

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Minneapolis Animal Control is giving dogs away to good homes
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CATHY Now, you all have heard of pandemic pets, right? Tons of us ran out, got puppies and kitties to help us cope with lockdowns and the changes brought about by the COVID virus. Well, now, shelters are seeing a big uptick in abandoned pets.

As an example, Minneapolis Animal Care and Control is begging people to foster or adopt, because the shelter has been swamped with animals. Yesterday, officials announced they were waiving adoption fees just to get these four-footed friends homes. Here with us is Caroline Hairfield. She's the director. Of Minneapolis Animal Care and control. And Caroline is joined by Madison Weissenborn, the Volunteer Coordinator there. Caroline and Madison, welcome.

CAROLINE Thank you. Thank you for having us.

HAIRFIELD:

MADISON Thank you.

WEISSENBORN:

CATHY Thanks for being here. Say, Caroline, how many animals do you have at the shelter right now? And how is that different from what you normally have?

CAROLINE Well, oh my goodness, we have a ton of animals here. There's about 139, 140 animals here on my last count.

HAIRFIELD: There may actually be a few more now. And that is up by like 58% from the same time last year. And those animals came in in the last 11 days. So they have just a ton of animals.

CATHY What do you think is going on?

WURZER:

CAROLINE I think it's just a combination of all kinds of things. There's been about a 67% increase in owner surrenders,

HAIRFIELD: where people are citing that they're having housing issues or maybe there's medical issues for the animals they can't afford to care for. And we're also seeing quite a few strays that have increased by about 50%, where animals are just being abandoned, which is unfortunate.

CATHY Oh my gosh, that's so sad. And, Madison, if you want to chime, in feel free too-- can you talk about, I can only

WURZER: imagine the stories are just so heartbreaking from folks about when they are dropping off a pet, why they're doing that. Caroline or Madison, go ahead.

CAROLINE I can jump in. It is heartbreaking when a pet already has a loving home, but there's no amount of help that we

HAIRFIELD: can offer that can keep that pet in that home. And that's just heartbreaking for me personally, because the shelter, although we do our very best, is never the very best option right for anybody, whether it's human or animals, to have to live in a shelter and move away from the people they know and love. So it's hard.

CATHY This is a labor of love. I'm sure this is a labor of love for your staff too. I know you probably don't have many staffers-- like, what, three people or so? Madison, do you have volunteers that help the staff?

MADISON Yeah. We are very fortunate. We have a great, great community of volunteers that do everything from walking **WEISSENBORN:** the dogs, we do playgroups for the dogs, cuddling the cats, and kind of really everything in between.

So we have a really dedicated group, both of staff and volunteers, that we do our best to do everything we can to make the lives here for the shelter pets as good as they possibly can. But there's just nothing like a couch or a bed for them to sleep on in a home.

CATHY Oh, bless the volunteers who are the cat cuddlers. I can imagine that-- well, I know because I actually used to work at an animal shelter-- it is stressful not only for the animals coming in, because they're not sure why they're there, right? But I'm assuming it's got to be stressful for staff and volunteers too.

MADISON Yeah, they're constantly busy. And we really strive for really, really high standards of care here. We try to get **WEISSENBORN:** everybody out three to four times a day. We do treadmill training for the dogs that really need to get some of that energy out.

We do playgroups. We do all sorts of stuff. But with the influx of animals and with that increase of animals, our capacity for care, so what we can do for every single animal does decrease with every new intake. And so our staff really has a hard time.

We kind of have to pick and choose, OK, what dog needs it the most? And what can we do for everybody else? And that's a hard choice for the staff and volunteers to make, to have to choose between two lovely dogs or things like that. It's a hard choice to make. And it's one that sometimes we lose sleep over.

CATHY Say, Caroline, what kind of pups do you have in the shelter right now? Are they are they mainly pity breeds?
WURZER:

CAROLINE Well, we have a lot of pity breeds. That's a popular breed up here in the Midwest. And we also have other breeds.
HAIRFIELD: There's some lab mixes in there, and shepherd mixes, and malinois. And we really get all kinds of dogs, and cats, and animals in general of all species in here that can fit just about any person's living situation.

So people often think of shelter pets as throwaways or animals that have issues. And in our reality, we have some really nice animals in here that are in here for no fault of their own. They're just in the system. And it happens to lots of us, right? And it happens to animals too.

CATHY But as you know, there are dog breeds that are more desirable than others. I'm thinking if you had a shelter full of mini-labradoodles, you know, you'd be able to adopt them out all day by the end of the day, you know? So those harder to adopt out breeds, what are you doing for those animals?

CAROLINE Yeah, so our staff are tasked with rehabilitating all animals and tasked with ensuring that every animal, no matter what their needs are, we meet those needs for that animal in the shelter. And we do a lot of work with our animals.

And we do something called play for life, where often Pitis are associated with dogs that don't like other dogs, right? And so we do a lot of playgroups where we have animals out in the runs together. And they have an opportunity to play and just be dogs.

And it gives us a lot of insight on how that animal is going to be in the community. And we also utilize foster homes that tell us whether they're good with children, or if they're housebroken, and all that kind of stuff. And they also help us work on behaviors so that the animal can be a very good ambassador for his breed, whether it's a pit bull, or a labradoodle, or a beagle, or chihuahua. We want to make sure that every person that gets a pet from us gets a very high quality pet that's going to be successful in their home.

CATHY So folks can adopt your dogs and cats for no fee. Has anybody taken you up on the offer so far?

WURZER:

CAROLINE Yeah, people do take us up on the offer. We just need more people to come forward. And that includes

HAIRFIELD: sterilization. We have two veterinarians and three vet techs that are on staff, so these animals are really well vetted.

And we make sure that all their medical needs are met before they're put on their adoption floor. And they're also vaccinated, and they're microchipped, and sterilized. So it's a really just a fabulous deal the city's offering to pet owners.

CATHY So, Madison, for folks who love animals but can't have one at home right now, can they help out in other ways?

WURZER: I'm thinking by volunteering.

MADISON Yes. We have a volunteer program. So, really, we're open to anything. If people are like, I want to do paperwork.

WEISSENBORN: Great, I have a job for you. So really anything-- you can just sign up online. It's pretty easy.

They go directly to my inbox. I usually do orientations monthly. And we just continue to bring volunteers on. Because the more volunteers we have, the more extra, additional things that we can do-- we can do more training, we can do more playgroups, all of that good stuff.

And also if they aren't ready to make that step of, OK, this is my forever dog or my forever cat, we do have a foster program now. It's relatively new. We kind of launched it earlier this year, but so far it's been really successful.

And even if somebody wants a dog for a weekend, if they're like, man, I have nothing to do. I want to go on a hike. Great, come pick up a dog, give them that forever home. And a lot of ours, knock on wood, have been foster failures, which is my favorite thing on the planet, where they leave our shelter for a weekend and they never come back because they realize, this is a great fit for me.

So it's been really successful. And that's also something they can sign up online for. So there's so much that our community can do for these pets. And if they're not ready to adopt, we have a lot of other options.

CATHY So, Caroline, we've got some people listening, where can they call or where can they go for information?

WURZER:

CAROLINE They can go to the city website at Minneapolis.gov. And they can look at the animals online. And they can also

HAIRFIELD: call 311 if they need help making an appointment.

But you can also make an appointment online. And then on Fridays, we're open to adoptions all day without an appointment. And we're going to be expanding those hours in the near future.

CATHY I love the rent a dog for a walk or weekend. Caroline and Madison, best of luck. Thank you for your work.

WURZER:

CAROLINE Yep, and one more thing, we even have a running program in the summertime where runners come in, and grab
HAIRFIELD: a dog, and go running with them. So we do all kinds of things.

CATHY I love that. Good luck to you both. Thank you so much.

WURZER:

MADISON Thank you.

WEISSENBORN:

CAROLINE Bye bye.

HAIRFIELD:

CATHY Bye bye. Carolyn Hairfield, Madison Weissenborn, they're with the Minneapolis Animal Care and Control. The
WURZER: shelter has been overwhelmed by abandoned animals recently, and they're asking folks to consider fostering or
adopting, with fees waived for now.