



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

THE HSUS SHELTER ADVOCATE TOOLKIT

Lifesaving Programs All Communities (But Not Necessarily Shelters) Should Have

Even shelters with the most innovative foster programs, the most aggressive adoption initiatives, and the best population management practices will still struggle as long as the number of animals needing their care exceeds the number of animals they can assist. Ideally, shelters would be the one-stop-shop for all of a community's animal services, but most simply don't have the resources, staff, or expertise to do everything. The good news is that the job of reducing the number of animals in need of care in the first place can be done just as well (if not better!) by groups and individuals outside the shelter walls.

To begin, you must assess your community, and realistically evaluate whether your shelter is getting the help it needs to fight the battle against pet homelessness. Are there free or low cost spay/neuter services available, and are they actually reaching the people who need them (for example, a spay/neuter clinic on the outskirts of town will not be useful to city residents who don't have a car)? Are cat trap-neuter-return programs widespread enough so that the shelter isn't inundated with cats? Do local food pantries also carry pet food to help people provide for their pets and keep them in their homes? Oftentimes the best way to help reduce euthanasia in your community is to establish or enhance an animal services program that is completely independent of the shelter.

Community Assessment: Your community may have a municipal animal control facility, a private humane organization, dozens of veterinarians, and a low-cost spay neuter clinic – so why do thousands of animals still end up homeless every year? Unfortunately, many communities have neighborhoods where there are no veterinary offices, no pet supply stores, no easy way to reach the low-cost clinics available to them, even though these are usually the poorest areas of town that have the greatest need for such services. The people in these neighborhoods care just as much about their pets as we do – they simply don't have access to the same services many of us take for granted (ever consider how you might take your 80 lb. Labrador Retriever on a public bus to reach the spay/neuter facility across town?). By assessing your community, you can identify neighborhoods where the need for services is greatest, and target your outreach and assistance efforts for maximum effect. See The HSUS' innovative Pets for Life program for more on assessing your community:

http://www.humansociety.org/news/press_releases/2012/01/pfl_report_012712.html

Spay/neuter services: The single most important factor in reducing shelter populations from their all-time highs in the 1970s has been accessible, affordable spay/neuter services. In fact, some areas have done such a good job of spreading the spay/neuter message that their shelters are actually importing puppies from other parts of the country. There are still many communities, though, where demand for high volume, low-cost, easily accessible spay/neuter services exceeds supply. For more spay/neuter information see:

- World Spay Day http://www.humansociety.org/issues/spay_day/

- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/nov_dec_2010/making_spay_neuter_insider_job.pdf
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/spay-neuter-campaign-materials/spay_neuter_community.html
- Humane Alliance: <http://humanealliance.org/>

Free-Roaming and Community Cat Programs: According to a recent study, there are currently almost 90 million cats living in homes; however, some estimates indicate that there are nearly as many free-roaming cats. Some of these are truly feral, but many are tame cats that live in neighborhoods without any specific caretaker. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these cats are not spayed/neutered, and many of these cats and their offspring wind up in shelters with little chance of finding permanent new homes. Progressive communities are exploring ways to humanely manage these cat populations, through trap-neuter-return programs (which vaccinate and sterilize colonies of feral cats), feral freedom programs (designed to divert community cats from the shelter population), low-cost spay/neuter programs targeted at free-roaming cats, and other innovative initiatives.

- HSUS' TNR information http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/
- Feral Freedom Programs: <http://network.bestfriends.org/10078/news.aspx>
- Map of feral cat groups: <http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/maps/feral-cats.html>

Surrender Prevention/Pet Retention Programs: Many pets end up in shelters because people can't afford them or don't know how to manage them (shelters are full of large adolescent dogs that proved to be too rambunctious for their owners and cats that have stopped using the litterbox). Progressive communities don't just turn a blind eye to these concerns, or callously say that "people who can't afford their pets don't deserve to have them", they provide alternatives that help people keep their pets in their homes. Comprehensive surrender prevention programs include:

- **Food banks:** Simply adding pet food to your existing community or church food banks can dramatically increase the number of pets assisted in your community. http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/mar_apr_2010/banking_on_generosity.pdf
- **Housing:** Helping ensure that there is pet-friendly rental housing in your community can be particularly important for people who have lost their homes due to foreclosure or downsizing. http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/jul_aug_2006/renting_to_pet_owners_makes_cents.html http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/animal_friendly_apartments.html
- **Free/low-cost vaccinations and medical assistance:** A recent study of low-income, at-risk communities shows that many pet owners cannot afford to visit a veterinarian, but will stand on line for hours in the hot sun or pouring rain when given an opportunity to protect their pets for little cost. Ensuring that all animals in the community have received basic vaccinations is the surest and easiest way to prevent outbreaks of highly communicable diseases like parvo and distemper, both in the shelter environment and in the community at large.

- Pets for Life: A New Community Understanding
http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/pfl_report_1_12.pdf
- http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/mar_apr_2011/churches_go_to_dogs.pdf
- Behavior assistance: Many people don't realize there are easy fixes for seemingly insurmountable problems like a cat that is clawing the furniture, or a dog that barks incessantly. These animals with minor, fixable behavior concerns are most at risk of losing their homes and winding up in the shelter. The most humane communities make affordable, accessible training available to pet owners who would gladly keep their animals if offered solutions.

Pet Care and Behavior Tip Sheets:

http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/pet_care_behavior_tip_sheets.html
<http://www.aspcapro.org/behavior-helpline-and-behavior-classes.php/o>

Pet Identification/Reunification Programs: In many communities, at least half of their shelter population is made up of lost/stray animals, but fewer than 20% of dogs are typically ever reclaimed by their owners, and only about 2% of cats ever make it home. If the numbers of animals successfully reunited with their owners were to increase only slightly, imagine how much lower the shelter's daily population would be! All animals, even those that live exclusively indoors, need to have visible collars with identification tags (recent studies prove that cats will easily adapt to wearing collars). Pets should also be implanted with microchips that serve as backup identification, although microchips are only useful if the chip has been registered and the owner's information is current. You can help by spreading the message about keeping collars and identification tags on all pets, encouraging pet owners to have their pet's microchip information updated, and ensuring that your animal control facility has enough microchip scanners to scan each animal they pick up and try to return it without even bringing it into the shelter.

- "Study: 3 out of 4 Cats Will Wear a Collar, Making it Worth a Try"
<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/catcollar.htm>
- "Seeking Many Happy Returns (To Owners)"
http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2009/many_happy_returns_to_owners.pdf