



No More Puppies Georgia Works to Save Dogs — One County at a Time

The organization started in Clayton County, offering free spay and neuter services, and has plans to expand across the state.

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Amy Yates had had enough. After more than three years of working tirelessly to rescue countless dogs from an over-burdened, high-kill animal shelter in metro Atlanta, she and her rescue partner, Kelly Crawford, were feeling exhausted and frustrated.

"We'd been working around the clock to connect dogs with rescues, raise money for vetting and boarding, secure foster homes, and transport dogs up north, but as soon as we'd get dogs out of the shelter, more would come in," says Yates. "It felt like we were bailing out the Titanic with a teaspoon."

To make things even more complicated, Yates had been doing all of this from her home in Brick, New Jersey. In fact, she'd never even been to Georgia before! So why would a dog lover in the Northeast want to help some troubled little southern shelter over 800 miles away?

"I accidentally found Clayton County Animal Control on Facebook," Yates explains. "I couldn't believe there were kill shelters like that, as New Jersey isn't high-kill. You don't see purebred Labs (http://www.dogster.com/dog-breeds/Labrador_Retriever) getting euthanized in our shelters, and there's a big demand for adoptable dogs up here in the north. So I started networking and rescuing their dogs."



The Clayton County Animal Control shelter. (Photo by Chris Savas)

Harnessing the power of social media, Yates and Crawford soon launched the Friends of Clayton County Animal Control Dogs Facebook page for sharing photos, descriptions, and videos of dogs on the shelter's euthanasia list, and inspiring local rescues to save them. But no matter how hard the ladies and their rescue network worked to clear the shelter week after week, intakes weren't slowing down at Clayton. In fact, they seemed to be getting worse.

So last fall, Yates decided it was time to get to the root of the problem by launching a free spay and neuter program for the dogs of Clayton County residents. After putting the word out on Facebook to attract clients and donors, Yates reached out to The H.E.L.P. Spay Neuter Clinic, a low-cost, high-volume pet clinic in Newnan, Georgia. They enthusiastically connected her with Fix Georgia Pets, a non-profit organization that provides fundraising support for local spay and neuter programs, which offered to help her with dollar-matching fundraising campaigns. Soon Tails of Hope, a rescue and spay and neuter advocacy group, was also on board help raise funds for surgeries. Prospective clients started reaching out, donations began trickling in, and by December 2015, No More Puppies Georgia was officially up and running.



NMPGA Founder Amy Yates and her dogs, Harry and Ticker.

"We knew that spay and neuter is the best tool we have thus far to combat (the pet overpopulation) problem, but that finances are the biggest barrier to getting animals fixed," says Yates. "Our concept is to help any pet owner who can't afford it to get their dog fixed, regardless of breed, for free, no strings attached. Our goal is to end euthanasia at the shelter, and once we fix Clayton, to extend our program to other counties."

But from all appearances, this "fix" won't be a quick one. In a state with one of the highest shelter kill rates in the nation, Clayton is just one of many Georgia counties plagued with backyard breeding, mediocre adoption rates, and irresponsible pet ownership. To make matters worse, the county is also known for being a hotbed for dog fighting, dog breeding, and animal neglect. And like many over-burdened, under-funded municipal shelters in economically challenged communities throughout the U.S., CCAC is tasked with handling the hoards of unwanted pets its citizens routinely dump at its doorstep. So if it wasn't for the small village of rescuers in and outside of Georgia working overtime to save Clayton's dogs, the facility would be continuously euthanizing for space. In essence, NMPGA couldn't come at a better time for the dogs, the shelter, and the county.



A typical, over-crowded Georgia shelter. (Photo by Lisa Plummer Savas)

So far, the response has been overwhelming. Since the beginning of this year, the fledgling organization has helped fix over 200 dogs, provided basic vetting and vaccines, and now boasts a waiting list of clients. All this has come as a complete surprise to Crawford, who was initially skeptical about the venture.

"Personally, I thought this was too big for us to even think about doing...but Amy has always said that this is the answer to stopping euthanasia in Clayton County," she says. "I am shocked at the amount of people who actually want their dogs fixed, as we were under the impression no one cared. Even someone on the Clayton County Animal Control Board told us we wouldn't succeed. (But people are) signing up in droves, and it's exciting to see!"



NMPGA Co-Founder Kelly Crawford and her pup, Jaeger.

When Leslie Mongford reached out to NMPGA for help, he was in a desperate situation. After his wife passed away, he found himself emotionally, physically, and financially overwhelmed with 25 unaltered dogs to feed and care for on his own. Yates not only helped him find placement for 11 of his dogs with five different rescues, but she also got his remaining dogs fixed and treated for fleas and parasites.

"Thanks to No More Puppies Georgia, my doggies won't be adding to the puppy population," he says. "They provided this service to me and other Clayton County residents free of charge. I really and truly couldn't have done it without them."



Leslie Mongford and three of his dogs: Gizmo, Angel, and Jake. (Photo by Chris Savas)

As it was with Mongford, helping Clayton pet owners get their dogs spayed and neutered has turned out to be a positive and often heartwarming experience, says Yates.

"We joke that we get 'the feels,' when we help somebody and they're so touched that we're doing this for them," she says. "It's put a whole human side to it that I honestly didn't expect. I thought this was all about helping the dogs, but it's really about helping people."



NMPGA Volunteer Ashleigh Ouimette and her Clayton pup, Max.

To handle the increasing demand and expand its outreach, NMPGA recently grew its team to seven volunteers, enlisted the services of an additional animal hospital, and attained its 501c3 nonprofit status. Although Yates would like to include cats at some point, her primary goal is to help CCAC stop euthanizing its dogs. But until that dream becomes a reality, she remains hopeful about the future, and encouraged that this labor of love is showing some signs of paying off.

"None of this was done in any type of formalized manner," Yates explains. "I didn't have a business plan, and a lot of it came from the gut. Who knows where this will end, but if I can start this, anybody can – anybody can do something! The way I look at it, fixing one dog is such a huge success, that we want to succeed and go as far as we can. There's no failing here as far as I'm concerned."



NMPGA volunteers (from left to right) Carole Smrecak, Kerrie Rich, and Ashleigh Ouimette at a recent CCAC adoption event. (Photo courtesy NMPGA)