

A Veterinary Private Practitioner's Perspective



Accessible Spay/Neuter

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A Veterinary Private Practitioner's Perspective on Accessible Spay/Neuter

“Challenge yourself as well as others to give back instead of just taking.”

This is the advice of Dr. Melissa and Evan Hunchak, owners of Airport Animal Hospital (AAH) in Regina, Saskatchewan, who were inspired to give back to their community after reading the book, *Redefining Success: Still Making Mistakes* by W. Brett Wilson.

The Hunchaks approached Regina Humane Society (RHS) with the idea of providing complimentary dog and cat spays and neuters for shelter animals in exchange for recognition by the RHS on Facebook and other media. Their successful program and the lessons they learned are described below.

Program description:

The AAH agreed to provide complimentary sterilization surgeries to animals the RHS had placed for adoption and who were waiting to be sterilized prior to going to their new homes. The RHS delivered these animals to AAH, where the surgery was conducted. The patient was then discharged to their new owner to take home. Structuring the program in this way gave AAH the opportunity to interact and build a relationship with a new client who would potentially return to AAH for future veterinary care.

After launching the program and gaining some experience with the partnership, AAH and the RHS were able to expand the scope: when adopted animals were not available due to scheduling issues, they turned to long-term resident RHS animals who needed extra incentives to encourage



Regina Humane Society cat spay at Airport Animal Hospital.

Pictured from left to right: Doctor Patricia Van Parys, Jaycee Dolter, RVT, Janae Bast, RVT.

their adoption. The AAH sterilized these animals and then returned them to the RHS, who could further reduce or eliminate their adoption fee. AAH also promoted the adoptable animal to their Facebook followers. These animals have all been successfully placed in a home.

In exchange for the complimentary spays and neuters, RHS recognized AAH's contribution on Facebook and other media. This recognition served to promote the veterinary practice in place of traditional marketing approaches and helped AAH to be seen as socially responsible corporate citizens.

Resources provided by partner organizations:

AAH provided the hospital facilities, staff, equipment, and materials for the complimentary spays and neuters. RHS supplied Elizabethan collars and microchips, which were implanted by AAH. AAH also provided ear tattooing. Any other services requested by the client were performed by AAH and billed to the client. The program was set up so that complimentary spays and neuters were booked only when empty surgery slots existed, with 24 to 48 hours' advance notice. Because the clinic was already open for business and the space was simply underutilized, the only costs of the surgeries offered were the wear and tear on equipment and the cost of materials such as anesthetic, sutures, surgery supplies, tattoo ink, etc. No external funding was provided for this program. AAH dedicated a portion of their annual donation budget to fund the program, in keeping with their goal of giving 5% of their annual profit to support worthy causes within the community.

Program success:

AAH was able to operate the program without significant disruption to day-to-day operations. They received positive feedback from the general public and clients, as well as on social media, contributing to an improved corporate image. A goal of 50 surgeries was set for the 2013 year. By the end of the year, 53 surgeries had been performed. Based on the success of the 2013 pilot program, AAH decided to continue their program in 2014. Evan Hunchak feels that the partnership with RHS succeeded due to the flexibility of both parties to compromise and alter operations slightly to meet the needs of their partner organization.

Recommendations:

Booking surgeries with only 24 to 48 hours advance notice proved to be a challenge for RHS, who had to find a suitable candidate and have them delivered to AAH within that short time frame. From the AAH's perspective, the challenge was filling vacant surgery times only and not occupying a period when a revenue-generating surgery could take place. To better accommodate the program in the future, AAH will try to provide more free surgeries during their less busy periods, such as late fall, winter, and early spring.

The Hunchaks suggest a trial period to explore a charitable idea and resolve any glitches before plunging into a new initiative. They also advise others to take the time to develop a detailed plan of the program before executing it and to ensure sufficient attention can be given to the program for it to succeed. "There are always bugs that need to be worked out in the infancy of any operational change, and if you do not have time to deal with them, any well-intentioned idea is likely doomed to fail."