

Dallas Animal Services Applies Toyota Know-How to Care for Pets In Need

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Everyone needs a helping hand from time to time.

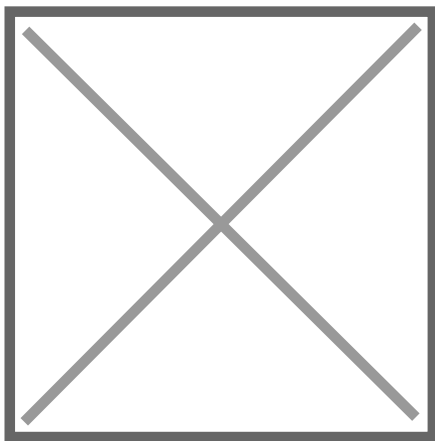
Toyota recently teamed up with Dallas Animal Services (DAS), a municipal animal shelter based in Dallas, to help improve its capacity and safety by increasing productivity.

Since the Toyota Production System Support Center (TSSC) launched nearly three decades ago, it has offered organizations and businesses of all sizes practical strategies and guidance to help them reach their maximum potential. Partnering with the shelter is one of the latest success stories where the automaker's kaizen – or continuous improvement — philosophy has helped impact the community.

As one of the nation's largest animal shelters, DAS served more than 16,000 dogs and cats during Fiscal Year 2021. Earlier this year, over the course of three months, TSSC worked closely with DAS to identify gaps and implement solutions in their day-to-day process.

“We are a high-volume organization that is moving a lot of animals through our system on a daily basis,” says Jordan Craig, general manager of Operations at DAS. “And each of those pets needs medical attention and treatment in addition to their general care.”

Due to the large number of pets, the shelter desperately needed a more streamlined process in place to ensure the safety and comfort of its animals and technicians during treatments. According to Craig, before the partnership, there was an “excessive burden put on the techs” when performing treatments.



DAS treats 150 to 200 animals a day, so there can be a lot of room for error if the proper procedures are not in place — and inevitably, there were mistakes being made.

“The first problem that we came across was that the report we used to deliver medication to each animal was somehow getting out of order,” says Michael Burk, manager of Veterinary Services at DAS.

As a result, employees were taking longer to transport medication around the shelter.

There were also missteps in properly dispensing the pets' medication. Prior to TSSC's involvement, while sorting medications, the shelter would place several different pets' pills in the same bowl, which made it easy to mix the medications up between each animal.

TSSC helped the shelter address those problems head on. They've since found solutions to improve each of those processes using Toyota Production System (TPS) Principles.

Burk says that the medication is now separated into sturdy, pet-proof divider trays and placed into “meatballs” immediately, thereby avoiding loose pills. The meatball trays are now kept on a trolley cart to make it easier for transport and prevent potentially dangerous mix-ups.

“If a dog gets loose, they can no longer get to the pills and potentially eat them,” explains Ann Barnes, assistant general manager of Field Operations at DAS. “And the meatballs can’t get mixed up because they’re all divided per dog. It’s a much smoother process.”

Tricks of the Trade

These seemingly simple, yet useful tweaks can have a profound impact on an organization. For DAS, these modifications allowed them to work smarter, not harder.

“By watching the process and implementing different countermeasures, we were able to eliminate steps that were no longer necessary, that were not value-added work,” says Craig. “We were able to remove several different processes — we were amazed.”

The TPS approach cuts through the waste — or “Muda,” as defined as a key concept of the approach — and leaves organizations with a more streamlined operation that benefits all parties involved. The best part is that it can be applied across industries with numerous variables.

“I think this is a great example of how you can take a process that is very clean-cut when it comes to production and translate it into what we do here with animals,” says Anthony Augello, assistant general manager of Shelter Operations at DAS. “It’s about really being involved, getting out there to see what’s actually happening, being completely open-minded, and not going with the ‘well, this is the way it’s always been done,’ type of mentality.”

By applying TPS philosophies, the shelter was able to improve efficiency and safety to care for the animals in need.

More Time, Better Care

Implementing kaizen to improve the work and using the ideas from the employees doing the daily work helped reduce fluctuation and save time.

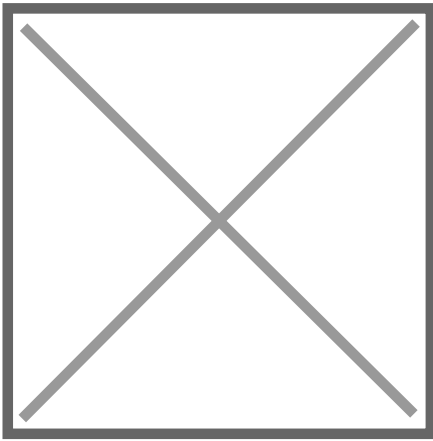
“Based on the initial condition that we saw when we started working with DAS, we found that it took 158 minutes to process 78 animals,” Michael Finnin, manager at TSSC and DAS project lead said. “After we implemented kaizen, it took 67 minutes to process 78 animals.”

Time is treasured in this industry, and this improvement allows the employees the ability to care for more animals in less time than they started.

“Our time is so valuable here, it truly is a matter of life or death, so this process — and every process moving forward that we’re able to shave a couple of minutes off of— is going right back to the animals and back to the community,” says Augello.

Teamwork Drives Innovation

Collaboration is essential to integrating new ideas and bringing forth new processes. Teamwork played a big part in the success of this project, and for good reason.



“For me, the group approach was really one of the best and most important key learnings,” says Augello. “Everyone had a different point-of-view and different insights, which really helped us look at processes from new perspectives. In doing so, and in walking through different areas of the shelter with medication delivery as our main project, we were able to identify so many other things and processes that we can improve upon.”

For instance, DAS plans to apply their learnings to other areas of their business, including customer service and website communications. However, they realize that successful transformations do not happen overnight.

“We also acknowledge that we have to invest the time in working through these problems if we’re going to make lasting change,” admits Craig. “But that will have a better impact than rushing through and trying to get a bunch of things fixed all at once.”

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Toyota is proud to work alongside its partners and share ideas to stay competitive, preserve jobs and support the community.

“Any organization or any individual can give a gift of money,” says Anthony Eleazarraraz, senior manager at TSSC. “But I think the gift of time and knowledge is something that can be passed on. Those skills can be taught. They can be shared with other organizations. So, it doesn’t just benefit that one agency, and in a lot of cases, the tools we share with these organizations are shared amongst their partner organizations.”

DAS has plans to do just that. They want to share their newfound knowledge to help similar organizations increase productivity.

“We’re really excited as a team to continue this process,” says Craig. “And also, to help others understand, especially other in the animal welfare industry. It’s really important that other organizations start learning these tools to maximize efficiency. Everybody’s struggling with short staff right now. If you can find some efficiencies and do more with the same, or with less, we can save more lives across the country.”

And while the kaizen philosophy that drives TPS is unique, it is also distinctly universal. In fact, almost any organization can take advantage of these tools that focus on continuous improvement and achieve impressive results.

“Toyota has created a process that works,” says Barnes. “If you can make it work at an animal shelter, it’s going to work anywhere.”