

Paws and Claws ? all for the animals

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Dawn Lyons, manager of both the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Animals (OSPCA) stores, for the finances and volunteers, explained, "Our major cost here at Paws and Claws is garbage disposal. What people give us, if we're not allowed to sell it, it has to be garbage."

The only paid employee, Ms. Lyons manages the two OSPCA stores, Paws and Claws, one in Orangeville and one in Shelburne. This means she runs the business of the stores, and the volunteers' schedule. She works to keep the stores open as much as possible.

She brought her skills to the job: "I managed big box stores for 15 years. I have people skills, soft skills and financial management," she said, plus, "and my love of animals."

Ms Lyons has been keen to learn what she needs to do this job well. "I've learnt more as I went along about how it all works. I did work in the Centre [where the animals are kept] for a little while.

"I spend 20 hours between the two stores. Then, I have all the volunteer management side. That's more difficult than retail. These people are not being paid. So, it's important to make them feel welcomed and appreciated. Sometimes, we have dinners and there's national volunteer week. We send birthday cards and thank you cards. I'm working with them side by side to make sure they're aware of what they're doing and how it helps the animals."

Ms. Lyons explained, "both stores have slightly different budgets. Between the two stores, about \$45k 50K a year go to the Centre."

Of the costs, she emphasized, "Our major cost is garbage removal. People bring medical things, aids and equipment, but we don't know what has happened to it and we can't take responsibility for it. We're not allowed to take baby and children's car seats."

Adding otherwise, "Some things, you know what it's worth but it's hard to judge what we can charge for it."

She speculated, "Really what we find is people are bringing stuff to us because they don't want to dispose of it. We have no laundry facilities. Items that are not saleable go to textile recycling, also metal goes to recycling.

"Textiles have to be clean, I send them to other charities, for other countries or here. We do our best to help those needs too."

Volunteers tend to stick to a theme. Ms. Lyons demonstrated this by telling us, "We have volunteers who also work in shelters. So, we can send a coat we couldn't sell but it's still warm and can be used there."

There are the usual costs of any brick-and-mortar establishment, "The cost of the building, our rent is very reasonable, for Orangeville. The property is owned by Granite Management Ltd., and they are good to us."

The cost of the rent for the Paws and Claws store in Shelburne, with a private owner, is "not too bad. Hydro bills; the stores are heated by small electrical heaters, we keep it really reasonable; water costs are very little."

The complicated part of her job is bringing in and coordinating volunteers.

"We solicit on social media," she began. "We've advertised in Volunteer Dufferin, put up signs at the shops." Sadly, "Sometimes, we have to close because we didn't have volunteers."

As for handling the money, "A lot of volunteers have had cash experience. Not everyone wants to be up front. We do like to have all

our volunteers to be able to be on cash and we do quick reference checks.?

Even non-paying jobs require ?interviews. I look for people who want to lend a hand; who are upbeat and happy. We want them to understand the philosophy of what we do and how we do it. Most people who come to us love animals and have in them at home. Where they would like to volunteer, some people don't want to work in the Centre with all that happens there: the good, bad and the ugly.?

The trick is get enough of the right people in all the needed places.

?Volunteer coordinating, at the the Centre and the stores. A lot of volunteers who are younger want to work at the Centre. They just want to cuddle a puppy or a kitten.

?More mature people want to work at the shop.?

Assuring us, Ms Lyons commented, ?We're always open for volunteers. We can always use an extra hand. One who comes for 15 years and others who only work a few months. They are all valuable. Our longest running volunteer has been here for close to 18 years. She has done both over the years.?

She paused to consider, ?What it's like. It's different every day. At the store level is giving back, for what ever it is. There's just one Centre, which is on Riddell Road. We always have animals looking for homes. The cute puppies and kittens go fast. The older ones hang around longer and we keep them as long as we need to. We keep all the animals up to date with shots. They're spayed and neutered before they leave.

?It costs \$450 per dog for adoption. The average spay is more than \$450. So, that means any dog, even puppies. People bring that puppy back to us to be sprayed or neutered. We prefer a puppy to go home and get on with its life and come back for that.

?Kittens are \$175 for the same deal. If people have already paid for the service, they'll bring the animals back.

?What else we get are guinea pigs, rabbits, birds, rats. The prices vary for spaying, and so on but, mainly, it's cats and dogs.?

After all is said, Ms Lyons was clear, ?It is a business and the biggest thing, our major cost is people bringing garbage. If we can't sell it, it ends up with a cost. We can't be irresponsible with light bulbs, half a can of pain, mattresses.?

Another aspect of the business around rescuing and caring for rescued animals is letting the wider public ?know who we are.?

She gave the definition, ?Paws and Claws, they don't necessarily know the stores are associated with OSPCA. That is who we are. If people were more aware, we are looking for new ways to partner with business, starting a new thing with a website . We hold ?Thrifty Thursdays.' It's about the store, what we doing, boosting our sales.