

2016

Best Friends National Conference

Playbook



No-Kill Community:

What Worked, What Didn't,
What's Next

Atlanta, Georgia



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics	4
Trap-neuter-return programs	6
Appointment-based owner surrender and counseling program	9
Working with local rescue groups and transport partners	11
Adoptions and adoption promotions	13
Volunteers.....	16
Animal care.....	18
Field services.....	20
Community outreach.....	22
Presenter	24



This playbook is one in a series meant to be used as guides as you explore how you can save more lives in your community. Getting to no-kill isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition. Each community is unique, with its own challenges and resources, so the playbooks highlight a variety of communities and detail the various ways that leaders in those communities progressed to no-kill or have their communities firmly on that path. Of course, there are some common denominators: Collaboration, commitment, hard work and data-driven approaches to problem-solving are some of the factors that have taken these communities to lifesaving levels once believed to be unreachable. We hope that you will find the information in the playbooks helpful and inspirational as your community works to **Save Them All®**.

Key participants in helping the community to become no-kill:

- LifeLine Animal Project

Some keys to LifeLine Animal Project's success:

- Opening two low-cost, high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter clinics
- Having a trap-neuter-return (TNR) assistance program that serves the entire metro Atlanta area
- Running appointment-based owner surrender and counseling programs to help people keep their pets
- Collaborating with more than 100 local partners and maintaining good relationships with these groups
- Increasing adoptions via a variety of creative initiatives and marketing efforts
- Creating a number of structured programs to recruit and retain volunteers
- Supporting an open communications environment in which animal services officers are considered a community resource for resolving animal-related issues
- Hiring dedicated employees who have a shared vision and shared responsibility for the animals in their care

Introduction

Founded by Rebecca Guinn in 2002, LifeLine Animal Project has strived to assess the needs of Atlanta's animal welfare community and to provide innovative, strategic resources in support of its mission to stop the killing of healthy and treatable homeless animals in shelters. From 2002 to 2012, LifeLine developed a number of lifesaving programs, including opening a private no-kill shelter focusing on the rehabilitation of animals with medical or behavioral issues; opening two high-volume, low-cost, free-standing spay/neuter clinics; starting a comprehensive trap-neuter-return program; and launching a number of community outreach efforts.

After a decade of running its own no-kill shelter and implementing effective lifesaving programming throughout the city, LifeLine Animal Project boldly took action that has resulted in a more far-reaching impact on Atlanta's companion animal population. "In 2012, we recognized that if LifeLine's goal was to end the killing in Atlanta's county shelters, we needed to actually run those shelters," Rebecca says.

So LifeLine submitted bids and, in early 2013, was awarded contracts to manage Fulton County's open-admission animal control and shelter services and DeKalb County's open-admission shelter. With this commitment, LifeLine is responsible for animals within greater Atlanta and beyond.

When LifeLine took over management of the two county shelters, it made a number of positive changes, including:

- **Increasing the staffing with a focus on adoptions.** Lifeline created a dedicated and experienced team of rescue and adoption coordinators.
- **Creating more welcoming adoption environments.** A grant from Purina enabled a renovation of the cat adoption area at the Fulton County shelter. In DeKalb County, LifeLine built a new bonding area where prospective adopters can get to know available pets.
- **Decreasing owner surrenders.** Counselors at both facilities build relationships with the community and offer struggling pet owners resources and options to enable them to keep their pets rather than surrender them to the shelter.
- **Enhancing marketing with innovative promotions.** One promotion that waived all adoption fees led to more than 300 animals being adopted in just one month.
- **Increasing visibility.** Fulton and DeKalb shelter animals are now featured around the community at up to five adoption events a week.
- **Facilitating transports.** Animals are being transported to nearly empty partner shelters in the Northeast for adoption.

While the Fulton County shelter has been managed by various nonprofit organizations over the past four decades, this is the first time that DeKalb County has outsourced its shelter operations. LifeLine's transformation of the DeKalb County operation also included:

- **Implementing policies and procedures targeting disease prevention.** The facility has been parvo-free for probably the first time in the building's 30-year history.
- **Addressing the disproportionate percentage of pit bull terriers in the shelter.** Funding was secured for the Free Pit Fix program, which underwrote the cost of spaying or neutering any pit bull mix for a year.
- **Expanding spay/neuter accessibility for community cats and pets of DeKalb residents in financial need.** Using the LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinic, LifeLine's SNIP (Spay Neuter Impact Program) DeKalb offers no-cost procedures and vaccinations to assist pet owners and keep more animals out of the shelter.

- **Tracking DeKalb pets more carefully.** An efficient pet registration system was implemented with the intention of getting strays out of the shelter and back to their homes more effectively.

Live release rates have climbed dramatically since LifeLine Animal Project took over the management of the two county shelters. In 2012, the year before LifeLine took over the operations of the two county shelters, the Fulton shelter had a dismal 38 percent total live release rate. The live release rate for dogs was 40 percent and the live release rate for cats was 30 percent. In 2014, the first full year under LifeLine's management, the Fulton shelter's total live release rate climbed to 76 percent. The live release rate was 75 percent for dogs and 79 percent for cats.

In 2012, the DeKalb shelter had a 56 percent total live release rate — 52 percent for dogs and 67 percent for cats. In 2014, the DeKalb shelter's total live release rate climbed to 80 percent. The live release rate was 77 percent for dogs and 86 percent for cats. In 2015, the Fulton County shelter had a total live release rate of 85.4 percent and the DeKalb shelter had a total live release rate of 83.1 percent. LifeLine is well on the way to making Atlanta a no-kill community.

LifeLine is committed to its no-kill mission and plans to reach its no-kill goal by continuing to aggressively promote pet adoption, provide affordable spay/neuter services, increase public awareness and advocate for lifesaving public policies. LifeLine Animal Project is transforming a city with a troubled animal welfare legacy into a compassionate community deeply rooted in a culture of lifesaving, creating a model to be emulated nationwide. Here's more about LifeLine Animal Project's lifesaving programs.

Atlanta, Georgia: Fulton and DeKalb counties	
2012 live release rate:	Fulton County shelter, 38%
	DeKalb County shelter, 56%
2015 live release rate:	Fulton County shelter, 85.4%
	DeKalb County shelter, 83.1%



LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics

LifeLine's two low-cost, high-quality, high-volume clinics, located in Avondale Estates and College Park, Georgia, have performed more than 85,000 low-cost or free spay/neuter surgeries to date. In 2014, LifeLine's clinics fixed 12,280 animals: 4,390 dogs and 7,890 cats, including 3,947 community (aka feral or stray) cats. In 2014, LifeLine also spayed or neutered 4,477 animals at the Fulton and DeKalb facilities, so LifeLine's total number of spay/neuter surgeries in 2014 was 16,757. And LifeLine's clinics are on track to perform their 100,000th surgery in 2016. These substantial numbers make LifeLine the largest spay/neuter provider in Georgia. Additionally, the clinics offer low-cost pet wellness and vaccine days each month and provide low-cost vaccinations to another 2,500 pets each year.

In addition to a measure of impact, the number of animals served by LifeLine's clinics is a critical measure of the clinics' overall effectiveness and efficiency, Rebecca says. LifeLine's clinics use the Humane Alliance low-cost clinic business model, which requires high volume for sustainability and emphasizes cost control, staff training and precise time management to achieve sufficient client volume while still delivering quality care. Staff recruitment and retention is also critical to the success of the clinic business model and to the overall organization, Rebecca says. LifeLine's goals for earned revenue as a proportion of the organization's operating budget is likewise tied to clinic volume.

The LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics are open to the public and offer services at low cost to many pet owners who might not otherwise be able to afford the expense. LifeLine provides discounted spay/neuter services to more than 50 metro shelters and animal rescue groups. LifeLine's clinic network is a cost-effective primary provider for several area spay/neuter assistance programs, including the Pets for Life initiative run by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The LifeLine team has worked with several organizations, including HSUS, to help develop targeted community outreach efforts and provide free spay/neuter services for pet owners in financial need. When necessary, LifeLine provides client transport options to other groups to better serve outlying communities and pet owners with limited transportation options.

With the acquisition of the Fulton and DeKalb county shelters in 2013, LifeLine's clinics have been integral to the organization's ability to help animals at risk in the community. Through LifeLine's own SNIP (Spay Neuter Impact Program) DeKalb, the LifeLine clinics provide free spay/neuter for dogs and cats of any DeKalb residents who need assistance, and a similar program is available to Fulton residents on a referral basis as funding permits. LifeLine's subsidized and free community cat surgery programs have helped more than 27,000 free-roaming cats.

WHAT WORKED

- **Collaborating with other organizations to increase spay/neuter.** The LifeLine team has worked with several organizations to help develop targeted community outreach efforts and provide free spay/neuter services for pet owners in financial need. When necessary, LifeLine provides client transport options to other groups to better serve outlying communities and pet owners with limited transportation options.
- **Developing good customer relationships and partnerships with local rescue groups and other spay/neuter assistance programs.** LifeLine staff are always willing to go the extra mile. Except when medically necessary, LifeLine's clinic staff will never turn an animal away and will use its partnerships when necessary to find financial resources for any pet owner in need.
- **Using the Humane Alliance model.** This clinic business model has proven to be effective and efficient over the last decade of LifeLine's clinic operations.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Having a high rate of no-shows.** When blocking out surgery days for other spay/neuter assistance programs, LifeLine sometimes experienced a high rate of no-shows. LifeLine encourages newer spay/neuter initiatives to allow its staff to help with scheduling and appointment reminders.
- **Serving all pets with SNIP.** LifeLine's SNIP DeKalb program was not effectively reaching LifeLine's targeted audience until LifeLine limited the advertised program parameters to dogs who weigh more than 30 pounds and cats.
- **Having one clinic that's inadequate.** LifeLine's Avondale clinic, which opened in 2005, is very small and overdue for expansion. It also suffered for too long with an inadequate phone system that has since been replaced.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Increasing LifeLine's spay/neuter capacity and low- and no-cost service offerings, particularly for the area served by its Avondale clinic location.**
- **Exploring a more extensive transport program for clinic clients in underserved and outlying areas where spay/neuter services are scarce.**
- **Finding additional funding to expand free services to pet owners in need in Fulton County.** Plans are in the works for increased marketing and visibility, including a more robust web presence with online scheduling options.



Trap-neuter-return programs

To date, LifeLine has performed TNR surgeries for 27,000 community cats at the LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics. About 3,500 of them came from DeKalb's Feral Freedom program.

LifeLine's Catlanta TNR assistance program serves the entire metro Atlanta area. The program coordinates specific TNR projects, provides trapping instruction, loans traps, provides ongoing support to trappers throughout the trapping process, and educates community cat caretakers regarding appropriate community cat management. The program is also called on to mediate neighborhood and community free-roaming cat disputes and complaints. LifeLine distributes cat food donations to community cat colony caretakers when available, helps relocate community cats slated for death at other shelters or in demolition areas, and promotes TNR as the first and only response to free-roaming cats.

Using the LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics, Catlanta focuses on the Fulton and DeKalb communities, where most cats are spayed or neutered and vaccinated at no charge to the caretaker, but the services extend beyond the county lines. In 2014, 3,947 community cats were fixed at LifeLine's clinics at subsidized rates or for free. DeKalb community cats accounted for 1,391 surgeries, Fulton community cats accounted for 1,082 surgeries, and 1,474 cats came from 19 other metro area counties.

The Feral Freedom program in DeKalb County, funded by Best Friends, commenced in 2011 with LifeLine as the spay/neuter provider. The effort is a joint project among Best Friends, LifeLine and DeKalb County. All community cats trapped by DeKalb County animal control officers are brought to LifeLine's clinic for evaluation, spay/neuter and vaccinations. Healthy cats are returned to their outdoor environments by a Best Friends employee, and underage kittens or cats with medical needs are transferred to LifeLine's private shelter rehabilitation and adoption program.

In Fulton County, the county animal ordinance does not require LifeLine's animal control officers to pick up or trap feral or stray cats, and they only do so in emergency or extraordinary circumstances, Rebecca says. Healthy community cats brought to the Fulton shelter by the public are accepted for free spay/neuter and vaccinations by the shelter veterinarian and then are returned to the location they came from by LifeLine's animal control officers. In 2014, 185 cats brought to the Fulton shelter were spayed or neutered and vaccinated at no charge and then returned to their outdoor homes by LifeLine's animal control officers. Residents requesting assistance with community cats are most often referred to Catlanta and the LifeLine Spay & Neuter Clinics, where services are provided at no charge for cats in Fulton County with funding provided by Best Friends and other donors.

Feral Freedom is the quickest and most effective program for reducing the killing of cats in shelters, Rebecca says. In 2010, before Feral Freedom began, the DeKalb County shelter

killed more than 1,400 cats — 69 percent of its total cat intake. With the advent of Feral Freedom in mid-2011, the cat euthanasia rate dropped to 53 percent. In 2012, the first full year of Feral Freedom, it dropped to 22 percent. Since LifeLine took over the shelter in mid-2013, it has kept cat euthanasia below 10 percent.

LifeLine has achieved similar results in Fulton County by promoting TNR as the first response to community cat issues and providing resources directly to the community. In 2012, before LifeLine took over the Fulton program, 1,460 cats were killed — 64 percent of the shelter’s total cat intake. By December 2014, LifeLine had reduced cat euthanasia to 7 percent while at the same time reducing cat intake by 40 percent from 2012 to 2014. In the first couple of months of 2015, fewer than 10 cats (only those who were gravely ill or severely injured) per month were euthanized at the Fulton shelter.

Passing ordinances favorable to managing community cats through TNR is extremely important. When it comes to free-roaming cats, local ordinances vary widely across jurisdictions, Rebecca says. In Fulton County, the existing ordinance explicitly excludes cats from leash laws and animal-at-large restrictions, so LifeLine could implement TNR as a first response through a change in policy rather than a change in the law. In DeKalb County, a pro-TNR community cat ordinance was enacted and took effect on March 15, 2016.

The impact of LifeLine’s TNR program in Atlanta’s two central and most populated counties, Fulton and DeKalb, has been phenomenal, Rebecca says. While LifeLine’s ability to effect policy change in these counties was key, the program owes much of its success to the generous funding received from private donors and organizations such as Best Friends.

WHAT WORKED

- **Implementing the Feral Freedom program.** Revising county animal control policies regarding community cats and adopting TNR as the first response to community cat complaints effectively prevents cats from entering the shelter in the first place and eliminates the need to find relocation sites for community cats who otherwise would be slated for death in municipal shelters. The kill rate for community cats at LifeLine’s open-admission county facilities is now practically nonexistent, Rebecca says.
- **Collaborating more with the community and educating the public.** When LifeLine shifted to a more community-based approach, it focused less on recruiting and retaining long-term TNR volunteers. Instead, LifeLine focuses more on educating people about the benefits of TNR and advising and supporting them during the TNR and community cat management process throughout the life span of the community cat colony. Sharing the responsibility with the public — rather than recruiting volunteers (or staff) for 100 percent of the work — has made a big difference in the number of cats and caretakers LifeLine has been able to help. While people definitely prefer that staff or volunteers do all the work, much of the community was willing to participate in implementing solutions with LifeLine’s support. The participation and personal investment of individuals in the community often determines whether a specific TNR effort is successful, Rebecca says.

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- **Trying to create a volunteer group of TNR “service providers.”** Initially, LifeLine tried to aggressively recruit and retain TNR volunteers throughout the metro area. Because trapping and transporting community cats is very different from most volunteer opportunities with animals, such as walking dogs or socializing cats, the TNR program did not have the appeal that volunteering with other pets had. Volunteers bond with animals at LifeLine’s shelters, but with TNR, the burnout rate is high. Also, the thousands of community cats in greater Atlanta far outnumber any potential volunteer workforce.
- **Expecting volunteers to do all the TNR work.** In the early years, LifeLine sent volunteers

out to try to “clean up” various neighborhoods. If the neighborhood wasn’t invested in the effort, however, the TNR project failed. When new cats showed up in the neighborhood, the residents did not trap the cats because they expected that a LifeLine volunteer would eventually arrive to do the work. Volunteers often got sidetracked with their own lives (families, jobs, crises, etc.) and did not return. “While we could sometimes find volunteers to manage specific TNR projects, if the neighborhood did not participate, we found that the project ultimately failed,” Rebecca says. “When the neighborhood committed to the project, the TNR project succeeded.”

WHAT’S NEXT

- **Getting funding for TNR throughout the metro area.** Neighborhood investment in TNR is made easy in Fulton and DeKalb because community cats in these counties are sterilized and vaccinated for free at LifeLine’s clinics. Rebecca says LifeLine offers subsidized, below-cost surgeries for free-roaming cats in other counties, but widespread success of TNR throughout the metro area will require additional funding and continued collaboration with rescue groups and other organizations in order to provide free spay/neuter for community cats in outlying counties.



Appointment-based owner surrender and counseling program

LifeLine's Fulton and DeKalb facilities are open-admission shelters, and LifeLine accepts pets from county residents whenever necessary. Because LifeLine wants its shelters to be a last resort for people considering relinquishment of their pets, LifeLine works with pet owners to find alternative solutions to surrendering pets. LifeLine's owner surrender and counseling program requires that people make an appointment with one of LifeLine's designated counselors before relinquishing their pet to the shelter. With limited exceptions for genuine hardship, LifeLine also charges a surrender fee. On average, LifeLine's owner surrender and counseling program keeps 50 to 100 pets out of LifeLine's shelters every month, Rebecca says.

To keep pets in their homes, LifeLine's counselors are prepared to offer free or subsidized spay/neuter services and vaccinations through LifeLine's clinics, free pet food, free doghouses, and access to low-cost and free veterinary care, as funding permits. LifeLine also works with pet owners to help repair fences or provide kennels and crates. LifeLine counselors offer advice and referrals to low-cost trainers for behavioral issues. For pet owners who must re-home their pet, LifeLine encourages them to first seek solutions among their own networks and provides them with a list of local rescue groups and limited-admission shelters.

In 2015, LifeLine implemented a referral-based program in which field officers in Fulton and DeKalb counties refer clients directly to LifeLine's outreach coordinator for assistance. LifeLine uses this primarily for compliance issues to help citizens comply with the anti-tethering ordinances or provide proper shelter. Officers can also refer people for help with spay/neuter and food donations. LifeLine's outreach coordinator works one-on-one with the referral clients to help them get whatever they need to care for their pets.

WHAT WORKED

- **Scheduling appointments with a designated trained counselor to offer solutions.**
- **Telling pet owners up-front that LifeLine is happy to help them and thanking them for trying to find help.**
- **Asking questions and listening to the answers.**

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Accepting relinquished pets with no questions asked.** Prior to LifeLine's management, both the Fulton and DeKalb county facilities accepted surrendered animals often without asking questions or offering alternative solutions or assistance.

- **Threatening to give citations or reprimanding people for not knowing how or not being able to care for their pet.**

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Establishing a more proactive program to help struggling pet owners.** LifeLine's community outreach efforts are currently aimed at keeping pets out of shelters by providing affordable and accessible resources, including veterinary care, for pets at risk in the community. Often when someone makes the decision to turn his or her pet in to the shelter, however, it is too late for intervention. Rebecca says LifeLine is hoping to establish a more proactive program and resources with high visibility to help struggling pet owners find solutions before they decide to bring their pet to a shelter.
- **Establishing and publicizing an animal helpline.** The helpline would expand LifeLine's reach and make it easier for people in need to ask for help sooner rather than later. For now, LifeLine's efforts are mostly referral-based.



Working with local rescue groups and transport partners

In 2015, LifeLine transported approximately 4,800 animals to local rescue and transport partners, up from 4,000 animals the previous year. Most of these animals went to local rescue groups or limited-admission shelters, with about 300 dogs and puppies being transported to groups in the northeastern U.S. for adoption. Unlike the situation in some cities where a single local partner accepts the majority of transferred animals, LifeLine relies on many groups to help save lives. LifeLine works with more than 100 local partners, and maintaining good relationships with these groups is critical, Rebecca says. LifeLine strives to make it easy for them to transfer animals from its shelters.

As funding permits, LifeLine provides medical treatment and spay/neuter services at little or no cost for pets transferred to local partners. About 25 percent of dogs coming into LifeLine's shelters test positive for heartworm disease, and LifeLine provides heartworm treatment at cost or even free. LifeLine's local rescue partners are very important when it comes to rescuing sick and injured animals, who generally need more extensive veterinary care than LifeLine can provide in its shelter settings.

Transports to groups in the Northeast help make room and increase LifeLine's capacity for the high daily intake of its Fulton and DeKalb facilities, particularly during the summer months when intake can be as many as 35 animals or more each day at each facility. Some of LifeLine's most valuable rescue connections were secured while searching for partners in the Northeast. For most transports, LifeLine uses its own staff, volunteers, foster families, rescue connections and resources.

WHAT WORKED

- **Having amazing and tireless rescue coordinators at each facility.** LifeLine's rescue coordinators make themselves available at almost all times to answer questions and facilitate transfers to local groups.
- **Actively using social media channels for moving animals.** LifeLine has separate social media pages on Facebook dedicated solely to animals urgently needing placement. The pages are followed by most of LifeLine's rescue partners and enable LifeLine's coordinators to keep online conversations focused and productive.
- **Working with a single receiving organization.** For transports, working with a single receiving organization is more effective than transporting to multiple smaller groups in various locations. When working with smaller organizations in the Northeast, LifeLine limits the receiving rescue groups to just a few within close proximity to each other.

- **Utilizing LifeLine’s private shelter to quarantine dogs for transport.** Instead of primarily relying on foster homes to care for dogs for the two or three weeks necessary to quarantine the dogs and prepare them for transport, LifeLine has been using its off-site facility as a quarantine space. Rebecca says this has made the transport program easier to manage and much more efficient and productive.

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- **Working with transport partners who could only take a couple of dogs.** For transports, one of the initial struggles was connecting with rescue groups that were able to bring enough dogs into their program at once to warrant the trip.
- **Doing planning and logistics with limited staff.**
- **Generating enough foster support to satisfy quarantine requirements.**
- **Adopting out pit bull terriers via transport partners.** The majority of LifeLine’s dogs are medium to large pit bull terriers and pit bull mixes, dogs that aren’t desired by many transport partners.



Adoptions and adoption promotions

In 2012, the year before LifeLine took over management of the Fulton and DeKalb shelters, the facilities combined adopted out 2,356 animals. In 2014, LifeLine's first full year of running those shelters, combined adoptions totaled 4,629 — a 96 percent increase.

LifeLine's success in increasing adoptions required many creative initiatives and marketing efforts. LifeLine is not the only game in town, and many potential adopters in the Atlanta area were unaware that the county shelter facilities even exist, Rebecca says. LifeLine's open-admission shelters are more than 30 years old, and they are dramatically outdated and undersized for the animal population they serve today. In fact, the facilities were not designed or constructed to be open to the public. In 2002, when LifeLine was founded, the Fulton shelter was actually closed to the public; in DeKalb, the public was allowed only limited access, to a very small area in the shelter deemed the adoption area.

Now, with an emphasis on creating a user-friendly experience in these facilities, adoptions and adoption promotions are the primary ways that LifeLine saves lives and invites the community to take part in its work.

The open adoption policy involved a paradigm shift for some of LifeLine's employees and volunteers, particularly those who have been involved with animal rescue for many years. LifeLine is invested in developing a customer-service-driven team to help better match pets and people and increase successful placements. LifeLine also wants to increase its on-site volunteer presence to assist with the adoption process. The shelter facilities are small, outdated and generally unpleasant, but Rebecca says LifeLine can overcome this with positive human interaction to transform the overall experience of visiting a shelter from negative to positive.

In 2015, LifeLine began developing an adoption team dedicated to customer service. LifeLine trained its adoption counselors using the Humane Society of the United States' *Adopters Welcome Manual* and did two days of training with HSUS staff. LifeLine also implemented a two-day customer service training workshop for all staff who have any contact with the public, including customer service staff, adoption counselors, kennel technicians, veterinary technicians and field service officers.

WHAT WORKED

- **Making animals available for adoption immediately upon intake, unless they have identification.** For animals still within the stray hold period (three days in Fulton and five

days in DeKalb, per county ordinance), LifeLine pre-adopts. If an owner surfaces, LifeLine refunds any adoption fee paid and helps the adopter choose another pet.

- **Having an open adoption policy.** LifeLine staffers try to listen more than they speak, looking for reasons to adopt rather than denying adopters via arbitrary restrictions and criteria. With that said, though, adoption counselors know they have support to deny an application when necessary. LifeLine strives to make a visit to the county shelter both informative and collaborative.
- **Holding off-site adoption events.** LifeLine partners with local Petco, PetSmart and Pet Supermarket stores to house cats and kittens available for adoption and for weekend off-site adoption events. Housing cats in stores has been very successful. LifeLine averages five different off-site events every weekend and looks to volunteers to help keep these events going.
- **Running adoption promotions continuously.** LifeLine's fee-waived promotions during high-intake months, such as Dog Days of Summer in June and Celebrate Their Independence in July, are more likely to be picked up by the media than discount-only promotions. LifeLine's Free Dog Friday promotions offer free adoption for any dog who has been in the shelter more than three weeks, which highlights longer-term residents and gives them a better chance at adoption.
- **Investing in a social media presence, with staff dedicated to managing LifeLine's social media.** LifeLine takes "glamour shots" of its dogs and cats and posts them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. LifeLine's staff produce creative photography collages and short videos and market their "staff picks" to spotlight animals who've been in the shelter long-term.
- **Distributing information about adoption promotions to a number of audiences.** When promotions are back-to-back, they are marketed to a variety of different news editors and outlets. For example, sending a press release to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution "Bargain Hunter" editor instead of the county news editors, who had run news of LifeLine's promotions the previous month, helped achieve continuous coverage. Sending announcements about adoption promotions to neighborhood groups, neighborhood newsletters and county government outlets also increases exposure.
- **Expanding the number of "Pet of the Week" profiles and articles.** This not only helps get more pets adopted, it keeps LifeLine in front of the public consistently. Every week, LifeLine has articles in 22 community newspapers, both print and online, featuring about 10 different pets. Sixteen of those newspapers allow LifeLine to write about more than just available pets, providing Lifeline with an additional opportunity to highlight its programs, services and mission.
- **Promoting adoptions on television.** A regular spot on a local TV news segment allows LifeLine to feature animals from each of its shelters on a rotating basis, as well as promote the organization and adoption specials. These feature appearances also strengthen media relations with the anchors and reporters, which has increased overall coverage of LifeLine stories.
- **Seeking out partnerships with other organizations and businesses, even some not affiliated with animal welfare.** LifeLine does ask partners in animal welfare to spread the word, but the organization needed to move its support from the margins to the mainstream, Rebecca says. For example, the Southeastern Yoga Conference donated proceeds to LifeLine and discussed the organization on a TV news appearance and on their Facebook page. And a successful relationship with a film promotions company allowed a pet adoption spot to be integrated into messaging at local movie premiers.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Using a waiting list.** Before LifeLine took over management, the county shelters either used a waiting list system for animals still within the stray hold period, or made no effort at all to show animals within the stray hold period to the public. For some animals, the waiting list would have numerous names on it. LifeLine changed this almost immediately, making all animals available to the public and pre-adopting animals still in the stray hold period. Rather than adding their names to a long list of potential adopters, visitors see that the animal is already adopted and move on to choose another pet.
- **Holding off-site adoption events exclusively within county lines.** For LifeLine's off-site adoption events, it had to broaden its reach beyond county lines. In-county events were less likely to result in adoptions, especially for pit-bull-terrier-like dogs. As LifeLine became more successful at getting people to come to the shelters, it needed to extend its off-site events into outlying counties to showcase longer-term animals and achieve better results.
- **Waiving adoption fees for small dogs.** During LifeLine's initial fee-waived adoption promotions, it had people literally stalking the shelters waiting for certain toy breeds, which are relatively few in its intake, and fighting over the small, fluffy dogs. LifeLine now focuses its fee-waived promotions on dogs weighing more than 30 pounds.
- **Attempting to get quality photos on intake.** LifeLine has a number of staff with great photography skills and uses them to take new photos to replace the intake photos as quickly as possible.
- **Doing early morning TV appearances.** "Pet of the Week" live TV appearances at 5:30 a.m. reached few viewers and unnecessarily disturbed all the animals when one was being retrieved for the live broadcast.
- **Not being selective enough when choosing partners.** In seeking partners outside of animal welfare groups, LifeLine sometimes expended limited resources on events that did not reach its target audience. For example, LifeLine held an adoption event at a local technical college where students could not have pets and had few ties to the Atlanta area. LifeLine needed to be more selective and focus on non-traditional partners with more of a family audience.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Providing more support to adopters after they leave the shelter.** LifeLine wants to streamline follow-ups to quickly identify and work with adopters on the issues they may be having with their new pet. LifeLine is exploring training options for adopters who need extra help, perhaps even "continuing education" classes for new adopters. "We want to be known as the go-to place to find your next pet by offering services to support new adopters from beginning to end," Rebecca says.



Volunteers

Volunteers are an integral part of LifeLine’s operations and play a huge role in bringing its mission to the community. “LifeLine is blessed to have many dedicated volunteers and a core group of longtime volunteers, some of whom have been with the organization for nearly a decade,” Rebecca says. Volunteers assist with walking, grooming and socializing dogs; caring for and socializing cats; bottle-feeding kittens; staffing LifeLine’s off-site adoption events; and doing fundraising, foster care and more.

LifeLine recently hired an organization-wide director of volunteer services to take its volunteer program to the next level. LifeLine’s goal is to have a solid, well-organized volunteer program that makes it easy and rewarding for people to help. LifeLine has also created a number of structured programs to recruit and retain volunteer partners, including these:

- **Dog for the Day.** Volunteers take one of LifeLine’s fully vetted dogs around town for the day for exercise and to give the dog more exposure. The dogs wear “Adopt Me” vests. This program has been very popular since its inception. “Volunteers who participate in the program provide insight into a dog’s behavior that we may not be aware of in a shelter environment,” says Kerry Moyers-Horton, manager of placement services at the Fulton County facility. “These volunteers always come back with tidbits of information that help to paint a picture of what this dog may be like in a home with a family. They also take wonderful photos that we can use to help promote the dog on social media and other online forums. And the volunteers promote the dog to their friends and social media contacts.”
- **Run Club.** Every Tuesday evening (weather permitting), a group of volunteers take friendly, healthy dogs out for a run, jog or walk for about an hour. This has been a huge draw for active volunteers who want to do more than help inside the shelter.
- **Tails on the Trail.** During warmer months, LifeLine has larger groups of volunteers meet on Sundays to walk dogs through a park. The volunteers are assisted by two adoption coordinators. The dogs all wear “Adopt Me” vests and draw a lot of attention. This program has helped build LifeLine’s positive image within the community, and Rebecca says the volunteers and the dogs love it.
- **Charm School.** Once each week, a local trainer comes to the shelter to work with behaviorally challenged dogs who may need a little boost to help make them more adoptable. Volunteers are assigned to individual dogs and participate in hands-on training.
- **Foster program.** LifeLine’s foster program is a huge asset to the shelters. Without it, LifeLine would not be able to save nearly as many lives, Rebecca says. Foster homes provide care for LifeLine’s underage animals, cruelty case hold animals and longer-term shelter animals. LifeLine has dedicated volunteers who foster again and again, and also tell their friends and family about their foster pets and advocate for them to find homes faster. “As

a high-intake, open-admission shelter, one of our biggest ongoing challenges is space,” says LifeLine foster coordinator Dorothy O’Connor. “Although we have successful adoption and rescue programs, they alone are often not enough to manage the high intake that we experience. We have so many wonderful dogs that just need a little longer to be able to find their forever fit. Our foster homes not only provide lifesaving space, but also stability, socialization, exercise, training and love.”

- **Dog training class for foster parents.** In 2015, LifeLine added a monthly dog training class just for foster homes and provides foster volunteers access to one-on-one counseling with a trainer, as needed, for behavior issues. In terms of live release, dogs with behavioral issues are LifeLine’s biggest challenge so LifeLine is developing and using foster homes to more effectively help these dogs.

WHAT WORKED

- **Offering a variety of ways for people to volunteer.** It is much easier to recruit volunteers when you can present them with a variety of opportunities to fit their interests and lifestyles.
- **Using volunteer leaders.** LifeLine has several high-level, leadership volunteers who play a vital role in maximizing the organization’s financial and human resources. They are well-connected and have resources to help LifeLine put together effective volunteer programs, Rebecca says.
- **Providing orientation and training for volunteers.** Conducting orientations and training to help volunteers safely and effectively work with the animals has been instrumental in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- **Having structure.** LifeLine tries to maintain dedicated volunteer coordinators at each facility whenever possible, or assign specific volunteer tasks to be performed at specific times. LifeLine’s director of volunteer services is charged with overseeing the entire volunteer program and helps ensure a safe, helpful and rewarding service opportunity for all of LifeLine’s volunteers at all of its locations.

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- **Having haphazard volunteer programs.** When LifeLine first took over the Fulton and DeKalb shelters, the existing volunteer programs at these facilities were in disarray, with the volunteers unsupervised for the most part, Rebecca says. Initially, creating and implementing structured volunteer participation was secondary to instituting proper animal care and eradicating disease in these previously neglected shelters. For existing volunteers in these facilities who had not been associated with LifeLine before the takeover, the transition was difficult and could have been better managed. Assigning volunteers to busy animal care staff proved problematic.

WHAT’S NEXT

- **Involving volunteers in program assessment.** LifeLine plans to formally survey volunteers periodically to find out why they got involved, what they like about the program, and if they are satisfied with their volunteer experience. Evaluations help LifeLine improve its programs and retain volunteers, as they are more likely to stick around if they feel like they’ve been heard. People are more invested in programs they’ve helped build, Rebecca says.
- **Improving recognition of volunteers.** LifeLine is looking at ways to better recognize its volunteers, including an annual celebration event to say thank you.
- **Continuing to implement a more structured volunteer program.** LifeLine is planning a more structured volunteer management and scheduling process using online tools.



Animal care

LifeLine's open-admission facilities have a very thorough intake process. Upon entering the shelter, each animal is scanned for a microchip, a photo is taken, and his or her weight and temperature are observed. All animals receive deworming and flea prevention. Cats receive FVRCP vaccinations and dogs receive DAPPV and bordetella vaccinations. LifeLine administers combo tests on cats, heartworm tests on dogs over the age of six months, and parvo tests on every puppy under six months. LifeLine also provides heartworm prevention and checks for any medical issues that need to be addressed via a LifeLine staff veterinarian or an outside emergency veterinarian. All animals are then housed according to needs: medical, quarantine or general population.

LifeLine is very proactive about parvo prevention and detection in its facilities. Every dog under six months is tested for parvo before entering the building. If he or she tests positive, LifeLine immediately isolates the dog and begins treatment. LifeLine's DeKalb facility has a separate isolation trailer where puppies are treated for parvo by LifeLine's staff veterinarian until they recover symptomatically and test negative for parvo. At the Fulton facility, where space is more limited, LifeLine reaches out to rescue groups to get the dog out of the shelter and into medical care within 24 hours. Any dog who has come into contact with a parvo-positive dog is titer-tested for immunity and quarantined or medically treated as necessary.

The rescue community and foster volunteers come to LifeLine's aid in most of these cases. LifeLine has a close to 100 percent save rate for medically viable puppies who have tested positive, Rebecca says. Because of LifeLine's extensive and strict cleaning protocol in the shelters, there's rarely an outbreak of parvo once a dog has entered the kennel environment.

To save very young kittens and puppies, LifeLine has a bottle baby program: All neonatal nursing puppies and kittens are immediately bottle-fed by staff members and continue to be bottle-fed until a rescue group or foster home can be found. LifeLine's volunteer program includes workshops on bottle-feeding, particularly during the summer months, when neonatal puppies and kittens are more likely to arrive in the shelter.

LifeLine added a new program in 2015 called Kitten Sittin', which is essentially a kitten nursery; volunteers come to the shelter to bottle-feed newborn kittens on a schedule. LifeLine also utilizes foster homes for newborn kittens, but during the summer months, the number of newborn kittens overwhelms the foster program.

WHAT WORKED

- **Vaccinating and testing animals on intake.** Vaccination and testing of all animals upon intake are critical. LifeLine encountered a full-blown disease epidemic at the DeKalb

shelter on the first day of operations because the previous county management had not vaccinated cats or kittens on intake.

- **Getting help from rescue partners.** Reaching out to rescue partners for help with under-age, sick and injured animals increased lifesaving immediately.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Housing puppies in the main kennel.** At the DeKalb shelter, under the previous county management, puppies were housed in the main kennel ward. A small adoption area housed longer-term dogs who were easily accessible to volunteers for walking. While convenient for the volunteers, housing adult dogs in the small area was not a good use of the space and left the puppies at risk in the main ward. LifeLine converted the adoption area to a puppy area and was able to keep the puppies much safer from disease.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Building new facilities.** DeKalb County will be building a new shelter in the next few years. LifeLine hopes to encourage Fulton County to do the same. Both shelters are nearly 40 years old and dramatically undersized for the current population. Additionally, LifeLine plans to expand its private shelter facility to add capacity for its county shelter operations.



Field services

In Fulton County, LifeLine is responsible for animal control field services as well as shelter operations. LifeLine's animal control officers respond to more than 2,000 calls for service every month and are responsible for enforcing county and state animal laws and animal cruelty provisions.

Rebecca says LifeLine's enforcement philosophy supports an open communications environment in which animal services officers are considered a community resource for resolving animal-related issues. LifeLine's goal is to move enforcement services from complaint-driven to community-driven. LifeLine believes that animal control enforcement should be considered an advocating arm for people and the animals they love, with resources to improve the safety and health of everyone. With that said, though, LifeLine's officers will also prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those who refuse to accept help or responsibility.

WHAT WORKED

- Focusing on helping people rather than punishing them.** The traditional animal control model is centered on punishment, but LifeLine has found it more effective to equip its field officers with information and access to resources for citizens who need help. LifeLine officers have referral forms so that they, or a community outreach team, can follow up to provide free doghouses, pet food, fence repair, tethering alternatives, spay/neuter options and other services. LifeLine's officers are first responders and can often intervene and help keep animals in their homes and out of the shelters.
- Being proactive about communicating with law enforcement.** LifeLine provides field services to 14 jurisdictions in Fulton County, including the City of Atlanta. LifeLine has met with local law enforcement agencies in a mutual effort to open the lines of communication before problematic situations arise.
- Making every effort to return pets in the field.** LifeLine has microchip scanners in every vehicle to aid in returning lost pets in the field rather than bringing them to the shelter. To try to locate the owners of stray dogs, LifeLine's officers ask people in the neighborhood.
- Providing training for animal control officers.** LifeLine takes every opportunity to provide training and support for its officers.
- Waiving reclaim fees as a condition of spay/neuter.** When an animal is reclaimed at the shelter, LifeLine will waive the fee if the owner will allow LifeLine to spay or neuter the animal.
- Analyzing field service calls and shelter intake data.** LifeLine's role as animal control enforcement in Fulton County is integral to its community outreach effort. Now, after analyzing two years' worth of service calls and shelter intake data, LifeLine is able to target

areas that produce the most stray or impounded animals. Through officers' work on the ground, LifeLine can better understand what resources are needed to improve the lives of pets and people in the community.

- **Spreading LifeLine's messaging via animal control services.** LifeLine's status as the animal control provider gives the organization an "in" to community meetings, town hall discussions, homeowner's associations, apartment management companies, and other community groups to magnify LifeLine's presence and articulate the no-kill mission as a community issue.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Using the traditional animal control model.** Impounding every animal possible doesn't help save lives, so LifeLine doesn't do it. In addition, LifeLine actively seeks to dispel the "dog catcher" mentality in the community and works to ensure that its officers are treated with respect.



Community outreach

LifeLine's community outreach program, Community LifeLine, provides free spay/neuter services to pets of residents in low-income communities, engages community residents in the development of activities for and about their pets, and assist residents with pet wellness, veterinary care and training. The program is a community development project to improve the health and safety of the entire community by helping the community's companion animals.

LifeLine holds bi-annual Healthy Pets events in each county, providing free pet vaccinations, spay/neuter vouchers and free pet food, collars and leashes to the 400 to 500 pet owners who attend each event. These events have been very successful. Many attendees at these events begin to recognize LifeLine as a community resource and reach out to LifeLine throughout the year for advice and support. LifeLine's animal control officers and surrender counselors make these same services available to pet owners in need on an individual basis by referral.

"Traditional models of public animal sheltering, which are reactive and treat only the symptoms of animal neglect and abuse, have never really served the animals well," Rebecca says. "More communities throughout the U.S. are approaching 80 to 90 percent save rates as no-kill sheltering initiatives become the norm. Sustainability of these efforts is jeopardized if animals still remain at risk outside the shelter. Our attention must necessarily turn from treating symptoms to addressing the causes of animal neglect, abandonment and cruelty in the community."

LifeLine wants to increase public awareness about what it does and solidify LifeLine as the lead organization working on behalf of Atlanta's pets. LifeLine recently started a campaign called "I'm In" designed to encourage community members to get more involved by adopting, fostering, volunteering, donating, and spreading the word about the importance of these things, as well as spay/neuter, vaccinating, licensing and microchipping. There's even an "I'm In" logo that people can download to their social media pages. Rebecca says the purpose of the campaign is to galvanize the community around LifeLine's no-kill vision for Atlanta and encourage broader support.

WHAT WORKED

- **Carefully planning the Healthy Pets events.** Careful planning and attention to logistics have kept these events safe and effective engagements of LifeLine's target communities. With up to 500 dogs and cats and their people gathering for these events, LifeLine uses an all-hands-on-deck approach to manage animal and human crowd control.
- **Having separate contact information for Community LifeLine.** A separate phone number and email address are maintained specifically for Community LifeLine so that people needing assistance can be quickly connected with experienced personnel.

- **Including bilingual staff and volunteers at Healthy Pets events.** Bilingual staff and volunteers for these events have been invaluable, since LifeLine frequently has Spanish-speaking attendees at the events.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Underestimating the popularity of the event.** LifeLine planned for 500 pets at its first Healthy Pets event, but nearly 1,000 folks were in line for services within the first 30 minutes of the event. Going forward, LifeLine better targeted its marketing and increased the number of veterinarians at each event to accommodate the turnout.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Getting more buy-in for no-kill from the community.** “We believe the future of animal welfare and the sustainability of the no-kill community is vested in programs like Community LifeLine,” Rebecca says. “Animal homelessness is still very much a niche issue, and we need to move our cause into the mainstream with diverse community buy-in.”
- **Involving the community in creating needed programs.** LifeLine is working to establish a model that will encourage participation of neighborhood residents in creating actual program components. The organization is seeking to engage community leaders and organizations not traditionally associated with animal welfare. While LifeLine can provide resources for pets, its objective is to seek neighborhood input and investment in the program components most needed or desired. “LifeLine will rely on existing relationships and establish new partnerships with community groups, schools, neighborhood associations and law enforcement to design and implement collaborative neighborhood solutions for pets and the people who love them,” Rebecca says.



Presenter

Rebecca Guinn is the founder and chief executive officer of LifeLine Animal Project. She left behind a successful law career in 2002 after visiting a county shelter where the majority of animals were killed. Thinking there had to be a better way for a community to address its homeless pet population, she founded LifeLine Animal Project and implemented a long-term strategy to redefine metro Atlanta's practices and philosophies regarding caring for animal companions. In 2013, LifeLine was awarded the management contracts for Atlanta's Fulton County and DeKalb County animal shelters, where the organization has increased lifesaving rates by more than 50 percent and positioned Atlanta to become a no-kill community.

Under Rebecca's leadership, LifeLine also operates its own no-kill shelter, which focuses on animals with special medical or behavioral needs; Catlanta, the first and largest organized TNR program in Atlanta, which has sterilized and vaccinated more than 27,000 community cats; and Community LifeLine, a community outreach effort that provides free vaccines and spay/neuter to thousands of pets belonging to low-income Atlantans. Additionally, two LifeLine spay/neuter clinics together comprise the largest provider of spay/neuter services in Georgia, with more than 85,000 surgeries performed to date.

A licensed attorney, Rebecca drafted state legislation that banned the use of gas chambers in Georgia shelters. She is active in the Animal Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia and a member of the HSUS Companion Animals Advisory Council. Rebecca and her partner share their home with four dogs and a number of cats.