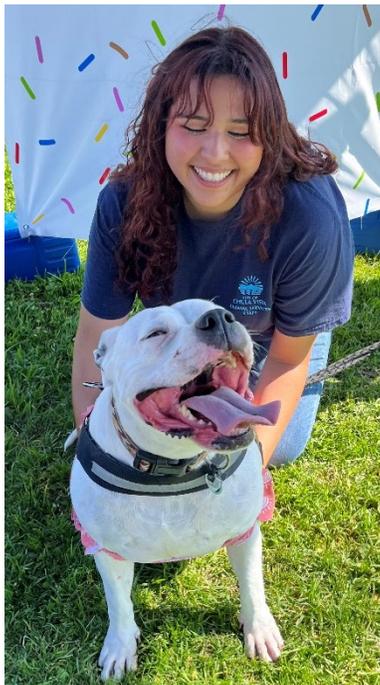




## Employee Spotlight: Chula Vista Animal Services Staff

There are no holidays in the animal shelter business because animals need to eat and be tended to around the clock. Luckily for the cities of Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, Lemon Grove and National City, there are nearly 50 passionate employees at Chula Vista Animal Services who are working tirelessly to get animals into loving homes. They are also reuniting lost pets with their families.

Most community members don't know that Chula Vista Animal Services—which is celebrating its 101<sup>st</sup> year anniversary of operation this year—is responsible for the stray animals and adoptions for those other cities mentioned above. It has been an ongoing effort by Deputy Director Ashley Milo and her dedicated team to build more community awareness of the shelter and the numerous services available to current and future pet owners. Thanks to grant writing efforts, the shelter has been able to offer 40 free spay/neuter clinics for a total of 800 animals serviced, including rabies and preventative vaccinations. Most recently, Milo secured a grant that provides financial assistance for community members wishing to reclaim their lost pets. Currently, it costs \$235 in fees to reclaim lost pets.



"We come in every day knowing there will be good days, bad days and a lot of in-betweens," Milo said. "We hold on tight to the good moments (the adoptions, reclaims, and the difficult cases that pull through)."

Community awareness is very important for Animal Services to help ease the overcrowding currently being experienced. The shelter has capacity for 80 dogs, but staff have cared for

120-140 dogs every day for months, with more than 100 dogs, mostly large dogs, daily since November 2021. The shelter recently had to bring in additional kennels to help ease the overcrowding.

Helping animals find “forever” homes is what excites the staff every day.

“We hope to do better by the ones that weren’t given the life they deserved,” Milo said. “We see the potential in our team and community.”

Animal Services staff recently celebrated their accomplishments with an Adopters Reunion on June 22 at Orange Park. Dogs indulged in pup cups and other treats, made a poster with their painted pawprints and reunited with their former shelter mates. The [Instagram post](#) on the reunion will make all pet lovers smile.

Although there are 48 staff positions at the shelter, currently six are vacant, and nearly half are part-time. That’s where Animal Services relies on volunteers, with hopes of getting dozens more volunteers.

Volunteer opportunities include dog walking, fostering pets, sharing social media posts, and volunteering to staff community events. Everyone can assist in promoting adoption over purchase and the importance of spay/neuter and preventative care, Milo said. Of course, adoption is a main goal.

“If we can help just one animal—it’s why we’re here,” said Animal Care Specialist Tianna Torres. “Those ‘just one’s’ add up.”

Many of the employees feel so passionately about pet adoption that they have a tattoo that says, “until every cage is empty.”

Adoptions are currently being affected by a canine infectious disease, which is creating an additional cost for the shelter to administer tests to infected and non-infected dogs. It’s one of those challenges that staff take as part of their jobs. But it’s one that they all work together to overcome.

Longstanding staff members, such as Senior Animal Care Specialist Eileen Howard, who has worked in Animal Services for more than 20 years; Senior Animal Care Specialist Dolores Cortez, Animal Services Specialist Linda Davis, Animal Control Officer Manuel Mariscal and Registered Veterinary Tech Arlene Martinez, who have all worked at the shelter for more than 15 years; and Milo and Animal Services Specialist Lizbett Espinoza who have worked at the shelter for more than 11 years, will continue to lead Animal Services into the next century.



**Thanks to the other Chula Vista Animal Services employees for their dedication to the wellbeing of our local animals:**

- Ashley Milo, deputy director
- Robert Calderwood, animal care aide

- Nadia Martinez, animal care aide
- Lissette Arellano, animal care specialist
- Whitney Brandenburg, animal care specialist
- Samantha Crawford, animal care specialist
- Karina Cuevas, animal care specialist
- Lacy Droddy, animal care specialist
- Lachlan Estrada, animal care specialist
- Lizbett Espinoza, animal services specialist
- Rosana Lara, animal care specialist
- Tianna Torres, animal care specialist
- Carissa Webb, animal care specialist, offsite adoptions
- Idalys Zerpa, animal care specialist
- James Smith, animal care supervisor
- Darrell Hanson, animal control officer
- Elena Perez, animal care officer
- Marlene Rodriguez, animal control officer supervisor
- Natoshia Seeley, office specialist
- Connie Green, office specialist/temporary
- Viviana Castellanos, public information specialist
- Jacklyn Crawford, registered veterinary tech
- Marina Daniels, registered veterinary tech
- Yadira Figueroa, registered veterinary tech
- Diana Hernandez, registered veterinary tech
- Alejandro Mastache, registered veterinary tech
- Jay Agan, senior fiscal office specialist
- Charlotte Jordan, veterinarian
- Mark Manzon, veterinarian II
- Stephanie Cital, veterinary assistant
- America Cosio, veterinary assistant
- David Guerrero, veterinary assistant
- Steven Hernandez Olmos, veterinary assistant
- Maria Romero Chavez, veterinary assistant
- Mayra Torres, veterinary assistant
- Naylea Zermeno Garate, veterinary assistant

Be sure to follow Chula Vista Animal Services on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages for the latest information on events, adoptions and how you can help.