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San Francisco Bay Area Veterinarian Takes a SPAYcation to Fiji, Spaying and Neutering More Than 200 Animals in Just Four Days

Local Organization Extends Global Reach as Dr. Crystal Heath of Berkeley Humane Journeys Across the Pacific to Volunteer Modern Medical Practices to Stem Pet Overpopulation

BERKELEY, Calif. – May 3, 2019 – Dr. Crystal Heath of [Berkeley Humane](#), the East Bay’s premier shelter and adoption center providing life-saving programs for cats and dogs with the goal of strengthening the animal-human bond, had a serendipitous moment when a simple Facebook post caught her eye and resulted in the expedition of a lifetime. The post from [SPCA Fiji Islands](#) shared the need for veterinarians who could spay and neuter animals in the Fiji Islands, helping with serious overpopulation and a long wait list for animals that needed the procedure. During the first week of March this year she was on a plane on a 5,500 mile journey to the middle of the South Pacific for her “SPAYcation,” suitcase full of medical supplies in hand, with goal of performing as many surgeries as possible and to provide modern medical training to as many Fijian medical volunteers as possible.

“It truly felt like the right time for me to use my knowledge to make a positive global impact. This was a life-changing experience for me, spending four days doing work that will stay with this island community long after I am gone—and I already can’t wait to go back,” said Dr. Heath, “For some of the animals that came to our clinic, this was really their only chance to be seen by a vet in their life. Being able to give them a chance at a better and longer life meant everything to me.”

When dogs and cats are not spayed or neutered, the consequences are startling. One unneutered male and one unspayed female cat alone can be responsible for the birth of over [2 million cats over a 10-year period and a pair of dogs can be responsible for 67,000 dogs in a 6-year period](#). This is an ongoing struggle that Fiji continues to face as dogs and cats are free to roam their neighborhoods; the challenge is compounded by a scarcity of fully-trained veterinary medical professionals and not enough sutures and surgical tools readily available. Berkeley Humane donated the instruments and sutures needed to allow Dr. Heath to execute surgeries, provide vet students with high-volume safe spay/neuter training experience, and send pet owners home with post-op care. With the help of additional volunteer doctors from other countries including the UK, Canada and Croatia, the island community was set up for the ongoing expansion and favorable outcomes of its spay and neutering efforts to curb animal overpopulation.

“It’s a huge need,” said Amanda Millar Co-Chair of SPCA Fiji Islands. “Dr. Heath was amazing. She was a great personality among the team of veterinarians that assisted in our efforts.”

The work that Dr. Heath did in Fiji and does with Berkeley Humane led to her being named a [Jefferson Award winner](#) and aligns with her overarching personal mission to decrease animal suffering and

recognize that animals all over the world have rich and emotional lives that deserve to be valued. She has spayed and neutered over 20,000 animals during her career, and as the head veterinarian at Berkeley Humane she continues to lead the organization's highly successful [Spay the Bay](#) program, which offers low-cost spay and neuter services for dogs and cats to improve the health and reduce overpopulation of dogs and cats in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the founder of [Vet Harmony](#), a website that aims to improve the welfare of animals through raised public awareness. Before obtaining her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree at U.C. Davis, she graduated with B.S in Animal Science from the same school. Since then, she has worked as a veterinarian for public shelters and private animal welfare organizations all across Northern California.

Recognizing that dog and cat overpopulation is an issue without borders, Berkeley Humane continues to apply its expertise and resources to reach beyond the local Berkeley/Oakland community. The organization is heavily invested in broader community efforts by taking in animals from surrounding shelters and emergency situations around the Bay Area and other states. These dogs and cats would otherwise would be euthanized or who would be unlikely to be adopted because of medical issues when they first come to the shelter—from wounds or orthopedic issues to dental problems and solvable behavioral issues. With a full veterinary hospital staff of highly skilled and dedicated professionals, Berkeley Humane attends to these animals' medical needs, nursing them back to a healthy state so that they are ready and likely to be adopted.

“We are always looking to find ways to make an impact on a larger scale and share our knowledge with new communities,” said Jeffrey Zerwekh, Executive Director at Berkeley Humane. “Dr. Heath is an important part of the Berkeley Humane family and we could not be more proud of how she represented us in Fiji. She truly walks the talk and is living proof that it just takes one person to make a huge difference.”

See Dr. Crystal Heath on TV

View the recent TV interview with Dr. Heath discussing her love of animals and life's work to reduce animal suffering, [here](#).

Learn more about Berkeley Humane programs and events

- [Spay the Bay](#)
- [Empty the Shelters](#)
- [Berkeley Humane Pints for Paws](#)
- [Clear the Shelters](#)

About Berkeley Humane

The Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society (Berkeley Humane) has origins dating back to 1895. Today, Berkeley Humane serves the people and animals of our community by providing life-saving programs for cats and dogs, cultivating compassion, and strengthening the human-animal bond. With the support of our community and a dedicated, talented team of volunteers and staff, Berkeley Humane transports animals from municipals shelters who are often in need of medical care, improved nutrition, training, and lots of love. In 2018, Berkeley Humane found homes for over 1100 dogs and cats and touched the lives of over 1000 additional pets through our programs and services. Learn more at www.berkeleyhumane.org.

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