

A triple challenge for supporting Spanish rescue animals.

This time a year ago the Adoptapet portal was launched with the aim to support animal charities across Costa Blanca. It came about after the initiators saw that rescue centres struggled with low adoption rates and finding new homes for the over 1,000 animals in care. This was reinforced when a survey was carried out pre-launch, showing that the average time spent in rescue centres was over 6 months and for many over a year.

Three challenges seemed to lie behind this:

Internal charity challenges: Despite incredibly engaged charity workers and volunteers, many struggle to find time for marketing and sponsorship activities. Dogs need to be walked, cats taken to vets, food dished out, centres cleaned etc., and there are only so many hours in the day. Money is also tight and with little or no council funding, the lack of time for fundraising and sponsorship activities often creates a negative spiral.

Public behaviour challenges: Even the organisations with the highest adoption rates struggle as new animals keep coming in. Expatriates returning home don't take their cats with them, hunters see their podenco dogs as a tool that is discarded when not working as well anymore, etc. Here lies a huge challenge to change public perception. Signs that things are slowly changing are e.g. Costa Blanca councils appointing councillors for animal wellbeing, the government acknowledging pets as dependants (previously social services were not allowed to make sure pets could keep living with an owner who had hit hard times). However there are still vast numbers of people out there that do not understand that taking on an animal, whether a pet or working dog, is a responsibility for the length of the animal's life, not for as long as they choose.



Finding each other and the right animal: A quick google search should show local animal rescue centres but, many of them don't even have a website. Some people will also be looking for a specific breed or type of animal and if the nearest centre doesn't have any fitting the profile, they will go to a breeder instead.

The Adoptapet non for profit portal was designed to address all these challenges. To help with marketing of the animals free of charge, raising awareness and, making it easier to find the right pet for a family choosing from a bigger pool of rescue animals. All the charities have to do is upload an image of their animals to the portal.

A year on many of the animals that were promoted through the portal (and radio commercials, social media advertising etc.) have been successfully adopted, particularly for the charities that have been the most active and embracing the initiative. Not as many charities as expected have engaged with the portal though. Perhaps this is because they do not realise that it is free of charge and not time consuming to advertise. Adoptapet plan to do more activities in 2020 to try and increase awareness within the various Costa Blanca animal charities but would also welcome charities asking any questions they may have by emailing info@adoptapet.es to find out more. The next two initiatives are a spring advertising campaign and a stand at the Adopt a Dog day at Moraira Dog Park on 5th April.

Meanwhile, based on observations during its first year, they would like to share their top 5 recommendations for smaller rescue centres.

Top 5 recommendations

1. **Get organised** – It's a classic issue for smaller charities that everyone wants a say and get along, but the reality is that to be effective, the organisation needs to be run like a company. Have a management team with one person in charge of it, have clear policies making it easier for volunteers to understand how things should be done and last but not least, state clearly that the people involved is not there just to look after the animals. Instead the number one reason of being for the charity is to find a new loving home for them as soon as possible.
2. **Structure your marketing** – Appoint someone in charge of marketing, member recruitment, company sponsorships, events etc. They won't be able to do everything themselves but someone suitable should write a marketing plan every year that gives everyone a heads up on how and where they can help out over the following months. And utilise free media such as local newspapers' animal sections and Adoptapet's portal.
3. **Form council relationships** – more and more councils will have a councillor in charge of animal wellbeing. Get to know them.
4. **Direct debit members** – Big sponsorships from companies are attractive but getting 500 of your Facebook followers to sign up for €20 annual membership fee on direct debit, will give you a steady income of €800 per month towards food and vets bills, with little effort to chase the annual fee.
5. **Help change attitudes** – Everyone is in the same boat here. We all have to pull together and make it clear that current attitudes towards animals aren't acceptable. Be that on social media, working with councils to produce awareness campaigns or just keeping track of the reasons animals come to you, and try and proactively address the top ones.

More information here: <https://www.adoptapet.es>

