

POSITIVE ENFORCEMENT

COMMUNITY APPROACH TO ANIMAL CONTROL OPENS DOORS
IN SANTA CRUZ // BY MICHAEL SHARP

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS were originally called to the housing complex in California's southern Santa Cruz County to deal with an aggressive dog out front. But it's what they found in back that has stayed with officer Carlos Montes. There, his rope tied to the pole of a clothesline, was a little terrier mix named Miklo. He was well loved, but his living conditions were meager: a worn travel crate with a small blanket and a tray of old leftovers.

On a follow-up visit, Montes met the two young boys who obviously loved Miklo. They cleared a space and assembled a donated doghouse. Montes discussed ways to provide enrichment. He dropped off food and toys. And he checked in later, having bonded with the boys over the fact that he too had lost his father at a young age. For the dog in the parking lot, who belonged to another family, officers provided a doghouse and other supplies.

"[Miklo] was cared for," Montes says. "It's just, they didn't have the means to get a few more things for the dog to make his life even happier. And for us to be able to provide that, and not just remove a dog from its loving home ... it's great."

For four years now, the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter has emphasized a community-focused approach, going door-to-door to provide spay/neuter information, enrichment items and yes, even doghouses. The model shares many of the same tenets as the HSUS Pets for Life program, and when field services manager Todd Stosuy met PFL leaders Amanda Arrington and Kenny Lamberti at a recent Animal Care Expo, the two parties hit it off.

Lamberti then traveled to California to provide additional training to animal control officers and volunteers who now handle Santa Cruz's door-to-door program. The hope—and "it's potentially game-changing," Lamberti says—is that this less punitive, more constructive, resource-driven approach continues to spread to other animal control agencies.

"I am seeing officers hungry for this sort of stuff," says Stosuy, who also serves as president of the National Animal Care & Control Association. Often, he says, officers will remove a dog from a home, only to see the owner get a new one a month later. "Rather than just kind of doing this vicious cycle of not solving problems, not keeping animals in homes, we need to get back to the root of working with the community."



Todd Stosuy (right) visits with Cookie and owner Jorge Olivares.