



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

THE HSUS SHELTER ADVOCATE TOOLKIT

Lifesaving Programs All Shelters Should Have

While each organization is different in terms of the community it serves, the financial resources it has, the size and configuration of its facility, etc., there are basic programs that each should have in place. These building blocks are the hallmarks of every quality sheltering organization, but it is important to understand that there is no “one size fits all” model for any of these programs. An effective volunteer program at a large municipal organization may look very different from one serving a small, rural community; even among similarly sized and resourced organizations, individual policies and procedures for these programs may vary greatly.

Effective Volunteer Programs: There’s almost no sheltering facility that can operate without a group of dedicated volunteers, who may do everything from cleaning to providing enrichment to managing off-site adoption programs. Volunteers are an organization’s most valuable asset – provided there is mutual respect for roles, responsibility and decision-making. For example, well-meaning volunteers can unwittingly put an entire population of animals at risk if they do not follow established disease prevention measures.

To be an effective and valued volunteer, first select an organization that is a good fit for you – if you want to spend time training animals, for example, a facility that specializes in managing dogs with behavioral challenges may be best for you. Or if you are not comfortable with handling dogs but still want to help, the shelter might have an administrative position in desperate need of your talents. Once you’ve found the right fit, follow the established policies and guidelines, make yourself an invaluable member of the team, and look for ways to continue helping the shelter make forward progress.

- Volunteer Management for Animal Care Organizations:
<http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/hsp/volunteer.pdf>

Foster Programs: Many animals that arrive at shelters need just a little extra time and attention to prepare for and find their new family. For example, kittens and puppies typically aren’t available for adoption until they are old enough for spay/neuter surgery (which should be done at about 8 weeks of age), and most shelters and rescues rely on foster parents to give these animals the leg up they need. Because these animals remain the legal responsibility of the organization, though, the actions and activities of foster parents must be managed and overseen. Sadly, organizations that typically are most in need of extensive foster programs often aren’t in a position to provide that necessary oversight, so they may default to not having a foster program at all. But resources and guidance are available through The HSUS and other organizations to help shelters struggling to develop an effective foster program.

- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2006/becoming_foster_parent.pdf
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2006/fostering_fundamentals.pdf

Rescue Partnerships: No organization can save every animal on its own – an effective rescue partner program is a necessity. Rescue partners can help provide care and opportunities for animals that might otherwise not be successfully placed. Like any other program, though, a successful rescue partnership must be built on a strong foundation. Shelters that have accepted responsibility for animals must feel confident that their partners will provide the animals with high quality care. But shelters must also be willing to trust that other organizations have the animals’ best interests at heart. Successful shelter/rescue partner relationships require all organizations involved to understand their roles and responsibilities, respect each other’s differences, and exhibit the highest levels of professionalism with each other at all times in order to collectively save more lives. For more information on building successful rescue partnerships see:

- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/may_jun_2003/animal_transfer_programs_pros_cons.html
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/scoop/towards_a_more_perfect_union.html

Comprehensive Adoption Programs: Finding a home for every adoptable animal can be challenging – while adoptions continue to increase, still fewer than 30% of American pets were adopted from a rescue or a shelter. Shelters struggle daily to improve this “market share”, and find creative ways to adopt their animals, using programs like off-site adoptions, special marketing strategies, and more. This is one area in particular where trained, dedicated volunteers can have a huge impact, particularly as shelter budgets shrink and staff struggle just to keep up with daily care of animals. For more information on successful adoption programs see:

- www.theshelterpetproject.org
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/adoption_transfer.html
- <http://www.petfinder.com/for-shelters/basic-components-successful.html>
- http://www.maddiesfund.org/Resource_Library/The_Truth_About_Free_Cat_Adoptions.html
- <http://www.aspcapro.org/adopter-friendly-adoptions.php>

Behavior Programs: For an adoption to be successful long term, the right match must be made between pet and adopter; that begins with understanding each individual animal’s energy level, trainability, and other characteristics. As explained in the resources below, comprehensive behavior programs, those that begin monitoring the behavior of an animal when he arrives at the shelter and document improvements or changes as he interacts with staff and volunteers, rather than relying on subjective criteria or on a one time “temperament test”, are vital for collecting this information. They then can help the shelter make informed decisions about training, remediation and placement to give pets a better chance of success in their new homes.

- <http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/animals/operational-guides/op-guide-behaviorassessment.pdf>
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2003/the_perils_of_placing_marginal_dogs.html
- http://www.maddiesfund.org/Resource_Library/Behavioral_Assessment_in_Animal_Shelters.html

Medical Protocols: Because shelters take in animals from a wide variety of sources, from homes to puppy mills, it’s crucial they have solid medical and disease-control protocols in place to keep all of the animals healthy. A

disease outbreak in the shelter can be devastating, but having good preventative practices in place—such as vaccination upon intake, sound cleaning and disinfection protocols, and designated quarantine areas—can reduce the risks.

- <http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/all-topics/disease-control.html>
- <http://www.sheltermedicine.com/>
- <http://shelternvet.org/>

Positive Public Relations: A positive approach to engaging the community in solving pet homelessness is a must for animal shelter or rescue organization. The community has a right to know what's happening inside their shelter, and a transparent records reporting effort can not only build public trust, it can help shelters communicate their needs and challenges. Developing positive relationships with citizens and the media in a community and engaging them in helping save lives makes a big difference.

- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/community_outreach.html
- Why Transparency? http://www.asilomaraccords.org/two_transparency_r_avanzino.pdf