THREADS 2026

From THREADS to Fabric: Moving Systems from Concept to Practice



KERN COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & RECOVERY SERVICES

KERN COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES

PAWS, PARTNERSHIP AND PATHWAYS TO HOUSING

November 16, 2026

KERN COUNTY GROUNDED & BOUNDLESS

Presenters

Michele Timmerman

Special Projects Manager, Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Program Development: How the pet-related barrier was identified and the idea developed into a cross-agency program.

Nick Cullen

Director, Kern County Animal Services

Animal Services engagement and impacts: What the program looks like in practice, how pet needs are addressed, and the stories that demonstrate its impact.

Lourdes Torres

Unit Supervisor, Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Behavioral Health Engagement: How the program reaches people, builds trust, and creates pathways to behavioral health services and housing.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe how cross-sectional partnerships can improve engagement with unsheltered individuals.
2. Identify common pet-related barriers to shelter entry and housing placement and strategies to address them.
3. Explain how Bridge Housing can support innovative outreach approaches that promote housing engagement, trust building and connection to treatment services.

Presentation Overview

HOW IT STARTED	The pet-related barrier we were seeing—and the opportunity BHBH created.
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	What animal services outreach encounter looks like on the ground.
THE IMPACT	Pet health, trust, engagement, treatment and shelter.
HOW WE BUILT IT	Partners, agreements, funding, workflow, roles, and operating decisions.
HOW TO REPLICATE IT	Practical lessons and a path for adapting the model elsewhere.

The Kern County Model

Immediate pet need

Immediate pet need

Care, vaccination, supplies, temporary shelter

→

Trust-building encounter

Listen, offer choices, identify priorities

→

Warm service connection

BHRS, Navigation Center, Animal Services handoffs

→

Treatment/housing

Behavioral health, shelter, bridge housing, permanent housing

The pet service is the bridge.

The destination is treatment, shelter, bridge housing, or permanent housing.

Partnership

No single partner could remove the barrier alone

KernBHRS

Grant coordination
Clinical engagement
Treatment connection
Street outreach

Housing Stability

Housing sites
Navigation Centers
On-site coordination
Places of Worship

Animal Services

Veterinary support
Vaccinations and supplies
Temporary pet shelter
Street outreach

Nick Cullen

Director, Kern County Animal Services

Animal Services brings the animal welfare expertise and field experience needed to safely and effectively support people and their pets.

Animal Services Role

Veterinary care

Address immediate health needs

Vaccinations

Support pet health and placement readiness

Supplies

Food, leash, carrier, and day-to-day essentials

Temporary pet shelter

Safe option when a placement cannot immediately accept the pet

Field coordination

Help partners choose safe, realistic next steps

Word of Mouth – The Best Outreach

“Someone told me you could help my dog.”

What this tells us

Participants perceived the support as useful, respectful, and safe enough to tell others.

Why it matters

Word of mouth reaches people who may not respond to traditional outreach or formal service messaging.

Presenter example

Different Pet Barriers Require Different Solutions . . .

Pet needs care	→	**Veterinary support or referral**
Vaccination blocks placement	→	**Vaccination and documentation**
Supplies are missing	→	**Food, leash, carrier, essentials**
Placement cannot take pet yet	→	**Temporary shelter + reunification plan**

Barrier identified by participant, partner, or outreach staff

Response selected with clear communication and documentation

Clear choices and continued communication protect trust.

Case Example: Animal Health and Engagement



Hercules arrived in crisis
Severe fight wounds placed him at risk of infection and death.

His owner was overwhelmed
Caring for Hercules had become an immediate crisis.

Animal Services intervened
We sedated, clipped, cleaned and treated his wounds.

Temporary care created time
Hercules stayed at M Street while he healed.

Care became engagement
Repeated follow-ups opened conversations about shelter, treatment and recovery.

Hercules recovered
After several weeks of care, he fully healed and was reunited with family.

Case Example: Temporary Care and Reunification



A field complaint in Taft became an opportunity for engagement.
An officer learned that three roaming dogs belonged to a woman experiencing homelessness who was living in the parking lot.

The barrier was her dogs.
She was willing to enter the Navigation Center but did not believe any shelter could accommodate three large dogs.

Partners removed the barrier.
Animal Services, M Street and Behavioral Health coordinated a bed, transportation and safe housing for all three dogs, allowing her to leave the street and begin moving toward stability.

Lourdes Torres

How the program reached partners, spread through word of mouth and became an engagement pathway.



Marketing the pathway to shelter and housing partners

- Stakeholder involvement to identify barriers – housing providers, homeless-service partners.
- Introduced the service to Navigation Center staff and homeless-service partners.
- Clarified what pet supports were possible and what limits existed.
- Shared through our local Continuum of Care.
- Reinforced that the goal was engagement into treatment or housing, not stand-alone pet care.


Kern BHRS
Pet Assistance Forum
October 27, 2023 10AM
Westchester Training Room
2001 28th Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301
Come join us to provide
feedback on client's pet needs!
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RECOVERY SERVICES


Kern BHRS
Pet Assistance Forum with our
Quality Standards Housing Providers
December 1st, 2023 10AM
Westchester Training Room
2001 28th Street, Bakersfield, CA 93301
Come join us to provide
feedback on client's pet needs!
KERN
COUNTY
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
RECOVERY SERVICES

What it looks like on the ground







The engagement conversation changes

Instead of starting with

“Are you ready to enter services?”

Begin with

“What would help you and your pet today?”

Respect the bond • solve one concrete problem • offer choices • keep the next step small

Program Reach

127
Unique individuals served

612
Pets served in Wellness Clinics

458
Pets received spay/neuter services

179
Owners provided with pet supplies

80
Individuals provided with pet food

The Consumer’s Perspective



Enjoy a video presentation about our program!

Michele Timmerman

How it was built



Why BHBH Fit

BHBH purpose

Bridge housing and individualized supportive services for people experiencing homelessness with serious behavioral health conditions, including SMI and/or SUD.

Allowable opportunity

BHBH offered the flexibility to provide pet-related supports that were previously identified through established outreach teams but there was no available funding to support.

Local guardrail

This was not a general veterinary benefit. The test was: will this help the person move toward treatment, shelter, bridge housing, or permanent housing?

From Problem to Program

Barrier noticed

Pets affecting shelter/housing acceptance

Grant fit explored

BHBH purpose + pet accommodation flexibility

Partners identified

BHRS, Navigation Center, Animal Services

Model designed

Eligible services, referral path

Launch planned

Cadence, staffing, communication, problem-solving

The Infrastructure Behind the Program

- Eligibility criteria and allowable supports.
- Scope of services and exclusions.
- Documentation and data reporting expectations (HMIS).
- Liability, safety, consent, and privacy considerations
- Temporary pet shelter/boarding and reunification process.
- Fiscal process: who pays, approves, tracks, reconciles.
- MOU with Animal Services
- Continuous improvement after launch

Before launch: decisions we had to make

A replication checklist for other counties

Eligibility
Who can receive support? What behavioral-health/housing connection is required.

Services
Which pet supports are allowable? What is outside scope?

Documentation
What forms, consent, invoices are required?

Safety
Animal handling, transport, staff safety, participant privacy, emergency protocols.

Reunification
How temporary shelter decisions are made and how pets are returned.

Shared Workflow

Identify person + pet
Navigation Center, outreach, or word of mouth

Confirm immediate pet need
Care, vaccination, supplies, temporary shelter

Offer BH/housing engagement
Choice-based conversation and warm handoff

Coordinate Animal Services response
Field visit, clinic, supplies, boarding, vet partner

Document + follow up
Outcome, next step, reunification, data

Funding, documentation, and sustainability

Grant funding launched the model; shared ownership helps it last

Essential Costs

Staff coordination, veterinary services, vaccinations, temporary shelter, transportation.

Documentation guardrails

Track the pet support, the engagement contact, the connection offered, and the treatment/housing next step.

Sustainability questions

Which costs require grant funds? Which can partners absorb, braid, donate, or normalize into operations.

Lessons Learned

Michele: system lesson

Agreements, fiscal process, and clear decision authority matter as much as goodwill.

Lourdes: engagement lesson

The first conversation changes when the program begins with what matters most to the person.

Nick: field lesson

Pet support requires animal-services expertise, realistic options, and clear communication.

Could You Build This in Your County?

- Identify where pet needs may be blocking housing engagement.
- Bring behavioral health, housing/navigation, animal services, and outreach partners together.
- Define eligibility, service scope, and exclusions.
- Create MOU/agreement, funding, and documentation workflows.
- Build referral, response, and follow-up steps.
- Market the pathway to partners and let trusted word of mouth grow.
- Measure whether pet support opened treatment or housing pathways.



- Closing remarks
- Resources
- Contact information

CONTACT INFORMATION

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