fed and had veterinary care. At LA site 2a, the administrator explained they “don’t have leverage to keep the clients accountable” but try to work with clients on an individual basis to help them meet daily expectations. For example, they offer kennels as an alternative to leashing an animal at night and permit other residents to pet sit. At LA site 2b, the staff member noted that the rule regarding 24/7 supervision of the animal was a problem, though explained it was for the safety of the animal and other people. Although they would not “kick anyone out for violating that guideline...it's much more like we strongly discourage them from leaving their animals with anyone other than themselves.” At LA site 2c, the staff member explained that, although the rule is to have the animal with the person at all times, they “don’t mind if someone else is with the dog.” He added, “I think the policies that we have in place are good...they're not so stringent that they're not reachable.”

At LA site 1 they “encourage the participants who have emotional support animals to keep them with them...If they're a true emotional support animal, then the idea is that the animal would be with the participant at all times.” However, they understand that is not always possible and allow another person at the shelter to be identified to pet sit.

Staff at the Toronto site verbally go over the rules regarding animals with new clients entering the shelter, explaining they are responsible for keeping the animal fed, providing access to water, picking up after the animal, keeping the animal with them at all times, and finding someone to care for the animal if they cannot. Clients are not given anything in writing or required to sign any type of agreement.

**Handling Abuse, Neglect and Abandonment.** Respondents from all six sites said that willful abusive behavior towards animals was rare. The most common issues included lack of care due to the client's mental or physical health and abandonment of the animals.

At the San Diego site one respondent noted street culture as one reason animals are rarely abused: "It's very rare that you see abuse of an animal on the street. Obviously one of the big factors if somebody was on the street they really look out for each other and they really get each other's pets. Also if they don't like the way somebody is treating their pets, it's a big issue."

At all three of LA 2 sites, abuse was reported to be rare. At two of three sites, staff reported never seeing an incident of abuse. At the third site, the administrator reported only having to report one incident to the Humane Society several years ago.

At LA site 1 two respondents described a situation in which a resident with severe mental health issues was unable to care for a kitten, causing life-threatening neglect. As a result, they had to make the difficult decision to call the SPCA and have the kitten removed. In general, they use their video cameras to verify issues brought to the staff's attention by residents. Regardless of whether the incident can be verified, staff will talk to the client about the behavior. If the behavior does not improve or if an animal is abandoned as a result of a client disappearing from the shelter, they ask Bark Avenue to foster. If that is not possible, they are forced to call the local animal shelter to take the animal.

At the Toronto site, two respondents described challenges working with clients who were unreceptive to repeated attempts to improve the treatment of their animals. For example, one client had two cats that he refused to ever take out of a cage. After repeated attempts to work with him, they were forced to ask the Humane Society to take the cats into their protection.

**Defining Adequate Care.** While abuse was reported to be rare, the continuum between abuse and adequate care was less clearly defined. One of the issues most of the organizations grappled with was how to define and promote "adequate care" of animals at their shelter. Some of the questions include: What is included and excluded (e.g., food, water, exercise, affection, training, spay/neuter, mental stimulation)? Is the definition of "adequate" different in different contexts (e.g., home vs. shelter)? How do shelters balance the need to remain "low

barrier” with the need to ensure “adequate care” of animals? How do “privilege” and culture affect perceptions of “adequate care”?

The San Diego site’s staff were among the few that did not talk extensively about what constitutes adequate care. They did not mention any recent issues. They expect clients to maintain the animal’s health: “[J]ust like we expect you to maintain your medical needs, we expect the same thing of your animals.”

At LA site 2a, two staff members recommended that clients receive training on “how to treat an animal and how they can best be connected to [the animal’s] feelings and needs.” The staff acknowledged that most of the clients seemed to have a connection with their animal and vice versa but they were concerned about mistreatment: “I do feel most of the clients that have had their animals for a long time have a connection...I guess the animal is used to being treated like that.” The two staff discussed the fact that just because an animal was used to something did not make it good but added, “Eight or nine years of doing the same, it’s a hard thing to break.” These two staff grappled with what could be done to improve the animal’s treatment and suggested an “agreement” that specified the kind of care the animal would receive or the training the person would get to improve the animal’s care. The staff also talked about sometimes having to talk with clients who were overwhelmed by the care of their emotional support animal: “And that’s when we have to sit down with that individual and talk about, is this really the option for you? Because at the end of the day, the safety of the animal is a high priority as well.”

Staff at LA sites 2b and 2c did not address issues of adequate care but they also consistently had few animals in their shelters.

At LA site 1 the director and three of five staff members talked about how best to address adequate care. Issues were raised with respect to both clients’ treatment of their animal and other residents stepping in when they didn’t think adequate care was being provided. For example, one staff member described an animal whose skin was sensitive to light and whose person would only take him out after the sun set. Roommates felt the animal was not receiving good care and so would “grab the dog and take him outside when he shouldn’t be outside because the sun is definitely going to burn [the dog’s] skin.”

Another staff member expressed concern about the shelter setting in general: “I think our team’s biggest concern, because I know it’s a shelter setting, it’s not the best setting for an animal or even an individual. So I think just coming up with better ways to support both the individuals and the animals that are staying here [would help].” She suggested offering more resources to help people take better care of their animals but acknowledged that the partnership with Bark Avenue was a strength. Another staff echoed concerns about the ability

of their clients to care for their animals: "This population doesn't have food to feed themselves. You know, they usually feed their animals before they feed themselves even. It's just very hard. You know, they're so attached to their animals, it's admirable at times." But she added that despite the attachment, courses on raising animals should be considered "...because it's a learning experience. You know that they haven't raised children, let alone a little puppy who's even probably more needy."

Another LA site 1 staff member discussed issues related to spay/neuter and controlling animals' behavior. Although it is a requirement in L.A. City to have animals spayed or neutered, clients are often reluctant to do so and interim housing providers are "not in the business to force a participant to spay or neuter their animal if they feel like it will alter their personality. Unless it's a service animal then it's not required." They have tried to use motivational interviewing to convince clients to spay/neuter animals but have sometimes had litters of puppies or kittens on-site. Another issue identified was the inability of clients to control the behavior of their animal and a lack of awareness of training as a component of responsible animal care.

Two of three Toronto site staff expressed concern about how to define, recognize, and "enforce" adequate care of animals. One respondent was frustrated at her inability to convince clients to change the way they treat their animals: "I tried different ways [to help clients] understand that the animals have to drink, eat and walk. But they don't like to hear it. They think it's my dog and I have nothing, but the dog is mine and I treat it the way I want." She also was concerned by the changes in "ownership" of some of the dogs and the impact on the dogs: "One person left the dog here. Somebody else took over. Then she went away and give it to someone else. Now she's back...So the dog is back and forth [with] neither of them giving the dog any love and affection." She acknowledged the challenges in defining adequate care: "That's the problem that it only says that if you take care of your pet, your pet is allowed to stay in here. But "taking care" is a very broad thing." She suggested both designating someone to oversee care of the animals and having a veterinarian on-site regularly.

An administrator at the Toronto site reflected on the challenges to defining adequate care and when to intervene: "[There is] so much debate...about when is it the appropriate time for the organization to intervene. When is it our business how the person is looking after their pet? Because everyone's threshold of that is slightly different, so it's a challenge." He emphasized the importance of considering the other challenges clients may be facing: "We probably give people more space than we might normally if it was someone who didn't have a slew of other challenges that exist in their lives...The relationship...might not exactly resemble the relationship that we have with our pets at home. But we have a different level of privilege in how we can respond to that." He also addressed challenges around working with staff: "That can be a complicated conversation to have with staff around when is it appropriate for us then

to intervene. When is it appropriate for us to not intervene? Because everyone's coming in with their own personal [opinion], well if this was my animal, I'd do this.”

**What's in a Name?** The stated policy for three of the four organizations is that they only allow service and emotional support animals. The fourth organization made no distinction among types of animals. The definition of the animal conveys expectations about what the animal should or should not do. When definitions are misapplied, this can create confusion for staff and clients, both those with and without animals. That confusion can exacerbate tensions between clients with and without animals.

Although the San Diego site currently only accepts service and emotional support animals, they ask no questions about either. Their written policy states an exception if “staff reasonably suspect that an animal identified by a client to be a Companion Animal [i.e., an emotional support animal] is not a companion animal even though the resident in the transitional housing program claims otherwise.” In such cases, again according to written policy, “the resident may be required to obtain a letter from a medical provider documenting the need for the animal.” All animals at the site have access to all of their residential services and spaces except for the dental clinic, which has its own rules for access. They are currently considering stating publicly that they accept pets and value the companionship they offer. The new policy being considered would, however, prevent a client from getting another animal while at the shelter unless there was a medical, physical, or mental health need.

At LA site 2a there was a lack of clarity among staff about the difference between service and emotional support animals and what the laws were related to each, particularly with respect to housing and accommodation. They were clear, however, that having a pet created a barrier to finding housing as landlords were not accommodating of animals. One respondent said she tried to help clients “make sure their animals are service animals” so that housing would be easier to secure. The distinction regarding the type of animal was not raised at LA sites 2b or 2c.

At LA site 1, staff work proactively to get a letter from a clinician saying every animal in the shelter is an emotional support animal. One respondent explained, “The main reason why we want to help someone get their emotional support documentation when they're in a bridge housing site is because we think it's a best practice as someone's moving into housing. It's a lot more difficult to have a pet and move them into housing without that emotional support documentation. So we have a lot of pets that come as an intake and we assist the participant with it becoming an emotional support animal if they are open to that and if that makes sense for a relationship. But it's, it's an added protection that we have seen when we're moving people into permanent housing that allows us to have a better opportunity to negotiate with the landlord with the Fair Housing Act to make sure that this person can be housed with their animal.”

Yet confusion about the implications of an animal's label remained. One of the staff members raised an issue that highlights mixed messages and unrealistic expectations that can result from assuming all animals are emotional support animals: "One of the issues that we've run into here is, for example, one individual had an emotional support animal, but was leaving that animal every day with another individual. So at that point, we had to have a conversation like how is this benefiting your functioning if you're leaving the animal behind?" There was also some confusion about where service animals could go and how they differ from emotional support animals: "The problem we run into is individuals who do have a service animal, some agencies don't allow those service animals to enter their premises. So, for example, if someone's linked to a certain agency and we're encouraging them to go receive their service and sometimes it's mandatory for their program....Those individuals say...I don't want to go there because they won't allow their animal on-site. So then we try to figure out an alternative."

**Solving Problems: Incident Resolution Process.** While staff did not identify incidents as a major challenge, they did acknowledge that some issues do come up regularly. The primary areas in which issues were identified included allergies, fear of and/or aggressive behavior in dogs, and cleaning up after animals.

The San Diego site has an appeal process, which they were using at the time of the site visit to determine how to handle an incident in which a small dog was off-leash and ran up to a larger dog on-leash who attacked the smaller dog. They handle each situation on a case-by-case basis and try to make decisions that are compassionate and in the best interest of the client.

Similarly, at LA site 2c the staff member discussed a situation in which a dog nipped another staff member. In handling the situation, their goal was to address the issue in the best way possible for everyone involved: "The dog has been muzzled now. We were able to solve that. She [the client] was able to stay. The dog was able to stay. And we just move forward. You know, our goal was to help people, not push them away, not overstress them, not present them with more than they already have on their plate." He went on to explain the importance of considering the implications of any decisions made, "It's not always so black and white. That, if this happened, this is the response. We're here to better people's lives. I'm not saying that we're not dealing with situations, but we try to be humane about it and really look and investigate things before we make decisions...That person could have been with that dog for 10 years now and you're telling them that they can't [stay together]. You know, they're not going to leave the dog. They're gonna go, but then they become homeless again."

Participant coordinators at LA site 1 are responsible for addressing conflicts that arise between clients, including issues related to animals. Mental health staff step in if the conflict escalates and a client cannot manage their emotional response. The emphasis is on problem-solving and

they have, for example, paid for dog training to address behavioral issues. Muzzles are used as a last resort.

The approach at the Toronto site emphasizes having conversations after incidents happen to identify the best way to move forward. No staff has declined to work in the shelter as a result of an incident involving an animal. They have never had issues with proof of ownership or disputes about an animal's rightful owner: "[There's an] unspoken kind of awareness amongst service users that they...don't kind of screw around with another person's pet."

There have been conflicts between clients at the Toronto site, however, related to health and safety issues. One client objected to animals being in the dining area and called the public health department. In response Toronto staff worked to make accommodations that helped all clients feel comfortable and welcome such as making sure clients with animals sat away from those clients that objected to their presence in the dining area.

**The Importance of Collaborative Relationships.** Respondents described partnerships as critical to the work of all four organizations. At the San Diego site they offer animal welfare services both at their day clinic and via a mobile clinic that visits the campus once a month. Services include veterinary care, spay/neuter, food, and vaccinations. In addition, they have a veterinarian who donates time once a month and sees clients on-site. They do not advertise the veterinarian's services but clients are aware that they are available. There are also a number of other groups that donate crates and leashes and do food and animal toy drives periodically.

LA site 2a works in partnership with k9 Connection, a program affiliated with the organization that provides such resources as pet food, leashes, crates, and muzzles. A mobile clinic visits the site regularly to provide veterinary care and vaccinations. While k9 Connection is focused on pairing at-risk youth and shelter dogs, the program's director has developed extensive connections with other organizations in the community that can be leveraged to support clients at the Santa Monica site. At LA site 2b, they try to identify free resources to which to refer clients such as the Pet Resource Center, which offers a vaccine clinic. LA site 2c is located a few doors down from a free veterinary clinic to which they refer clients.

LA site 1 works closely with the Bark Avenue Foundation, which is committed to reducing pet surrender and provides crates, leashes, collars, treats, and food as needed. In collaboration with Bark Avenue, LA site 1 both offers on-site veterinary clinics and refers clients out to veterinarians in the community. Every month the Bark team, which includes a veterinarian, a vet tech, and administrative staff, visits the shelter to pass out free food, toys, blankets and other supplies. They do physical exams and vaccinations as well as refer out for and cover the cost of lifesaving surgery and spay/neuter procedures. In addition to providing services and resources, Bark Avenue has also been a source of information, providing consultation on what

to do if an animal is exhibiting a certain behavior and whether or not an animal should be placed in a foster home, among other topics. This is important because shelter staff noted that they cannot be expected to be experts on animal issues.

The Toronto site's foundation-supported PAWS program provides veterinary care to clients' animals. The site struggled initially to get veterinarians to partner with them, having assumed that if they publicized the veterinary clinics' participation, the clinics would offer services pro bono or at reduced cost. Over time they developed relationships with two clinics that have recognized the value of repeat business and have offered discounts for their services. Clients can request to have their animal seen by the veterinarian and Toronto site staff will make the appointment and pay for services in advance of the appointment.

The Toronto site also approached the Humane Society to ask what more they could do to support their clients' animals and prevent surrender. The Humane Society was seeing more homeless people surrendering their animals and those animals were being euthanized. It behooved all parties to work together. The Toronto site committed to getting homeless people in need to the Humane Society, and the Humane Society committed to providing free checkups, vaccinations, spay/neuter surgeries, and preventative care. VCA Veterinary Hospital has come to the shelter several times with their veterinary students to do day-long events that included checkups, nail care, and basic grooming.

**Staff Expectations and Training.** At the San Diego site one respondent acknowledged the need for more and more nuanced training saying, "The training that we have now really is just around our policies and procedures. And it's just kind of like this is the law. We have to allow animals, point blank. There isn't a lot of training otherwise, but I think that's a gap." Specifically, more training was suggested around animal welfare and the human-animal bond. Another respondent discussed the need to have reasonable expectations of both the animal and the client. Their approach is to have conversations with clients to develop a plan depending on the client and animal's individual situation. They are working to educate the staff that this is the agency's stance "versus the old school way of things" (i.e., strict adherence to a service animal only policy).

At the San Diego site, one of the challenges identified in relation to training was lack of experience with animals: "There are a lot of people here at this particular agency...that did not grow up with pets. And there is a lot of anxiety that we face with staff around animals. They see them as a nuisance a lot of the time, rather than kind of a piece of just someone's life. You know, we accept our homeless clients as they come in every other way. So why not their animal too, right?" Bias around certain breeds of dogs and fear of bites was also identified as a challenge.

At LA site 2a, staff discussed training primarily in the context of clients being trained to manage their animals. Further discussion turned to training received on recognizing child and elder abuse, and staff acknowledged that including animal abuse in those types of training might be beneficial. At LA site 2b there was no formal training. Copies of the form clients with animals have to sign is distributed periodically along with a list of resources to which staff can refer clients who need help with vaccinations or veterinary care. Training was not discussed at LA site 2c.

There was some variability in perceptions of the need for additional training at LA site 1. All staff have a 90-day onboarding period that includes information on emotional support animals, including resources available through Bark Avenue and daily expectations regarding keeping the animal clean, maintaining control, picking up after the animal, and making sure s/he is fed and has access to water. Staff are asked if they have allergies and if they are comfortable entering a room with an animal in it. Rooms with animals have signs on the door to alert staff and other clients. Informal training is done on how to enter a room with an animal in it, particularly if the animal shows territorial behavior. Concerns about animals are also discussed during case conferences and efforts are made to be proactive in addressing concerns before they become major issues. For example, if a dog is doing a repetitive behavior like scratching or chewing, they discuss solutions such as providing a toy or more exercise.

Two staff members at LA site 1 noted specific areas in which additional training might be helpful. One respondent talked about managing difficult decisions regarding whether someone should keep or give up an animal: "Because you have to at some point...make the educated decision for that person and the animal and...sometimes you feel like you're doing a disservice, but then you know that you are doing the better thing for everyone involved." Another respondent noted the need for training on what criteria clients need to meet in order to have an emotional support animal.

There is no formal training on working with animals at the Toronto site. Staff know when they take the job that animals are permitted at the shelter. In fact, the presence of animals has been used as a marketing tool to recruit staff who have an affinity for animals and to encourage other shelters to adopt a more inclusive model. While there is no mandate that staff interact with the animals, they do need to be comfortable having animals in the space.

One respondent at the Toronto site did acknowledge that sometimes there was no choice but to interact with an animal. As such, she noted that it would be helpful to have training on the proper feeding of dogs and cats, how to move animals safely, and how to talk to clients about their animals. De-escalating emotional encounters was mentioned specifically: "Sometimes we move the dogs someplace and guests get really upset when we do that...Of course, that's their pet. You know, like it's like their child. They're just like, no. you don't touch my pet. Don't touch

them at all...Handling and deescalating that aspect can be a lot harder than deescalating when someone gets into a fight with another guest or worker because people are more attached to pets than they are to whatever issue they're fighting about.”

**Where Do We Go From Here?** Given that the San Diego site has been accepting animals for more than a decade, there was little question of sustaining efforts and more emphasis on whether they would openly accept “pets.” One staff member talked about improving the services they offered to clients with animals, particularly washing stations as it is illegal in CA to wash your animal outside (due to groundwater runoff).

Because the housing market in LA is causing people to stay in the shelter for long periods, LA site 2 is trying to develop an enrichment program to help clients make better use of their time. An animal training program is one of the options they have considered. Currently they are planning a dog “therapy” program with three or four dogs coming on-site once a week for a month to interact with clients who are interested in participating.

LA site 1 did not discuss specific efforts to sustain or expand their program.

The Toronto site has been actively working to expand their pet-friendly model to other homeless service providers in Toronto. They believe the pilot data they are collecting this year on the PAWS program will help them demonstrate the viability of accepting animals. The hope is to use the data to negotiate with the city to provide funding to cover the cost of PAWS. They also hope to continue to work with the Humane Society, which is providing some services for free, having acknowledged that it is a win-win because it keeps animals out of the shelter that would otherwise be surrendered and possibly euthanized. Working with the Humane Society reduces expenses previously paid to private veterinarians, further reducing the overall program cost.

The Toronto site has been proactive in advertising their services for animals via social media. They encourage neighboring agencies to send people to their clinic and help low-income people who are not homeless. They have also used the PAWS program as a fundraising tool for the shelter. When they first started accepting animals their strategy to cover veterinary costs was reactive and involved waiting for a need to arise and then trying to raise money with appeals on social media. They soon realized it would be more efficient to budget a certain amount annually for veterinary and related costs. As a result, they began featuring the PAWS program more prominently in their marketing and fundraising efforts. They found that “one of the unfortunate realities in this world is that oftentimes people are quicker or more eager or more willing to financially support animals than people.” When people call to donate to the PAWS program, staff use it as an opportunity to educate the public about the shelter’s work and ask if the donation could be used, as needed, for more general operating expenses.

## Challenges

**Finding Permanent Housing for People with Animals.** At three of the four organizations, respondents identified finding animal-friendly housing as a challenge to getting clients placed. Staff at the San Diego site acknowledged that having an animal can be a barrier to getting permanent housing. One respondent at the San Diego site acknowledged that while the Fair Housing Act prohibited discrimination, landlords with multiple offers were free to select whomever they preferred as a tenant. At LA site 2a, staff noted challenges finding housing for clients with animals, particularly those who had large dogs and/or pit bulls. At LA site 1 an administrator talked specifically about using the designation of an emotional support animal to overcome challenges to securing permanent housing when clients have animals.

**Bites/Aggression.** Concerns about dog bites and/or aggressive behavior were mentioned by staff at three of the four organizations. At the San Diego site they had not had any bites to people but had experienced dog-on-dog aggression, including a case in which a small dog was severely injured. Recently their in-house legal counsel has begun discussions about tracking rabies vaccinations, though they do not ask for or keep vaccine records currently. Residents do sign an acknowledgement that they are responsible for providing regular medical care to their animal and referrals are made to visiting veterinary providers to assist the client in meeting that responsibility.

The respondent at LA site 2c mentioned having a bite incident resulting in the dog having to wear a muzzle. However, he suggested that staff needed to have perspective when dealing with people and animals who have been living on the street: “Depend[ing] on where they've come from, if they've been living in tents and the dog has been in this protective mode and now it's in a community, the dog doesn't really understand that. And the dog may not understand that people are approaching this person. When it's a small dog, it's not a big deal. When it's a larger dog—a 45-pound, a 60-pound, 80-pound dog—it changes.” At LA site 2b the primary concern was clients leaving dogs unattended and the dog biting someone who enters their room unexpectedly.

LA site 1 staff did not talk about bites or aggression.

The Toronto site has had cases of dogs biting staff and, more often, other clients. In some cases the dogs have been forced to leave the shelter and in others the dog has been required to wear a muzzle. There is currently no specific protocol for following up on bites other than getting confirmation that the person and dog are okay. It was unclear if proof of a rabies vaccine was required by the medical provider or the health department. There is follow-up with staff to check whether they feel comfortable being in the space with the animal in question.

**Health Issues.** Health, hygiene and the possible transmission of disease were identified as challenges by respondents from all four organizations. At the San Diego site there was particular concern about having places for people to bathe their animal because it is illegal in CA to wash an animal outside and animals are not allowed in the shower areas.

At LA site 2a the primary concerns included vaccinations, particularly of birds that might be more likely to spread zoonotic diseases; allergies especially to cats; and having animals in areas where people are eating.

At LA site 1 one respondent talked about the fear created when a puppy was bleeding and the client was not able to clean up the blood, which “caused a crisis with other individuals in the facility because they didn't know if it was human blood or if it was emotional support animal blood [or] if it was an HIV-positive participant's blood.”

At the Toronto site, two staff discussed health hazards to people resulting from animals who are sick or animal waste that is not disposed of properly.

**Space.** Respondents from all four organizations discussed issues related to space and accommodating animals. At the San Diego site, one respondent pointed out the need to be sensitive to both people with and without animals: “So really being sensitive to both sides. Not just, hey, you know, people have a right to have animals. Well, people have a right not to be around animals too.” He emphasized the need to have space for people who don't want to be around animals and respect that right. It is also important for staff to “have a script for when somebody is upset about other animals being there. Because there's that side of it also. Especially cats. Some people are deadly allergic to cats. And that's a real issue in an open-air environment.” In the parts of the San Diego campus that have rooms with doors, it is relatively easy to isolate people but where they have congregate housing in large, open areas, it is more difficult to maintain separation. There are also practical issues with the type of beds offered at the shelter, specifically bunk beds. Animals are required to be near their people during the night, either in a crate or on a leash tied to the bed. For safety reasons, people with animals can only be accommodated in a bottom bunk, which sometimes requires moving people from one bunk to another to make room for a person with an animal.

The other issue related to space in downtown San Diego had to do with an area for animals to eliminate. The site's campus is surrounded by sidewalks with few if any grassy areas. Respondents noted the need for a space for dogs to eliminate that does not pose a health hazard to children who may also play in the space.

LA site 2b addressed the issue of a separate elimination space by building a designated pet area. Though it is under construction currently, it is planned to include a fountain for the dogs, a bench, and AstroTurf.

At LA site 1, respondents emphasized the importance of thinking about space and how it affects animals and people alike. They are cognizant not to put crates in every room as that would pose a hazard and limit accessibility for people with disabilities. They also noted the importance of doing “meet and greets” to be sure assigned rooms are appropriate for all occupants. As one respondent said, “Kind of puzzling where they go in our site has been difficult, but completely manageable.” Another respondent noted the difficulties inherent in sharing a large community space in which beds are close together or only divided by a small partition. Yet another respondent recommended having “a designated space for those individuals [with animals] to stay in because there's always going to be conflict with individuals that are allergic and those that are not allergic, those that are okay with being in a room with individuals that have support animals and those that are not okay.” She noted that there should be separate spaces for cats and dogs to prevent fights and reduce the need to crate the animals.

At the Toronto site they decided not to require animals to be kept in a separate kennel space. Instead, they have managed issues as they arise by, for example, requiring a dog to wear a muzzle at mealtime when the dining space is crowded. There have also been situations in which someone did not want an animal in the bed next to his/hers. They have worked around that by having people switch cots.

Despite the decision at in Toronto not to create a separate kennel space, the two staff interviewed expressed concern about the small area between cots. One explained, “I don't know that that's healthy. You know for the animals. And I don't think it's healthy for a lot of the guests because we do get guests here who have allergies and they have to be in this big enclosed space with animals.” She went on to say, “I think having certain spaces where dogs and cats can run around and play or just sleep for a little while without necessarily needing to be near to humans might be a good idea. Problem is, we would need staff to be able to upkeep that.” One suggestion to address this was reconsidering the addition of a designated kennel or crate space.

**Who Should Have Animals?** Respondents from all four organizations touched on the question of who should and should not have a companion animal. At the San Diego site one respondent described a “vigilante” situation in which several clients decided that another client was not taking good care of her cat so “they made an atrocious decision to take that cat and release it into the wild. So that was heartbreaking. I can't believe that happened. It's just one of the worst things. I can't. It's like taking someone's kid. I can't imagine it. But, you know, we have vigilantes, if you will. They just decide that they know better than the owner does.”

At LA site 2a two respondents talked about helping clients get their animals back after they came into the shelter because “it's like your own family. So it's hard, you know, it's their own child.” Despite that, both respondents felt there were some clients that should not have

animals. For example, they described one client whose “mental health is not stable like they're not regular on their meds. And you see them every day picking at the dog or thinking somebody is dropping oil on them...But she's here with us, so we know that the dog OK. You know, how is it going to be when she's housed?” They agreed that once in shelter, clients should not get a new animal: “I don't think they should get a pet or emotional support animal while in shelter if you don't come in with one...Well, we're working on your housing and stuff, no. After you get housed it's different when you walk out of here.”

Respondents at LA site 1 talked about the challenges faced in deciding whether or not clients were mentally fit to care for animals. They had at least one case where a cat had to be fostered by Bark Avenue because the owner was on the street and not caring adequately for the animal. The person came into the shelter for a period of time and the cat stayed in the foster home. When the client was being discharged, he wanted the cat back, but Bark Avenue refused. The LA site 1 staff felt stuck in the middle: “I think it's confusing because we know the cat belongs to that individual. But how do we find the balance between returning it or letting this other agency still care for the animal?” There was a clear desire to “make sure that we're taking the right steps to ensure the safety of the animals.”

Another respondent at LA site 1 talked at length about being conflicted about whether people in the shelter should have animals: “I have seen some people who really benefit from having the animal and then I see some people who probably not only neglect themselves, but the animals as well just because of their mental health. But they're so attached to the animal that in order to break that apart, they would suffer mentally.” She went on to say, “So I'm torn. I don't know if it's good or bad...I feel as though maybe the animal shelter is doing a disservice by just allowing everyone to have a support animal without checking if it's for your mental health.”

One of the things this staff member suggested was reexamining the process by which decisions are made about whether or not people can come into the shelter with an animal. She gave an example: “We have a participant here who has an animal. But she neglects her own self trying to take care of the animal. If more time was spent with her when they were doing the outreach, they would have probably made a best decision like, OK, let's get you taken care of. We can place your animal in a shelter. And then when you're on your feet, you can still have that animal with you.” She recommended that some sort of screening needed to be done to assess clients' daily living skills: “If you want to have an animal, it's OK to have one. Just make sure that you're able to do this for yourself and as well as for the animal. But you first. So I think it's probably a lot to ask for, but it would save a lot of animals being left out on the streets.”

Respondents at the Toronto site expressed similar conflicts about whether people in the shelter should have animals: “I think that having pets is both important and at the same time it's almost like you're taking on an additional stress...Like it's really good for your mental health but

you're still in a respite. And so it's hard enough looking after yourself. You don't really want to look after a pet as well. So that's very difficult.” Another respondent felt more strongly: “I would encourage [clients] to surrender [the animal] because I think their situation is bad...You know they don't look at the dog as someone with feelings, as someone with needs. I mean I don't want to judge here, but you know someone that hasn't been cared for properly doesn't know how to care for others.”

## Benefits

**Sense of Community.** Respondents from all four organizations cited a sense of community as a benefit of accepting animals. At the San Diego site, one respondent said, “I think it normalizes life, communal living, if you will...We opened a shelter in January of 2018 and it was empty. And our first family moved in and the kids brought life to it. We had some singles move in, but a family moved in and the kids were brought in. But then our first animal moved in and it just brought the normalcy of like community. There was just something about it. I can't explain it. It gives people a jump-off point. I know when I interact with strangers, I typically will interact with their animal first before I do it with the human being. And I think we see that here, too. You know, kids are interacting with older single women who maybe they wouldn't have otherwise because their dog is with them. And so I think it just allows for that connection and the human connection.”

At LA site 2a, the director talked about the benefits of clients working together to share responsibility for the care of other clients' animals. Similarly, one respondent at LA site 1 talked about the benefit of encouraging clients to support one another: “We also have them all placed in the same room so that they can be supportive of one another. They can remind each other of the different happenings surrounding emotional support animals while they're here. They can also encourage each other to get shot records or if they need a physician's letter, they can use each other as a support network to retrieve any documentation or any services that their animals may need.” She went on to talk about the benefits of a diverse community: “Another support is it diversifies the community. Not only are we open to humans, but we're also open to animals. So, yeah, it diversifies the community and I believe having emotional support animals on-site is a benefit to the overall functioning of the site because of the joy they can bring.” Another LA site 1 respondent echoed those sentiments: “So the animal owners have their own community and they watch each other's animals, which is so sweet. All the time we see participants who are in a room with an animal. Those roommates are like, that's their animal now. They're all taking care of it. They eat lunch at a different time. Each of them. So you can watch the dog on different shifts when their owner is in the hospital or looking for housing, they're babysitting the animal.”

At the Toronto site, one respondent talked about the importance of connection and giving back by aggressively promoting their services for animals and opening them up to the entire community, including people who are low-income but not homeless: “We want to feel like we're giving back in some way, even though we don't have much to give back. So it gave an opportunity for us to connect with someone else in the community that we might not ever connect with...I think that's one of our foundational philosophies--the development of community.”

**Responsibility.** Respondents at three organizations talked about animals fostering a sense of responsibility. At the San Diego site, one respondent said, “It just feels like our animal owners are more responsible clients.” She went on to say, “I would say that it gives our clients an opportunity to practice living with their animals inside because so many of these animals were acquired while they're living on the streets... So it gives them a chance to practice and be better tenants in the future, which is what we're always looking to do.”

At LA site 2c, the respondent talked about the benefits he saw of clients caring for their animals: “And so it's good to see them with the animal [and] caring for the animal because when you're homeless sometimes you feel like nobody cares about you...They hold the dog while they have to go to an appointment...You can just see them caring for their dog and making sure they are taking the dog out.”

At LA site 1, one respondent talked about the fact that clients who do not consistently take responsibility for themselves, are sometimes better able to show responsible care for their animal: “It's interesting because even some participants who have a very difficult time taking care of their own personal hygiene and they have missed a ton of appointments and they can never remember when their housing navigator is coming or anything like that, they're really good with the animal. We see that a lot. Just because someone can't take care of themselves or is kind of neglectful in that way doesn't mean that that is going to be a parallel to how they take care of their animal.” She went on to discuss the role of animals in helping teach clients how to take responsibility for and learn skills of daily living: “Learning how to take care of something else is something that's extremely important for our participants. And using a parallel process to discuss the participant's own hygiene or own self-care items or own experience with the animal too. So that has been amazing. And I think for our bridge housing site one of our main goals was to teach participants life skills so that they don't return to homelessness when they're connected to permanent housing. And what better way to teach someone life skills than to teach someone how to take care of another living thing that's dependent on them? So that has been amazing.”

**Therapeutic Mechanism.** Staff at three of the four organizations talked about clients' emotional attachment to their animals serving as a therapeutic mechanism. At LA site 2a, two staff talked

about the calming effect of the animals. One noted a particular client's relationship with her dogs: "She has them in this little stroller all the time and they're always groomed...She talks to them and she has a full conversation...She'll be talking to her animals like, I know, I know. I've got to calm down. I know. I know. So that's therapeutic for her. It helps and the dogs will bark at her and she's like, OK, OK." The other staff member responded, "I think they should accept the animals with their clients because it helps them...and it gives them support."

At LA site 2b, the respondent talked about the animal helping to keep clients grounded and serving as a coping mechanism: "When they feel like isolating themselves, they still have that connection. Like something to kind of ground them a little bit...Like especially with the two clients now that have animals. I've only known them with animals. So I can't say this is what they looked like before the animal this is what they look like after the animal. But I do see how much they care for and love their animals and I think it kind of gives them a purpose. It gives them something to focus on throughout the day. They have a little animal that can go on walks with them. They can just sit in one of the benches outside and just talk to it. They don't want to talk to anyone else. They just go talk to that little animal...So I see that as a benefit because they're probably doing that to release some stress or to get their mind off of something. I'd rather them do something proactive like that than do something else that is potentially illegal or could get them in trouble or could be unsafe."

At LA site 1, one respondent highlighted the importance of an animal's affection: "They are able to feel the affection and empathy from an animal, which is so important because some of our participants maybe have never felt that in their entire life or haven't felt that love in 20 years or however long they've been on the street." Another respondent noted the utility of animals in crisis situations: "When we're in a crisis with certain individuals that have those support animals, they definitely work to help calm those individuals down. Not only do they calm those individuals down, but maybe that dog or that cat has a rapport with another participant and it helps to calm them down as well." She elaborated on the benefits to clients who don't have animals: "[Clients] reach out to the owners of the emotional support animal to take care of them. And that calms them down and makes them feel a little more relaxed. So we do see benefits of having the animals here on-site."

At the Toronto site, one respondent talked about the potentially unique therapeutic value of animals: "I've seen it where that pet could be the motivation to the person starting to make some effort towards making changes in their lives. If that pet can be a catalyst to change, then, you know, that's a particular value that we're maybe not going to get in any other avenue.... the health of the pet is impacted in being in a space like this, too. Right. And we will often try to use that as motivation when we're doing our casework with people...[Our] role is to convince people to seek treatment and detox or get counseling. We'll [ask] wouldn't you like to envision

a better life for you and your dog?...Wouldn't it be better if you had your own space...We can help you.” The benefit of being able to offer veterinary care was also noted as a way to de-escalate clients: “People are often in a very escalated emotional state when they first come to us with their pet concern...We can very quickly help a person to come down emotionally when we say, look, within a few hours, we've got you an appointment set up and there's no cost. Go get your animal checked out....The change can be very immediate in the person's presentation, which is beneficial to the whole rest of the space and to staff. So the benefits have peripheral impact beyond just the person in their immediate need.” The respondent also noted a benefit to the staff: “The pet in the space acts as a therapeutic mechanism for staff. You know, staff will often ask do you mind if I take your dog out for a walk? I'm stationed at intake, can I sit with your dog for a few minutes and pet them?”

## Clients

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### Experience at the Shelter

**Rules and Policies.** Overall, clients at the four organizations felt most of the shelter rules and policies were reasonable, with the notable exception of the requirement to keep the animal with you at all times. Clients identified the services provided for animals as an important aspect of their experience at the shelter.

At the San Diego site, clients with animals expressed appreciation for being able to have animals on-site but noted challenges with two shelter rules. The first was the requirement to have the animal with you at all times: “The only problem I have with my animals is dealing with staff. We have an outside life you know, looking for a job or errands, going to work, they make it very hard on us and what we do with our animals when we have something to do. You're threatened to be put on the street because you had to leave your animal behind. It's unfair.” Shelter staff explained, however, that crates can be provided should the client need to leave the shelter for a period of time. The agreement clients sign upon entering the shelter states: “The Resident agrees to keep Animal on a leash or other restraint at all times in cubicles or whenever it is outside of Resident's bed area.”

The other issue noted involved being able to take the animal outside during the night: “They make it really hard on the time you can take the dog to the bathroom. We can take them before bed check. And then they can go out again before twelve o'clock. And if they don't go before twelve o'clock then they're not allowed to go out until four o'clock in the morning...How do you tell an animal they can't go outside and go to the bathroom?” This is important as it involves balancing the need to allow clients to take their animals outside with the need to limit traffic in and out of the shelter while people are sleeping. Staff also noted needing to minimize clients using animals as an “excuse” to go outside for other reasons (e.g., to smoke).

Clients without animals at the San Diego site raised concerns about pet food being left on the floor, people not cleaning up after their animals, people not taking their animals outside on a regular schedule to eliminate, lack of training among animals, and animals being confined in small crates.

At all of the LA site 2 sites, clients with animals generally felt shelter rules and policies regarding animals were reasonable: “Everything they asked you to do, frankly, is fair. You know, as far as keeping your dog [up to date on] shots, clean, stuff like that. You would normally do that any other time.” Another client agreed, “Pretty much everyone knows the rules and knows how to handle their animals. I haven't seen anything out of the ordinary.” One client did express frustration about the requirement to keep the animal with him at all times, “I'm not blind. She's not that kind of a service dog. I'm not in a wheelchair. She's an emotional support animal. And they don't consider that a service animal or anything. It's a pet. So you have to argue in those cases. That's what irks me is that they know about these places [where the animal won't be let in].” To address this, the group agreed that accommodations should be allowed to have fellow residents care for the animal if a client must go to a place where the s/he would not be allowed.

Clients without animals at LA site 2a generally agreed that clients who do not have animals when they arrive at the shelter should not be allowed to acquire them. Three of the clients felt strongly that the prohibition against petting someone else's animal was unnecessary and unfair, particularly given the length of time clients typically stay at the shelter and the bonds that form among them.

At LA site 1, the clients with and without animals felt the shelter rules and policies were reasonable, though not all followed them (e.g., only about half of clients with animals had them spayed/neutered). Clients without animals talked at length about animals being left alone for long periods of time and mentioned health concerns related to cleaning up after animals. They also discussed the possibility of having separate wings for people with animals. Both clients with and without animals noted that they needed adequate space, which was difficult to manage in the shelter environment.

Clients at the Toronto site noted few rules, including no requirement to show vaccination status or a license: “Like, for instance, when you bring a bike to this building, they want you to show a receipt that you purchased it and that it's...your bike so that they know that you didn't go steal it. How is that not the same as a dog?... Now, on the other side of the coin, there are basically no rules when it comes to the animals. And I think that that might be the other end of the extreme.” Clients did acknowledge the requirement to keep their animal on a leash at all times and provide food and water.

**Services for Animals.** Services for animals were generally considered an important shelter benefit. Clients with and without animals at the San Diego site described appreciating the free veterinary services, food, and supplies offered monthly. Clients with animals at LA site 2 sites similarly reported being able to access care for their animals and appreciating that support, as did clients at LA site 1. At the Toronto site, the experience with services for animals was less consistently positive. Some clients had accessed services through PAWS but others seemed to be unaware that the program was available. Two clients reported long delays in having requests for care acknowledged and addressed.

**Consistency and Fairness.** Clients at all four organizations noted the need for consistency and fairness. At the San Diego site, clients without animals noted that although animals were not to be left alone in the living space, the rule is not enforced. Among clients with animals at that site, there was a consensus that there were different rules (or at least differences in enforcement) in the men's and women's wings: "That's the thing up there, they're a lot harder on the women." The difference seemed to center primarily on rules about when animals could be taken outside and whether a supervisor's permission was needed to take a dog out after midnight. One client also noted inconsistency in enforcement of the requirement that animals be on leashes at all times.

At LA site 2a, clients without animals expressed concern about lack of consequences for things like not leashing your animal or cleaning up after him/her. Clients with animals focused on the fairness of shelter rules, including having people with animals eat outside and decision-making around which dogs have to wear muzzles. Two LA site 2 clients (one at site 2a and another at site 2c) felt it was unfair that only their dogs had to wear a muzzle as a result of a bite incident that was perceived to have been instigated by either someone else's dog or a staff member.

At LA site 1 both clients with and without animals agreed that clearer policies are needed along with consistent enforcement.

At the Toronto site, three clients discussed the need for a more proactive response to aggressive behavior, including a consistent series of warnings and requiring a muzzle if a dog continues to exhibit aggression. One client explained, "There's not really a good warning system. If your dog barks or lunges at staff or shows aggression, they ask you to muzzle it. You get a bit of warning and another warning and another warning. But there's not really continuity. There's not really follow up."

**Entry Requirements.** Clients at all four organizations agreed there should be specific entry requirements for people with animals. At the San Diego site, clients with and without animals agreed that there should be minimum requirements for entry, including having the animal

spayed or neutered, getting a letter from a doctor saying the animal is necessary for emotional support, and having vaccination records.

Clients at LA site 2a who did not have animals recommended a 30-day entry period during which clients had to get proof of the animals' vaccinations and support role. They agreed that accepting animals into the shelter was positive and should be continued: "Like if you're losing everything and your life is falling apart, I think it's good that you would be able to have your support animal. And I know not a lot of shelters have that. I think it's net positive."

Clients at LA site 1 who did not have animals also agreed that accepting animals was a good idea. The consensus was that there should be some sort of screening that people and their animals go through prior to entry to be sure prospective clients are committed to caring for their animals and the animals have a temperament that is conducive to communal living: "It would be logical to screen them before you're allowed to come in because they are street dogs. Remember, we come from the streets and our dogs, they're basically trained about the street. So bringing it into our shelter environment, it's a whole different ballgame." Similarly at the Toronto site clients agreed that people with animals should be referred to the PAWS program upon entry into the shelter so that they can get their animal vaccinated.

**Protocol for Care of Animals.** At the San Diego site there was agreement among clients without animals that those clients who had animals should be expected to train and care for them. At LA site 2a, clients with and without animals suggested having more resources for people with animals and being more proactive in getting them the guidance they might need: "I'll bring it to the attention of staff when I see something that is not okay, which it's been several times. There's got to be some way to handle it. Not to have the dog taken from the person, but to help the person...understand in some compassionate way and overcome what they're [doing to the animal] because...people get very defensive just like [with] a child."

At LA site 1, clients without animals felt there should be requirements for how animals are cared for and maintained. At the Toronto site, clients also agreed that more rules are needed regarding care of animals, including how long an animal can be left alone and provisions for designating someone to care for the animal if the owner needs to leave the shelter to work or do errands. Further, it was suggested that a staff person be designated to serve as a coordinator for the shelter's co-sheltering program: "I definitely feel like having somebody in charge of paying attention to the owners and the animals would make a huge difference. They could look at things like neglect. They could look at things like if the dog is eating properly, if the dogs being taken out...Be that person to [help people] take the next step. Maybe that person who is the owner needs some help or can't do it themselves."

**Resources.** Clients from all four organizations agreed that more resources are needed for clients who have animals, including designated outdoor areas for animals, crates, and help with pet sitting. Two clients at the San Diego site talked about the need for separate spaces where animals could eliminate and be bathed.

At LA site 2a, clients without animals talked at length about the resources that should be provided. The focus of the conversation was on “babysitting” of other people’s animals. The consensus of the group was that clients should be encouraged to help each other care for the animals: “We’re in a communal environment...So people need people to help them.” They also objected strenuously to the prohibition against caring for one another’s animals. They did not think it made sense for the person or the animal to put an animal in a shelter when their person was, for example, going through a 72-hour mental health observation. They talked about having a cadre of sitters who could be called on as needed: “Just having a designated amount of people or a couple of people that can be reliable, that when there’s an emergency, [people don’t] have to worry about their pet because there’s somebody that they can trust [who] will take complete care of their animal...They can trust that [and] it will help them get better.” Further, the group suggested that training be offered for those who wanted to serve as pet sitters so that they were equipped for the job.

Clients with animals at LA site 2a also discussed needing help with pet sitting. Two clients suggested having a pro bono veterinarian and vet techs come to the shelter every month to provide medical care and temporary respite (i.e., the techs would care for the animals on designated days). If that was not possible, they recommended relaxing the rules and letting other clients pet sit: “ But allow us to lighten up a little bit and allow us to be able to say, hey, if you’re not doing anything Tuesday afternoon, can you watch, the dog? I got a doctor’s appointment or a dentist appointment.”

At LA site 1, three clients with animals agreed that a designated outdoor area for animals would be helpful. At the Toronto site, two clients suggested that crates be made available to people with animals.

## Challenges

**Finding Shelter.** Clients from all four organizations talked about how challenging it was to find a shelter that accepted animals. All of the clients with animals agreed that the policy of accepting animals was integral to their decision to come into the shelter. One client at LA site 2a said, “Well, there was a lot of places in Los Angeles period that don’t want to be bothered with animals, especially on a shelter site. And it’s very hard to find a place that will deal with animals.” Another client at that site agreed, “There was another facility that I was matched with. And I declined that facility because it was the beginning of winter and in the facility they

wanted you to have your animals in a kennel outside. And I said, that doesn't work for me because I don't want my animals to be outside. I mean, if that's the case, I'll be outside with them.”

Clients at LA sites 2b and 2c also said they would not have come into the shelter if their animals were not allowed: “I said I refused to go into a shelter unless you can find me a shelter that'll take me and my dog. Because I'm not just going to leave my dog. I'm not going to put her in a boarding house. I'm not going to kennel her...I don't have anybody other than me to take care of her that I know will take care of her to the best of what she needs. And plus, I need her to get through this. We've gotten through so much together. I need her to get through this.”

The stories were similar at LA site 1. One client said, “I was coming down the dirt road and there was [the organization] at the end and they said can we help you? I go, if you are pet-friendly. They said yeah and I said you can help me then.” Another client explained that he and his dog were living in his car: “When they first approached me, I wasn't for it. I actually told them no. And then they came back...and reached out to me and were like, well, we can get [your dog] in...too. And that's when I was like, okay, for sure.”

At the Toronto site, all of the clients noted challenges finding shelter and permanent housing that accepted pets. Three of the clients specifically mentioned objecting to shelters that required animals to be crated. One said, “I did the intake...And then they said, okay, well, your dog is going to have to go in the crate on the other side of the room. What? No. I stood up and it was in the middle of winter and I said to my boyfriend, I don't care if I have to sleep outside.” Another said, “You know, having the dog in the crate is not fair to her.”

**Maintaining Boundaries.** Clients at three of four organizations noted challenges maintaining boundaries between their animals and other clients—both physical and interpersonal boundaries. At LA site 2b, one client talked about being proactive in establishing physical boundaries by asking others if they are allergic to or scared of animals: “Just let me know and I'll remove Lucy...because I'll respect your feelings about it.” At LA site 1, two clients also talked about trying to be respectful of fellow clients: “You may have a roommate who may be allergic to them or afraid of them just period. So you're not trying to conflict with them or make them feel uncomfortable. That's why you tell me you know if it's a bother. I can leave him [the dog] alone or take him with me if I have to.”

Clients at LA site 2 and 2c and at LA site 1 reported difficulties managing physical boundaries, particularly with respect to people approaching their animals without asking first. Of her dog, one client said, “She doesn't like to be pet by a bunch of random people. But...most of these people here have mental disabilities. So it's like you can't really expect too much.” Another client said, “It's just that here people don't ask me--Hey can I pet your dog? They just run in

and want to grab your dog...Then it's like, if my dog bites you, it's not my fault. You didn't ask for permission. The dog doesn't know you." Another client described steps to maintain a safe space, "I know my dog, even though she's a Shih Tzu, she's very territorial. She'll let it be known like, hey, you're getting too close. You know, what are you doing? Don't talk to my mom. And she's in her own buggy. So I keep both of them in their buggy and it zips closed."

At the Toronto site, one client described struggles keeping people from feeding his dog, "People were coming up to me and feeding him things. I told them I don't want you feeding...the dog. I never fed the dog any...it had its own food, dog food. There were people feeding him bacon and ham...anything, right? Finally, now they don't feed him. I had put up a little sign: Please do not feed the dog." Three other clients at the Toronto site discussed challenges managing interpersonal boundaries with respect to clients making judgments about one another's treatment of their animals: "I had an issue with a guy who kept his dog in the crate all day. But I've since apologized to him because I was unaware that he takes the dog out at night and they cuddle like two little kids. Like, you know, he loves his dog. I was having a bad day and I took it out on him 'cause the dog is in the crate all day long, which is something that I would never do to my dog. But it's not my job to tell him how to take care of his dog." Another client talked about the stress of the environment and being judged: "All the other people that live here are constantly complaining about how terrible of cat owners we are. So this is...everything's just really, really stressful."

**Defining the Role of the Animal.** Clients at all of the organizations expressed confusion about expectations of service animals, emotional support animals, and companion animals. At the San Diego site, clients without animals generally agreed that animals at the shelter were service or emotional support animals and as such should be expected to be with their person at all times. One client made a distinction between a service animal and a watchdog, "We can't have a watchdog. A watchdog watches in response to people getting too close to you. A service animal won't do anything until the master tells them to. And in response to the people on the street, their dogs become their watchdog. They're watching for people to come across their master's perimeter. So when they come into this cube, now that becomes the area that they're watching over. So it becomes a not safe situation for everybody." In contrast, clients with animals at the site did not describe their animals as performing a service or support role.

At LA site 2 sites, only one client described a specific service role for her dog and reported specific training for that role (seizure alert). At LA site 2c, both clients specifically described the emotional support their dogs provided them. Participants in the 2a focus groups who had animals did not describe them as service or emotional support animals.

At LA site 1, clients talked about staff helping them get letters documenting their animals as emotional support animals, but not every client reported having a letter. At the Toronto site,

clients talked about the emotional support their animals provided, thought they did not describe them as service or emotional support animals. One client talked about the role her dog played in helping her overcome loss and addiction, “I've got family issues and she's been there. I had a miscarriage in January and we got her shortly after and she's kind of taken the place of my baby. So having her away from me through the night...wasn't conducive to my health or my sanity in that place because I'm also trying to... I'm a recovering addict, trying to stay clean, trying to stay focused. And I'm trying to focus on her [the dog], trying to make her a main purpose.”

**Managing Bias, Benefit, and Well-being: Who Should Have Animals?** At the San Diego site, all of the focus group participants without animals expressed skepticism about people in shelters or on the street being able to care for animals. One client said, “A lot of people don't take care of their dog. It's one thing for the person to feel the need to rescue something, but you got to rescue it and take care of it...You're not capable [of that] because you live here.” She went on to say that clients should be prevented from getting an animal after they move into the shelter: “So the problem is the change of the guard somewhere, they're letting people go get rescue animals. The lady told me she went to rescue an animal. How do you rescue an animal when you're not rescued. You're in here being rescued, so you don't have space to rescue something else.” Both clients with and without animals agreed that clients coming into the shelter should be limited to having one animal.

At LA site 2a, people without animals struggled with balancing concerns about clients' ability to provide care of animals with a belief about the benefits animals provide: “I feel like sometimes with the dogs when they're like taken care of and their owners are watching them and supervising them, it brings a little joy because you see the dog can bring happiness.” Clients without animals talked at length about the risks and benefits of allowing people with mental illness to have animals in the shelter. One client explained, “Sometimes they take out their mental illness on their pet...But what I see happening to the animal is very sad. But it's difficult because she's not intentionally trying to, you know, [hurt the animal]. So that combination of the mental illness and...the steps she takes to, you know, handle her thing, it can be very disturbing to watch. And then because it's her pet, we can't intervene.” She acknowledged the potential detrimental effect of taking the animal away: “You know the issues...if that dog were taken away. It would be detrimental to this person. So things like that are what we need to know. Things like that are what staff needs to understand so we can figure out how to make things work [better for the person and the animal].” Another client agreed, “I don't have a problem with the people having their dogs here. Like she says there is a person here that-- we've all seen it. And it hurts us to see the dog go through pain, discomfort. You're right. And it's like I don't want to report the dog because then the dog is going to be taken away, be put to sleep, and it's not fair to the animal. So maybe if they're going to accept the animals here, then

find some type of program [that] if they see a person doing this to a dog, we'll try to bring them into a group and teach them what not to do and what to do with the dog.”

Yet another client without animals at LA site 2a talked about feeling helpless to address the situation, “And you can't jump in. You can't if you see something terrible or whatever. It's not like the dog whisperers here that can just say let me see if everything is OK. Cause owners are very protective, and they're very--it's their dog. It's like a parent that's abusing their kid. What are you saying to my kid? What are you doing? They don't want you--no information. The dog can't talk to us. It's just a matter of noticing and paying attention.” She went on to explain that some animals were very well cared for, “Oh, and there's a few that are here that are gorgeous. I mean they set themselves aside they're prized dogs, you know, and they're very well taken care of and they're very nourished and shiny and glowing. And you can tell they've been cleaned and washed in their coat, you know, shampooed and brushed.” Responding to this, one client said, “But then on the other side, when we see them not being taken care of, it's super depressing. And it's like it's sad and there's nothing you can do cause it's not your dog. It is just too much.”

Clients with animals at LA site 2 talked about their commitment to their animals despite their current circumstances: “And that seems to always be an option. Well, you know, maybe you should give up your animals. No, like that's not fair. Why is that? Why should that even be an option? Like, are you kidding me? We're going to give up our animals, like, are you going to give up something... And I think that there should be more empathy and compassion for us because who wants to be in this situation, let alone in this situation with animals? Like we love our animals like they are our children. They're not just animals to us. They're not just dogs. These are our babies, you know, and we just want the best for them regardless of the fact that we're homeless. You know, we get a lot of bad talk from people if you will. Oh, how are you homeless and you have animals like you have a dog or whatever. It can happen to anyone.” One client stressed the importance of responsibility for the animal and the need to consider alternatives if that responsibility could not be fulfilled: “You know, it's not up to [the organization] to make sure that our dogs have food, our dogs have shots, our dog as the necessities that they're supposed to have, we're their owners. That's our responsibility. It's not up to [the organization] to make sure that these things are done. We're not children. We're adults. When we chose to take on the responsibility of these animals, we have to see it through. They don't have a voice. They can't talk. So we're responsible for them. It's our responsibility. It's no one else's responsibility but ours. And if we can't, you know, take all of that responsibility and live up to it then we have to explore options to see what we can do. You know, for them to have a happy life. So it's not up to anyone else. It's solely up to us.”

Among clients without animals at LA site 1, the consensus was that people who are homeless should not have animals. One client said, “It's not feasible to have an animal here. I'm working

on me. I can't deal with my dog." Another said, "I don't think any animal should be allowed in these places period." Yet another saw a more self-serving motive, "I don't think anybody in this place deserves dogs....It's a ploy so they can just panhandle the dog to get more money." Selfishness was also noted, "Because they don't even love themselves. Otherwise we wouldn't be doing that stuff...So how could you love an animal [if] you doing stuff to hurt yourself...Yeah, it's selfishness."

At the Toronto site, even the clients who had animals expressed reservations: "I'm sorry, but if you can't afford it or can't have your animal have those shots, you should not have that animal. And you shouldn't be coddled or given a place, a respite because you're forcing another being to be in that situation with you...I always hated when I saw homeless people and animals. And I never thought that I would be in that situation myself. I was always one of the people who said, if you can't take care of that animal, you should not have them. You should put it out for foster or adoption. I know you love it for whatever reason and it loves you, but it's not fair. But now that I'm in the situation myself, I'm doing everything in my power to make her [the dog] not understand that she's at a loss, just as if she was a child. Because she can't do it for herself." Another client talked about how conflicted she felt: "And I feel really, really bad for the cat because up until here, he's been an indoor/outdoor cat. Now he has to be on a leash...And that means that he basically has two cots where he can roam around 24/7. Nothing else I can do...We've had him forever and we're very attached to him. We don't want to give him up. But I also feel like this isn't a life for him. Not that it's any life for us either, but we're supposed to be responsible for him, so I'm just not sure."

## Benefits

**Affection and Emotional Support.** At all four organizations, clients with and without animals talked about the importance of the affection and emotional support animals provide both their people and others. At the San Diego site a client without animals said, "I have anxiety so when I babysit the dog she helps me." Another said, "And being with an animal can be very therapeutic. It is a good thing."

At LA site 2a, clients with animals talked about the importance of their animals and the fact that they would refuse shelter if the animal couldn't accompany them: "...Especially when we're talking emotional support. Because I've got enough things going on. The last thing you want to do is take my dog away from me. It's real--that is the last thing you want to do is take the dog." Another client said having her dog with her was like "having my baby with me." Clients without animals all agreed that it is "positive for individuals to bring their pets." One client talked about animals providing support to get through difficult times and provide a "sense of normalcy."

At LA site 2b, the client talked about her dog being her “best friend” and a confidante: “Lucy's gotten to the point where I talk to her.” At LA site 2c, one client talked not only about the emotional support her dog provides her but also the support she provides to other residents: “She's what's kept my sanity. She loves me. She sleeps right here and she just knows when I'm feeling bad. Even the girls in the dorms, some of them, she knows when they're [feeling down] and she'll go cuddle with them.” She went on to say, “She's my baby. I love her. She's my child. She is my child because all my kids are grown now. And this is real love.” Similar sentiments were echoed at LA site 1 where two clients with animals and one without talked about the importance of the “unconditional love” received from animals.

**Motivation.** At LA site 2c, one client talked about her dog giving her motivation: “I want [the caseworker] to show me what I need to do [to get a place] and how to get there, because that's all I want is a place for me and my baby. And I know I can do this.”

At LA site 1, one client explained: “It's something different but when you have your pet with you, it's almost like...you have a kid, a little kid with you. It gives you the drive. It gives you motivation...’cause you don't want to keep your dog in the car. So it's pushing you to work, to keep going. Like, I'm going to get you out of the car, not just for me, but for you, too, because I don't want you [to be here]. I need you to have a yard.” He went on to say, “Being homeless, you almost lose your sense of urgency or your sense of responsibility. Keeping your dog it makes you keep that. 'Cause I have to get up and take care of you. I can't let you run out of food and things of that nature. If I spend our money here, then I won't be able to have food or money for you. So I feel like when you're homeless with your dog it definitely keeps you, or just your animal period, it keeps you on your feet.”

Another LA site 1 client said, “I feel like shelters should definitely push on letting people keep their dogs. It definitely pushes you and not just emotionally, but physically, to get up and want to go and just do, do, do.” Yet another client said, “There have been times when I've been sick. Most of the time when you're sick, you don't want to do nothing. But when you have your dog there, you've got to get up. You've got to let them go do their business and stuff like that. So you're not constantly thinking about, I'm sick, and then you're not taking care of them. For me, my priority is I'm taking care of him first. Regardless, if I'm sick or not, I could be crawling, but I'm still going to let him do whatever he needs to be done...So long as he's here with me, I have been more motivated doing things.”

The goal of this study was to better understand how service providers are accommodating homeless clients who have companion animals. By describing similarities and differences in approaches, challenges, benefits, and lessons learned, our aim is to promote discussion about how to improve services for people experiencing homelessness with their animals and how to replicate the best features of approaches that are currently in place. While the study used a convenience sample of service organizations which was not necessarily representative of homeless service providers nationwide, the findings provide important information to inform discussion—and possibly debate—about how best to provide shelter for people and their animals.

Several key findings provide a starting point for that conversation. First, it was clear from discussion with clients that the shelter’s willingness to accommodate their animals was a critical factor in their decision to leave the street. It is unsurprising that clients with a deep attachment to an animal would be reluctant to enter a shelter without him or her. What is somewhat surprising, however, is the small number of people with animals who have taken advantage of these shelters’ animal-friendly policies. Only about 5-10% of the clients at each shelter had animals. And in some cases, the shelters rarely accommodated more than one or two animals at a time. This is contrary to fears expressed by some shelter administrators that accepting animals would open a floodgate. While three of the four organizations did not advertise their animal-friendly approach, which may have contributed to the lower numbers, the one shelter that did consistently advertise their pet-friendly policy had only 5-10% of their beds occupied by clients with animals.

The stated policy of three of the four organizations to “only” allow service and emotional support animals—and confusion about what that meant—suggests the need to educate both service providers and consumers about assistance animals, including the legal definition, federal requirements regarding reasonable accommodation, and how an animal is deemed a service or support animal. Assistance animals (otherwise known as service or emotional support animals) “work, provide assistance, or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provide emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person’s disability” according to a memo from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Fair Housing Act, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act all require shelter providers to make reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities who have assistance animals. In fact, all shelters in the U.S. are required to make this accommodation.

Shelters can choose whether or not to allow pets, but as discussed previously there was uncertainty on the part of both staff and clients as to whether animals were pets or assistance animals. How animals are “classified” in a shelter has important implications, not only for clients with animals but also those without them. Clearly, expectations of a service animal (e.g., in terms of training, staying with a person at all times) are different from those of a companion animal. Most of the animals in the shelters we visited were not technically assistance animals despite providing comfort and support to their people. In the absence of a clear definition of the animal’s role in a person’s life, it is difficult to make and enforce relevant policies. For example, the requirement to have a companion animal with a client 24 hours a day is likely unreasonable, particularly if the hope is that the person seeks work or other meaningful activity outside the shelter. Education about what constitutes an assistance animal and frank conversations about the animals coming into the shelter would facilitate development of policies and practices that reflect the actual role of the animal in each client’s life.

Regardless of the role of the animal in a client’s life, ensuring the welfare of that animal is important, though fraught with a host of practical, moral, and ethical issues with which both staff and clients reported struggling. Defining adequate care, ensuring it is provided, managing cases in which it is not, educating staff and clients around this issue, and helping to elucidate biases that arise from culture and socioeconomic status are no doubt challenging issues. In fact, one of the key themes noted by both staff and clients was the question of whether or not people who are homeless should have animals. These are difficult topics, but they must be more proactively addressed by all shelters that accept animals—in the interest of the well-being of clients, animals, and staff alike.

Maintaining the minimal requirements of a low barrier shelter while at the same time ensuring the health and well-being of people and animals can pose significant challenges. Key questions include: 1) How can partnerships with animal welfare organizations help clients get the care they need for their animals, including basic vaccinations, within a reasonable time period following shelter entry? 2) What strategies are most effective to help clients meet daily expectations around hygiene (e.g., picking up after animals) and safety (e.g., keeping dogs on leashes)? and 3) What role should other clients be allowed to play in the care of animals that are not their own (e.g., pet sitting)? While staff we interviewed did not discuss legal issues, this is certainly an area that must be considered in the context of strategies to ensure the health and well-being of all shelter residents.

The benefits of having animals in the shelter were widely acknowledged, even by those few clients and staff who expressed concerns about the appropriateness of having animals in a shelter environment and the capacity of some residents to care for them. The animals provided emotional support and promoted motivation, responsibility, and a sense of community. They

were described by staff and clients alike as being therapeutic not only for their people but for others in the shelter.

So where does that leave us? While these four organizations have made strides in developing strategies to accommodate people experiencing homelessness with their animals, there is much more to be done to ensure that policy and practice protocols are robust, implemented consistently, and refined as we learn more about what works—and what doesn't—in co-sheltering. Staff at all four organizations described an incremental approach to development of policy and practice guidelines. Protocols are developed as issues arise or new information becomes available. Of note, directors and staff alike are open to learning from other agencies and adapting the way they do business. This openness offers the opportunity to assist in crafting—and testing—new protocols that address emerging issues, particularly those noted here. By drawing on this study's findings and the work of other organizations and groups, including My Dog is My Home and the Co-Sheltering Collaborative, we are well-positioned to improve the provision of homeless services and enhance the well-being of both people and their animals.

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