

Return to owner: What's the big deal?

Have you ever walked a neighbor's pet back to their house? Maybe you were just out for a walk with the family when a friendly dog walked up. You read the tags and learned that the dog lived just three houses down. A knock on the door and a "thank you" later ... the pet is happily reunited with its owners.

What if it was your full-time job to complete 1,700 of these instances in a year? That's what the City of San Angelo is tasked to accomplish in FY21 as we make San Angelo a no-kill community.

A little history:

- FY19 – 17% of outcomes (or 828 animals) left via return to owner
 - Launched American Pets Alive! programming
 - Includes reuniting with owners in field
 - Owners redeeming from the shelter
 - Wildlife releases
 - Already exceeding American Pets Alive! best practices of 15%
- FY20 – 34% of outcomes (or 1,562 animals)
 - First full year of American Pets Alive! policies
 - Includes all of the above
 - Added shelter-neuter-return of eligible community cats
 - Doubled prior year's performance
- FY21 – Goal of 38% (or 1,700 animals)
 - New "Claim Your Canine" posts on City Facebook page
 - More ideas to come

Animal Services staff boasts such success stories:

Thick Bit – a pit bull who escaped his yard with his brother 10/23/20 and somehow got up on Loop 306 at Bryant Blvd during rush hour traffic. Thankfully, both dogs were microchipped and Animal Services officers returned them home directly from the field. Neither dog was harmed and no traffic accidents occurred.

Minnie – an ancient Shih Tzu was missing for six months before we found her. A late-night call for an injured dog resulted in an Animal Services officer picking her up. After examining her, no injuries were identified but she was certainly in rough shape. Although she wasn't microchipped, a volunteer remembered a family lost their small dog several months ago. A quick phone call later and Minnie was back home.

Now some might say these owners were irresponsible and don't deserve their pets back. I would disagree; maintaining the family unit that includes pets is a sign that our community's households are thriving. In almost every circumstance, a pet's homelife is preferable to a stay in the animal shelter.

We cannot build or adopt our way out of crowded animal shelters. Proactive programs that resolve issues and bring long-term solutions are necessary to solve the pet overpopulation problem. Investing in families and meeting them where they are is key as we work to achieve 90% of animals released alive in FY21.