

San Diego Humane Society

BACKGROUND

San Diego Humane Society (SDHS), an open-admission shelter, is creating a more humane world by inspiring compassion and advancing the welfare of animals and people. San Diego has become the largest city in the US to prevent the euthanasia of healthy and curable shelter animals, thanks to their lifesaving safety net. They are a private, independent, non-profit organization that is not affiliated with any other humane society or society for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

With campuses in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona, and San Diego, they provide animal services for 14 cities within San Diego County. They not only care for more than 40,000 animals in their communities annually, but also share the expertise they have gained through their innovative programs with shelters nationwide so they can save more lives in their communities. They provide exceptional care for all animals through world-class veterinary medicine, shelter, and most of all: love.

Kim Soto, Senior Director of Volunteer Engagement, is on a mission to help animal welfare professionals increase their capacity for life saving work through effective volunteer engagement. She is responsible for more than 3,000 volunteers, donating services valued at over 14 million dollars annually. In addition to her 14 years in an animal welfare leadership role, her background in human resources, education and a degree in Anthropology combine to make her fully qualified as a people expert. She is proud to use that expertise to assist staff and volunteers in forging impactful relationships that increase capacity and save lives.

Back in 2018, SDHS's volunteer program was using a volunteer management solution, known as Volgistics, which they were quickly outgrowing.

CHALLENGES

SDHS oversees volunteers who do a wide range of tasks at multiple locations; however, Volgistics was not adapting to their new needs. "We needed a system that could be customized to meet the needs of staff who engage volunteers in roles from neonate kitten fostering to animal husbandry for bear enclosures and everything in between," says Kim.

Key Pain Points:

- Volgistics **did not update nor adapt** to meet our needs as we grew over time.
- **Inadequate support services** and **no app for volunteers** to use.
- **Lacking customization to track volunteers** and meet the needs of staff to engage volunteers in specific roles.
- There was **so much time wasted**

Kim was determined to replace their outdated Volunteer Management Software (VMS) with one that better suited their needs.

*"For us, **Volgistics wasn't keeping up with the times**. They never changed much, and we are an organization that continually grows. We knew we needed something that would adapt with us."*

- Kim Soto, Senior Director of Volunteer Engagement



JOURNEY

When Kim met Rob Bonesteel, Member Success Team Manager at Better Impact, at a Points of Light conference a few years ago, she recalled learning the robustness of Volunteer Impact (Better Impact's VMS). "I thought if I could have THAT, it could fix everything!"

Kim's team would eventually schedule a **demonstration** and later **trial** the software. Key **decision-makers and senior leadership** at SDHS participated in the product demo. "They could see all the different software features and capabilities. **We looked at many software options**, but after seeing the possibilities with Volunteer Impact, this was the only solution we seriously considered," explains Kim.

Why Volunteer Impact

The ability to **customize the system for different departments** was the main feature Kim and her team were searching for. "We had volunteers who did emergency response, volunteers who fostered animals in their homes, and volunteers who'd come into the shelter and do work. For each of those, I needed a different application form, and for people to apply in a different manner. I also needed training to be different and in some cases I don't supervise those volunteers, so I needed other staff in the organization to be able to customize their portion. For example, Foster doesn't fall under me, so there's a foster staff person and she wanted to run her own section of the software. With Volunteer Impact we were able to provide her with the ability to customize what she needed," says Kim.

In addition to seeking and finding **eLearning capabilities** within Volunteer Impact, to minimize staff time spent on volunteer training, Kim also sought a solution that could offer **automation**. "I wanted to be able to automate as much as possible, to expedite the onboarding of new volunteers," says Kim.

Choosing a software vendor that would meet Kim's **customer service** standards was a high priority. "We were a growing program and I needed to know I could confidently lean on a vendor for **quick, reliable, and relevant support**, when needed. I wanted to be able to put words in a chat box at almost any hour of the day and night and get an answer. That was my final criteria for Better Impact to meet. The level of **service and support** we were able to get was **amazing!**"

Some of Kim's favorite Volunteer Impact features include:

- **E-learning modules for volunteers**, who complete training quizzes by watching videos. "Volunteer Impact significantly altered how we train volunteers. Once COVID hit, we didn't have to slow down because we had the platform for people to receive training videos (or books, or anything else we could write for training materials). After the volunteer successfully completes the quiz, the system will automatically qualify them, and they can begin seeing schedules and roles for whatever they are now qualified to do."
- "I love that we can **customize our searches** by ANY field in the database and **pin them to the main dashboard** for quick and easy access. I can pull up any combination of volunteers by qualification, location, history with us, etc. The fact that there are so many ways to search has really changed the game for us."
- "The ability for volunteers to earn **virtual badges**, when completing qualifications, is a great feature. When volunteers satisfy each qualification level, they are given badges which are akin to awards. Volunteers take great pride in their achievements and like to show off their badges to each other."

"How volunteers manage their training is my favorite thing. They just go to their volunteer portal and under My Profile they click on Training. It's incredible because my staff don't need to get involved!"

Implementation

When SDHS switched software solutions in 2018, roughly 3,000 volunteer records were transferred from Volgistics to their new home – Volunteer Impact.

Based on the needs and structure of SDHS's volunteer program, an Enterprise account was the appropriate choice for operations. "It is an overarching umbrella over each of our campus accounts and some of our unique programs like Wildlife Rehabilitation, Foster, Emergency Response," explains Kim.

"The portal/app that volunteers utilize was easily customized by us within Volunteer Impact. We added our branded colors that match our website and have unique banners at the top of each of our accounts. **Volunteers LOVE the app!** They rave about it," says Kim.

RESULTS

Although Kim can remember a time when the volunteer program used paper applications and spreadsheets, she acknowledges that “the world has changed so much. Using a dedicated VMS just changes your ability to know what’s going on. Now **I can’t imagine a life where I don’t use Volunteer Impact.**”

In fact, SDHS has been able to **automate a significant portion of their volunteer onboarding process**, and they are currently trying to further automate the process for volunteers who want to advance to more challenging roles. “The application, onboarding and training tools available to us mean that less staff time is needed on administering the process and those **resources can be reallocated to hands-on training with volunteers** in animal handling roles,” says Kim.

One of the most significant changes experienced since the switch to Volunteer Impact is the team’s **freedom from manual data entry.** “Directly from our website, volunteers can complete an application and the information automatically populates in the system. Since we’ve set up our system to allow for a quick onboarding experience, volunteers can start learning immediately and it’s up to them how quickly they complete the steps to get involved,” says Kim.

*“Sometimes a new software feels big, and it feels scary, but **imagine all the things you can do when you’re not managing spreadsheets all day.** And, when the software is working for you, managing your communication, and keeping the volunteers connected to your organization. **I can’t say enough good things about Volunteer Impact.** A VMS can be a big leap for some organizations to make...but worth it!”*

– Kim Soto



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