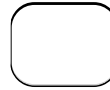


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Ex-volunteer links adoption policy to dog's death

By EMILY LESLIE, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER
May 28, 2016 5:16 AM

Mark Bandurraga, a former volunteer at the Santa Barbara County Animal Shelter, is speaking out about issues at the shelters, among them being a "relaxed" adoption policy that could have led to the "torture and death" of a recently adopted dog.

An 8.5-pound brown Chihuahua mix named Floyd who was adopted from the shelter last month died Monday and an investigation has been launched by the Sheriff's Department and Animal Control to see if cruelty and abuse caused the dog's death.

Mr. Bandurraga, who was fired from volunteering on Tuesday for criticizing the county's shelters, said Floyd's owner initially met the dog four weeks ago at a "Get a Dog at Home" event in Goleta, an offsite adoption program that is held every Sunday.

Mr. Banduragga said he knows an adoption counselor and a volunteer who described Floyd's owner as "off" and "creepy" when they met him at that event, when he became interested in adopting the dog.

But two days later, Floyd went home with his new owner, confirmed Jan Glick, director of county Animal Services.

Ms. Glick said details on the dog's death could not be released as the investigation is ongoing.

Mr. Bandurraga said the county shelter, which is considered a no-kill shelter due to its 90 percent live-release rate, has loose rules that make adoptions easier than they used to be.

"One of the ways you release a lot of dogs is you're very loose on your adoptions," Mr. Bandurraga said. "You would give a dog to whoever walks in. There's been this push, and they're relaxing the rules on what they do for adoptions."

For example, the county only conducts yard checks in certain situations, Ms. Glick

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Holding a list of 24 dogs he has fostered over the years, ex-volunteer Mark Bandurraga stands in front Santa Barbara County Animal Services, where he was fired Tuesday for speaking out on issues at the shelters, including inhumane conditions and a "relaxed" adoption policy.

ERICK MADRID/NEWS-PRESS



Monday's death of Floyd, a Chihuahua mix who was adopted from the Santa Barbara County Animal Shelter in April, is under investigation for possible cruelty and abuse.

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confirmed.

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Recently, the American Humane Association did an evaluation of the county shelters and issued a report recommending that the county consider an open, or "conversational," adoption process, Ms. Glick said.

The conversational approach attempts to "make the best match" between dog and owner and would involve more interaction between volunteers and adoption counselors with the person interested in adopting a pet, she explained.

"We don't want to create barriers so animals don't get adopted and remain in our shelters for months on end," she said. "There's a balance there. We want to make sure you get an appropriate home for the animal, but without setting an unrealistic standard."

While the county has not yet implemented this new process, Mr. Bandurraga claims it is already being partially used, noting the most recent volunteer newsletter that included information about conversational adoptions.

"Our ability to be flexible with past restrictions and allow a better experience for our adopters is part of this process. Consider this a test-market or trial period for the processes that are being discussed," the newsletter stated.

The issue of less adoptable dogs being kept in the shelter without getting proper exercise is another concern Mr. Bandurraga raised that ultimately led to his firing, he said.

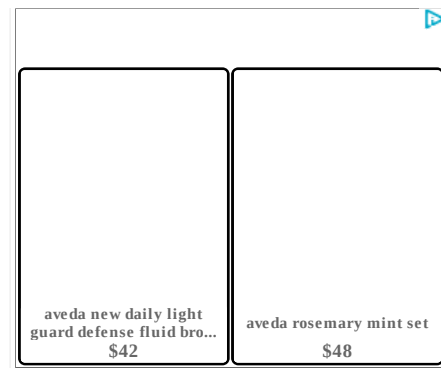
"There's this whole issue of repercussions if you bring up any issues at the shelter. And basically I've been bringing up too many issues lately, so I'm out," he said.

Having fostered more than 20 dogs during his eight years as a volunteer - whether it was to prevent euthanization or to give them more humane conditions - he pointed to a dog named Butters who was deemed "too dangerous" and "vicious" to be handled by staff and volunteers despite being friendly with those he was comfortable with.

"I knew him really well and he was really great with me," he said.

Regardless, Butters sat in his kennel without exercise for nearly three months before Mr. Bandurraga recently decided to foster the pit bull-mix before he went to a rescue shelter.

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