

## Animal Balance Barbuda & Antigua Campaign Report October 2018

*The Animal Balance team has just returned from a groundbreaking campaign on the islands of Barbuda and Antigua. The first campaign of this kind to be offered on the island of Barbuda, it was warmly received by the community, which is still in the rebuilding stages following the devastating hurricane that tore through the island in 2017. The campaign, the people of Barbuda, their animals, and the experience as a whole, left an indelible mark on the entire Animal Balance team. It was the first time Animal Balance has executed a post-disaster effort, and we look forward to continuing to work with the community on Barbuda to establish humane solutions for non-human animals on the island.*



*The straight facts about Barbuda are simple. It's a small island, at just 62 square miles, which sits in the eastern Caribbean, north of Antigua. It's part of the Commonwealth Nation of Antigua & Barbuda, and also part of the Leeward Islands of the West Indies. Population is approximately 1,800 people, most of whom have historically lived in the town of Codrington, on the western side of the island. The climate is tropical marine, meaning there is little variation in temperature throughout the year, falling somewhere around the mid 80-degree mark. Nearly the entire island sits at sea level, with the highest elevation reaching just 125 feet. The economy is service-based, revolving primarily around tourism and government related jobs.*

*Those are the facts.*

*The story of Barbuda is much richer, weaving in history that goes back as far as the Stone Age, according to archaeological evidence discovered in the River area of the island. It was the Arawak and Carib Indians on the island when Christopher Columbus made landfall in 1493, followed by settlements of the Spanish and French, and finally the English, who eventually colonized the island in 1666. Over the following years the people of Barbuda were witness to piracy, privateering, slavery, rebellion, insurrection, and missionaries. The island finally gained sovereignty in 1981, as part of the dual nation of Antigua and Barbuda.*



*It's Barbuda's most recent history, however, that gets the most attention. As Hurricane Irma battered the area in the late summer of 2017, the tiny, sea-level island, it's 1,800 human residents and many more non-human residents, took the full brunt of the category 5 storm, which destroyed 95% of the buildings on the island and tore apart the community. Residents rode out the storm in their homes, many lying on the floors, locking elbows to help anchor them from the deadly force of the winds. Following the storm, residents were forced to evacuate and the island was uninhabited by humans for the first time in thousands of years.*

*Without humans on the island, the dogs, goats, horses, donkeys and other non-human animals left behind, were on their own. The dogs reverted to their instincts and formed packs, attacking livestock in order to survive. The destruction of all fences meant that livestock roamed freely. The military arrived and began to shoot the dogs, as*

they had been deemed “dangerous.” The situation quickly became inhumane and it was clear that assistance was needed to help restore a balance of species on the island.

As it usually goes, by word of mouth, through the incredibly tight knit network of Animal Warriors, Animal Balance Founder and Director, Emma Clifford, was told about the situation, and asked if AB could help in any way. Of



course, the answer was yes and we teamed up with Helene van Beuren and the van Beuren Charitable Foundation to create the first high-volume, spay and neuter clinic on Barbuda.

Following a feasibility study in March of 2018, the team of 14 AB staff and volunteers arrived, via a chartered speedboat loaded down with gear, at the dock in Codrington on Oct. 1, 2018. Volunteers had been handpicked for their field experience, specific skill sets, flexibility, ability to handle stressful situations, and, of course, compassion. Little did they know, as they unloaded dog crates, camping gear, food and medical supplies onto

trucks to head to the clinic site, that the next five days would put all of those things to the test.

With little housing available on the island (many of the residents are still living in tents in front of where their homes are/were) the team was prepared to camp out next to the clinic site, located at Caribana, a large field with a concrete platform and a toilet block, close to the center of Codrington. Camping supplies, tents, solar showers and other equipment was generously supplied by the campaign’s primary funder, Helene van Beuren and the van Beuren Charitable Foundation. Luckily for the team, a large event tent was still on site from a previous event, giving us a protected area to set up the clinic. After a smooth crossing, everyone was in good spirits and ready to set up the clinic to start surgery the following day.

Thanks to the Antigua and Barbuda Humane Society, which helped our team obtain temporary veterinary licensing for this project, Kendra Beazer and the Barbuda Council for helping us find a spot for the clinic, providing tables and a truck for the team to use, and supporting our efforts in every way. Because of this support, the team was able to hit the ground running, and the first day of our clinic was a huge success. The community showed up early, eagerly seeking spay/neuter, vaccinations, microchips and dewormer for their dogs. 31 dogs were sterilized, and many more were vaccinated to protect them against life-threatening diseases. ABHS sent a representative to show the AB team how to register the dogs in compliance with local requirements, and many collars and leashes were distributed so that the dogs could wear their microchip and registration tags. As school let out and the children began to come around, impromptu dog training classes popped up to keep them entertained and away from the medical side of the clinic. By the end of the first day, everyone was in great spirits, working together with members of the community to make sure as many dogs as possible received care. The clinic



*ran smoothly for three days, with the community showing up each day to get their dogs sterilized, observe the activity, ask questions, learn, and support the team.*

*This was truly a community effort, with several local residents pitching in to help the team with whatever they needed. People like Berwyn Webber, who drove our outreach team around and introduced them to all of the dog caregivers, providing transport to and from the clinic for those who couldn't bring their dogs themselves. Charm Charles cooked vegan meals for the team each day and set up a dining area for the team outside of her own home, allowing us to mingle with the community and get to know people a little bit better. Rose King, whose home sat just across the street from the Caribana, immediately offered use of her water when she saw the team setting up. Knowing what a precious resource this is on Barbuda, the entire team was touched and grateful for this offer, which proved to be crucial for us. There were the children who showed us where the beach was so that we could cool down after the long work days, and volunteers from PAAWS Antigua, who came by for a day to help out and observe the clinic flow. By the end of the week, we were all family and it was clear that none of this would have been possible if not for the involvement of this amazing community*



*Team morale remained high over the week, despite several challenges that Mother Nature threw our way. Drenching rains flooded the campsite on the second day. The clinic was spared thanks to the tent that had miraculously been set up at Caribana for a previous event, which was left up for our use. Roving packs of donkeys snuck into the clinic at night, making a snack out of the paperwork and keeping the team awake with their antics. High winds blew our camping shelter, and everything that was line drying from the rain storm, into the trees.*

*It seemed like nothing could stop this team, and by the end of the week 98 dogs had been sterilized and vaccinated, with another 135 receiving vaccination only, accounting for a significant percentage of the dogs on the island. This will most certainly have a huge impact on controlling the population moving forward. The timing of the campaign, which came just as the population was beginning to rebound after the hurricane and ensuing events killed so many dogs, was critical in getting ahead of any future population problems on Barbuda.*



*Unfortunately, the campaign was cut short by one day, following an unexpected nighttime storm that blew through the camp and the clinic, taking down (or up) both the clinic tent and the large campsite shelter tent that everyone was sleeping under. Despite efforts to lift the clinic tent in the morning, the wet ground was too unstable to support the heavy stakes, and the decision was made to pull the team out for safety concerns. Everyone was disappointed that they could not complete a fourth day of surgery, but still proud of everything that they were able to accomplish. As we packed up, everyone took a moment to write a message on a strand of Tibetan prayer flags, wishes for the community that so touched us. The flags were strung across Rose's fence, visible to*

*everyone who passed by on the main road through Codrington. The belief is that as the wind passes through the flags, the prayers and wishes are carried into the air and spread to everyone who needs them.*

*While most of the team packed up and headed to Antigua to perform three days of targeted trapping and sterilization for cats at the Mill Reef Club, Dr. Raymond Deonanan and his technician Jaggy Bee remained on Barbuda to provide any necessary post-surgical follow up care and go house to house to offer vaccinations to dogs that were not able to make it to the clinic site. In total, Animal Balance vaccinated 233 dogs, thereby protecting all species from the spread of disease.*



*The rest of the team returned to Antigua, where they worked to target the cat population at the Mill Reef Club, graciously hosted by Mrs. van Beuren at her home. Together the team trapped and sterilized 50 cats over the course of three days on Antigua. They were also given the opportunity to visit the Antigua Barbuda Humane Society and Donkey Sanctuary, as well as PAAWS of Antigua's shelter, which provided perspective on the variety of issues faced by animal welfare organizations on the island, and allowed us to continue to build relationships with our local partners on the islands.*



*Overall, this campaign was the first of it's kind in many ways, for Animal Balance as an organization, for each of our volunteers, for the community of Barbuda, and for everyone involved. The warm reception we received bodes well for future work on these islands, and Animal Balance looks forward to continuing to help Barbuda in particular, as they rebuild, move forward and continue to develop humane solutions for all species living there.*