

**BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT
BUTTE COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTERS**

SUMMARY

The 2007-2008 Butte County Grand Jury reviewed the four animal shelters that operate within Butte County after some concerns arose while looking at city police departments. During our review we found that the Northwest SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in Oroville and the Butte Humane Society in Chico are private, non-profit entities. Because these two locations are contracted by Butte County and the City of Oroville, and the City of Chico, respectively, for the care of animals, and are not public agencies subject to Grand Jury review, we could only use these sites for comparison. Therefore, we centered our efforts on the Paradise and Gridley animal shelters, both of which are a part of those cities' Police Departments. The Paradise Police Department's Animal Control Unit operates a clean and well organized shelter that the citizens of Paradise can be pleased with. The Gridley Animal Haven, with inadequate facilities and fewer resources, was found to be struggling in its efforts to provide minimal care to its animals. Gridley's small shelter building is a converted gas station located in the downtown area, made of cinder blocks, and bordered by an asphalt parking lot.

BACKGROUND

The 2007-2008 Grand Jury reviewed all of the animal shelters in Butte County – Northwest SPCA (Oroville), Butte Humane Society (Chico), Paradise Animal Shelter (Paradise), and Gridley Animal Haven (Gridley). Excluding the Gridley Animal Haven, visits at the other animal shelters gave this Grand Jury a clear understanding that those three facilities all use basically the same operating procedures for the care of the animals. This includes vaccination for DPHCC and kennel cough when the animal comes through the front door. They are also scanned for a microchip (a device that may have been placed under the skin for identification purposes in compliance with state law). Then there is a five day mandatory hold for strays (an animal that had been picked up by animal control or brought in by a concerned citizen). When an animal is surrendered by its owner, there is no hold period. In either case, when the hold period is up, the animal is tested for temperament (a test for sociability). When it has been determined it is adoptable, the animal is given further tests to insure good health. If applicable, it is spayed or neutered and, if necessary, the animal is given a checkup by a veterinarian. The process for cats and dogs is similar. While in the care of these facilities, the animals are given food and appropriate care. They are socialized, walked, and viewed on a daily basis by facility employees and volunteers, and exposed for adoption. The cats are almost always placed in a special room, attractive to the eye and displaying a homelike atmosphere. This gives them every chance for a new home.

DISCUSSION

The Grand Jury found that three (Oroville, Chico, and Paradise) of the four shelters in Butte County operate similarly using procedures that are the best for the welfare of the animals (cats, dogs, and sometimes exotic creatures) from the time the animals enter the front door until they are adopted, euthanized, or sometimes moved to another facility such as a specific rescue center. It was made very clear that each of these three shelters, room permitting, is open to accepting animals from outside their own jurisdiction. This is done to give the animals every chance for a new life. The Northwest SPCA in Oroville is a new and superbly managed state-of-the-art facility. The Butte Humane Society in Chico, with its older facilities in need of expansion, operates an exceptional program that its community supports and appreciates. The Paradise Animal Shelter, under the jurisdiction of the Paradise Police Department, was found to be working earnestly to provide the best care possible for its animals. The Animal Control unit of the Paradise Police Department, thanks to the passage of Measure N, is fully staffed now at: one Animal Control Supervisor, one Animal Control Officer, one part-time Animal Control Officer, and two part-time shelter assistants. Measure N, a parcel tax passed in 2004, provides one dollar monthly per address in funding for animal control. Recent accomplishments include increased animal control coverage to seven days per week, increased hours that the shelter is open to the public, and, consequently, an increased number of animal adoptions to the public.

The fourth facility, Gridley Animal Haven, which operates a seven day per week site with one five-day-per-week employee, is in need of improvement. An unannounced Monday morning visit by the Grand Jury found the shelter dirty and with very strong odors distinctly noticeable from outside the building. It could not be determined if the animals had been fed. The cages were obviously not cleaned and some of the animals were covered in their own feces. The Animal Control Officer was at the police station training to fill in as a dispatcher. This employee also has the responsibility to answer road (telephone) calls from citizens with concerns about the safety or health of animals in the city limits. There is no regularly scheduled relief for this purpose. When possible some animals are passed to an animal shelter in Yuba City to the south. This relieves crowding and gives the animals more exposure for adoption. Volunteers are not utilized at this shelter.

Animals brought to the Gridley shelter are scanned for a microchip and then held for a five day waiting period. They are not vaccinated and no further care is given unless it is obvious that medical attention is necessary. The animals in the Gridley shelter are housed without any access to outside runs. This means they have to urinate, defecate, eat, and sleep in one place. They have little or no exposure to fresh air or sunshine. In the new fiscal year there are plans to add an outside run but there will not be automatic access to it.

Because the sole Animal Control Officer has such widespread responsibilities, the hours the shelter is open are minimal. There is a telephone number posted on the front door to call if interested in adoption or looking for a lost animal. The Animal Control Officer

comes in on her two days off (overtime) to provide minimal weekend care or, if unavailable, an on-duty police officer does this on their normal duty tour. There is no dedicated schedule in place and no logs are kept.

FINDINGS

- F1.** The Gridley Animal Haven operates a seven day facility with one, five-day-per-week, employee who also answers road calls away from the shelter. No regularly scheduled relief exists.
- F2.** The Gridley Animal Haven has no set hours to remain open for the adoption of animals.
- F3.** The Gridley Animal Haven keeps no logs of care and feeding on weekends or holidays.
- F4.** The Gridley Animal Haven houses its animals in cages with no outside facilities forcing them to urinate, defecate, eat, and sleep in the same cage.
- F5.** The Gridley Animal Haven operates at a noticeably substandard level compared to all other animal shelters in the county.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** The City of Gridley needs to develop a plan to assure proper care of their animals seven days per week.
- R2.** The City of Gridley should consider creating a volunteer program to help provide assistance at this shelter as soon as possible.
- R3.** The City of Gridley should develop comprehensive procedures covering all aspects of animal care commonly used at other shelters to assure good health and proper care of the animals at its shelter.
- R4.** Unless immediate action can be taken on these recommendations, the City of Gridley should consider closing its animal shelter and contracting the care of its animals to nearby shelters.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

From the following governing body:

- City of Gridley