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November/December 2011

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Lives on the Line

Animal control officers and humane investigators face dangers in their daily work—dangers that often go unrecognized until the worst happens, bringing their sacrifice to the public's attention. A veteran of the field explores how animal welfare workers can improve their safety and be better prepared in a crisis.



24 | Kitten Up!

When you take in kittens who are too young to be adopted, wouldn't it be great if you had an efficient system for transferring them immediately to their foster families—while still making sure they get the necessary screenings and care? In the latest article in our series highlighting the Association of Shelter Veterinarians guidelines, learn how the Animal Rescue League of Boston developed its "Foster On-Deck" System.



34 | Value Added

Animal welfare organizations play a vital role in their communities, but it's often difficult to explain their importance to public officials who make spending decisions, or to those outside the sheltering sphere. Veterinarian Jyothi Vinnakota Robertson explains "social value," and how to quantify the results of sheltering and animal welfare programs.

COVER: DAVID SOKOL... ABOVE: MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS; BOTTOM: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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CAMMIE BACKUS

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6 Scoop

Dogs rescued from a Mississippi hoarder find new homes; an animal welfare advocate from Brazil interns at the ASPCA; an abandoned cat in Oregon goes from a locked storage unit to a new life; a Vermont wildlife rehabilitator leads the way with humane methods; a court decision makes it easier for animal rescue volunteers to deduct their expenses; and much more.

22 Coffee Break

In your space, you told us what you think is the best approach to adoptions. A free-for-all? A careful, detailed screening? Many of you thought the answer was somewhere in the middle.

39 The "101" Department

Running a shelter is one of the more demanding professions out there—and so is trying to find someone who's qualified to do the executive director's job. Boards and search committees need to take their time, figure out exactly what they want in a new leader, and then do their homework.

44 Q&A

Aimee Sadler, a veteran animal trainer specializing in behavioral problems, travels the country teaching shelters how to implement play groups for dogs. They're a natural way for dogs to blow off steam, and the group interactions allow them to teach each other how to behave. It's all about giving the dogs (who are pack animals, after all) physical and mental stimulation so that they ultimately become better-socialized and more adoptable.

47 Humane Law Forum

It can be difficult for shelters to find responsible potential owners who want to adopt certain breeds. But it's even more difficult to have to tell one of those adopters she can't take a dog because her landlord forbids it. You need to learn your state and local laws to better inform adopters and their landlords, neighbors, and insurers. And what are some of the legal strategies advocates have used to try to stop breed discrimination?

53 Behavior Department

Many perfectly friendly dogs go a little nuts when it comes to their dinner. The Humane Society of Boulder Valley's training and behavior modification program is designed to efficiently help dogs overcome issues such as food guarding in a short period of time, making them more adoptable—and saving lives in the shelter.

60 Off Leash

The Ottawa Humane Society has rediscovered the joys of the Santa-delivered pet.

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A Word From Us

Normally in our Show Me the Money department, *Animal Sheltering* features fundraising ideas. This time, though, we're talking about fundsaving via a recent tax court decision that has implications for those involved in animal rescue and fostering work. After all, as Benjamin Franklin mentioned, a penny saved ...

We have our usual great mix of stories for you, but wanted to highlight a recent alert to the Washington Federation of Animal Care & Control Agencies that caught our attention. In her note, Denise McVicker, deputy director of the Humane Society of Tacoma & Pierce County, referenced an article on microchipping from a publication of Ohio State University by researcher Linda K. Lord. Among its tips: "Avoid interference by scanning away from computers, metal tables and fluorescent lighting. Remove any metal collars prior to scanning."

McVicker noted, "We did our own 'test' here with my dog, who has an Avid chip. When using the Home Again scanner and the tag and collar ring were on top of his neck, we could not locate the chip, no matter how many times he was scanned or how slowly. When the collar was flipped so the metal part was facing the ground, the chip was found within a moment of scanning. ... Since this seems to be an issue, I believe all who might scan animals for microchips should be made aware of this potential for not picking up chips."

We couldn't agree more! Lord notes that the main thing "is to slow down and scan the whole animal." With multiple frequencies, she says, scanners can't handle speed; slower scans will be more accurate. Read Lord's entire article at bit.ly/pDM5Dn.

Reader Paula Snyder wrote in with questions about an older story, "The URI Challenge," (January/February 2007, p. 53). Snyder writes, "With regard to stress reduction, which is better, to confine felines in condos 24/7 and socialize them within their condos, or to risk transient stress by having the same handful of volunteers work with the same cats three days per week, with a predictable routine of bringing them individually to a visiting room for one half hour at a time for individual attention?" Snyder was concerned about the advice against moving cats from one place to another. "Many of our cats come in already overweight, and keeping them sedentary isn't helping," she wrote.

We asked our sheltering experts. "Personally, I think it should depend on the individual cat," says Inga Fricke, director of sheltering and pet care issues at The HSUS. "If the cat is shy, easily stressed, and unhappy being handled, then making the living environment as happy as possible is paramount—assuming, of course, that they have ample living space to begin with. Life in a 2-by-2 box is unacceptable even if they get daily exercise sessions. If, on the other hand, the cat is outgoing and seems fairly well adjusted, giving her the opportunity to run and play is always a good thing. Alternatives like creating novel living spaces that give them the luxury of *both* is the ideal. From my perspective, enrichment programs should be flexible and based on the needs of the individual animal, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach."

Just keep in mind that socialization spaces shared by multiple kitties (who don't live together on a daily basis) must go through a full cleaning between playtimes so that playtime doesn't end up passing along germs. See the July/August 2011 article "Spot-Cleaning Cat Cages" for more information!

—*Animal Sheltering* magazine staff

Facebook fans fire off:

In response to our story about Wall-E, the puppy who survived euthanasia and proceeded to get thousands of adoption applications ("Here for a Reason," July/August 2011, p. 22), Facebooker **Jolly DogHouse** wrote, "My question always is: Where were those people before all the publicity? For instance, the dog who was supposedly euthanized, but 'came back to life.' Where were all the adopters before the little guy was euthanized; how come no one wanted to adopt him before that?" **Ann W.** noted: "Agree this kind of publicity is a mixed blessing. Good for the animal in the story, but those people applying from all over the country are overlooking many adoptable animals in their own communities. Let's support local shelters instead of looking for dramatic stories online."

What do you think? Talk to us about our stories or what's going on in your community at facebook.com/animalshelteringmagazine, or email asm@humanesociety.org.



CORRECTION: In the story "Spot-Cleaning Cat Cages," (p. 39 of the July/August 2011 issue), a caption identified Roy Silguero as an employee of the Frederick County Humane Society. Silguero is in fact a staff member at Frederick County Animal Control in Maryland, and the pictures showing spot-cleaning done right were taken at that agency. We regret the error.

From Squalor to Serenity

Rescued from a hoarding case, these dogs are now thriving

BY CARRIE ALLAN

When the sheriff opened the side door of the squalid ranch house in Mississippi and permitted emergency teams inside, Chunk was one of the first dogs rescue teams saw.

The low-slung dog with the big, worried eyes and patchy fur was in the first room, watching nervously as rescuers entered one by one. Wearing respirators to protect themselves from ammonia fumes, rescuers from The HSUS, the Mississippi Animal Rescue League, and United Animal Nations stepped cautiously into the trash- and feces-filled house, going room to room to assess how many animals would need to be removed.

The teams gathered the squeaking puppies who sat in a pen under the red glow of a heating lamp, and lured out the timid dogs who darted through shadows and peered from under the bed. Meanwhile, Chunk paced back and forth, his raw and hairless paws squishing into a floor covered with poop, empty cans, and flattened bags of dog food and Wonder bread.

Local authorities had estimated that the woman running Raven's Hope Animal Sanctuary had about 70 animals on her property. But by the end of that grueling, rainy day in March 2010, rescuers had pulled nearly 200 dogs out of muddy, algae- and feces-laden pens around the property.

Chunk and 69 others went north on an HSUS rig to the Washington Animal Rescue League (WARL) in Washington, D.C. Almost all the dogs were suffering from mange, and many were "fearful verging on feral," says adoption and rescue director Jamie Scotto. They'd rarely seen any human being but the hoarder herself and had been forced to compete for food.

Chunk had terrible skin problems and showed aggression toward other dogs, but shelter staff helped him and other victims from the case come around. For weeks—and in some cases, months—they built positive



associations with humans by hand-feeding each dog.

They also introduced the dogs to leashes, no small task for unsocialized animals. "If you show a puppy how to do it, they pick it up immediately," says Scotto. "But adult dogs who've never been on a leash before? It's a totally different story."

The TLC paid off. Since his adoption and recovery from mange, Chunk looks like a different dog—"more basset-y in the snout," says adopter Dan Metcalf. "He's a great guy—the whole neighborhood loves him."

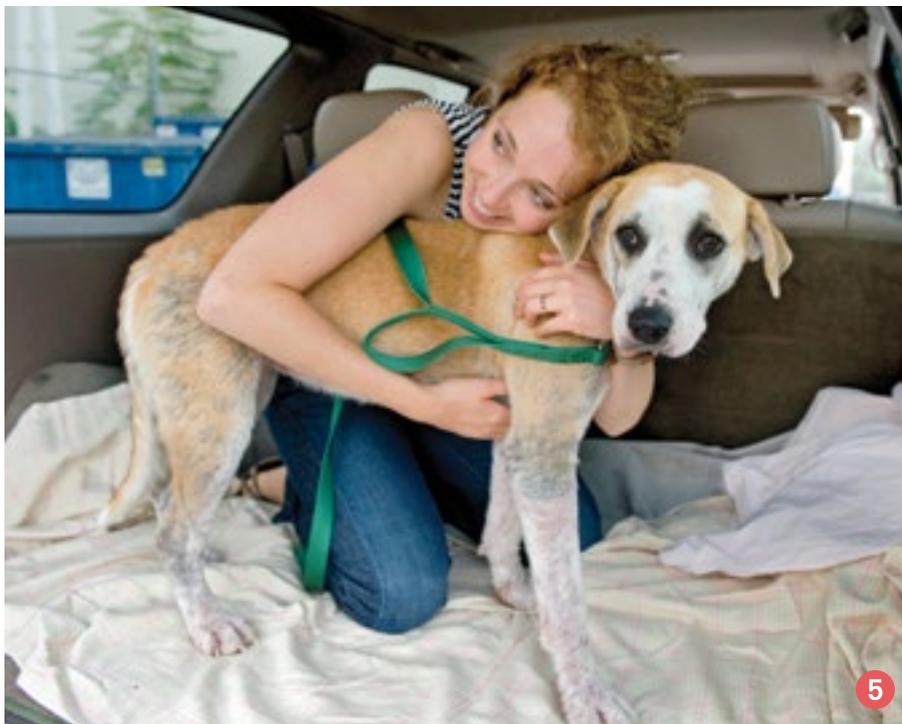
Chunk is mellower with other dogs now, enjoying his friendship with Daisy, a rescued

boxer Metcalf and his wife adopted when they were expecting their first child and wanted a companion for Chunk. "They balance each other out really well," Metcalf says. "She was isolated; she was tied up in a backyard. ... He's very much a go-getter and friendly, and she's kind of shy and jumpy, but they both sort of bring each other to the center."

Helping dogs recover physically and behaviorally is often a long process for both shelter staff and adopters. But when "they finally make eye contact with you or show signs of recognizing you, it all becomes worthwhile," says WARL behavior and training manager Michelle Yue.

During large-scale rescues, cruelty is often so pervasive that victims can be hard to tell apart: one dog after another malnourished and eaten up by skin parasites, one after another with infected eyes and runny noses, shivering in sickness and fear. Onsite and in the moment, the teams focus on speed and quantity: Get as many animals out as you can, and do it quickly.





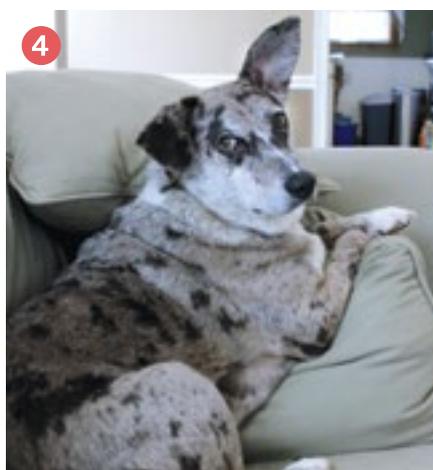
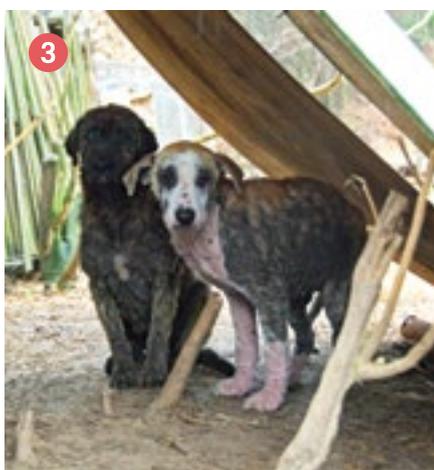
1) Chunk was one of the first dogs rescue teams saw when they entered Raven's Hope Animal Sanctuary in Mississippi—one of nearly 200 dogs pulled from the squalid conditions.

2) Dan Metcalf and Kathy Peacock adopted Daisy to keep Chunk company. Metcalf says the dogs' personalities balance each other out.

3) Carolina and a friend seek shelter amidst filthy conditions on the property of the hoarder in Preston, Miss. Many of the dogs suffered from skin infections and untreated wounds.

4) Yoda—so named because her ears reminded her new owners of the little green sage from Star Wars—found a new home with Cammie Backus's family in Takoma Park, Md.

5) Five months after the seizure, Carolina—now named Gili—leaves WARL for her new home with adopter Madeleine Goldburt. Carolina/Gili was almost totally hairless when she arrived at the shelter, but some TLC from WARL's staff set her on the road to recovery.



The aftermath, though, is all about the individuals. It is during recovery that cruelty victims become particular. Their eyes, once clotted with infection, become clear and bright. Their fur grows, revealing true colors and hints of breed. They heal, they put on weight, and they discover the thrill of running, the squeaky delights of a particular toy, a love for being scratched in one sweet spot—and the pleasure of finding a new home, where a family spoils you rotten and you don't have to compete with scores of brothers and sisters in order to survive.

One of the last Mississippi dogs to leave WARL was Gili, who had no fur and was "just so uncomfortable for so long that it took a while for our behavior team to get through to

her," says Scotto. But when the traumatized dog met her new family, "she lay down on her back and gave us her belly and wanted to be scratched. This dog just seemed like she wanted to be loved," says adopter Madeleine Goldburt of Washington, D.C.

And while she's still nervous about some things—plastic bags, for example—she loves to run in a field near her house. "She'll go and dart out and do figure eights and make really sharp turns," says Goldburt.

Yoda—named for her expressive ears—found a home with Cammie Backus's family in Takoma Park, Md. "We do a Yoda voice for her ... and she won't actually beg at the dinner table, but she'll make these little rrrrrrr sounds," says Backus, emitting

a noise that sounds like a cross between a moan and a hungry stomach. "We say that's her Wookiee voice."

A blind dog named Wonder is no less shy in conveying her needs. Taken into foster care with Valerie Brehm's menagerie of fostered and owned pets soon after the rescue, her sightlessness made placement a challenge. But the dog worked her charms, and Brehm and her husband finally concluded that she belonged with them. In July, they decided to keep her.

"She's pushy, which surprises me, because I would think she'd be more reserved," says Brehm, who lives in St. Petersburg, Fla. "But when she wants affection, she's right there."

Like all the other dogs rescued and brought to life by so many caring people, Wonder is finally herself—and she is finally home. **AS**

To read about the hoarding case these dogs came from, see "Rescued from Squalor" in the November-December 2010 issue of Animal Sheltering.



It's a Miracle

An abandoned cat in Oregon goes from a locked storage unit to a loving home

It was February, and the owner/manager of a storage facility in Oregon City, Ore., heard meowing as he walked past one of the closed units.

So he ground the lock off the door, and, seeing the source of the noise, immediately called the Oregon Humane Society (OHS) in nearby Portland.

Austin Wallace, an animal cruelty investigator for the shelter, arrived quickly, and peered inside the storage unit to see a cat tangled up in a makeshift leash at the foot of a grocery cart.

Trapped in place by the snarled leash, the emaciated cat had urine burns on his

body, and Wallace saw patches of raw skin where the animal had tried desperately to free himself.

"He quite literally looked like he was dying," Wallace says. "I wasn't quite sure if he was going to make it back to the shelter."

Wallace rushed the cat back to OHS, where a staff member was standing by to collect him and race him to the shelter's emergency clinic. The medical team started treatment immediately, checking his vital signs, giving him fluids, and countering the effects of days—or possibly weeks—without food or water.

Barbara Bagnon, the shelter's marketing/communications director, says the cat's

condition at intake was among the direst of any animal she'd ever seen at OHS. "The cat almost looked *liquefied*" because he was so starved.

The kitty was placed on a careful feeding program, so that he didn't go into shock from eating too much food at once. "He was so hungry, he was biting at the air any time he smelled food," Bagnon says.

The cat's story made the local news, sparking outrage in the Portland area. "This is one of the biggest stories we've had in the 10 years I've been here," Bagnon says. She was besieged by TV and newspaper reporters, as well as by the shelter's

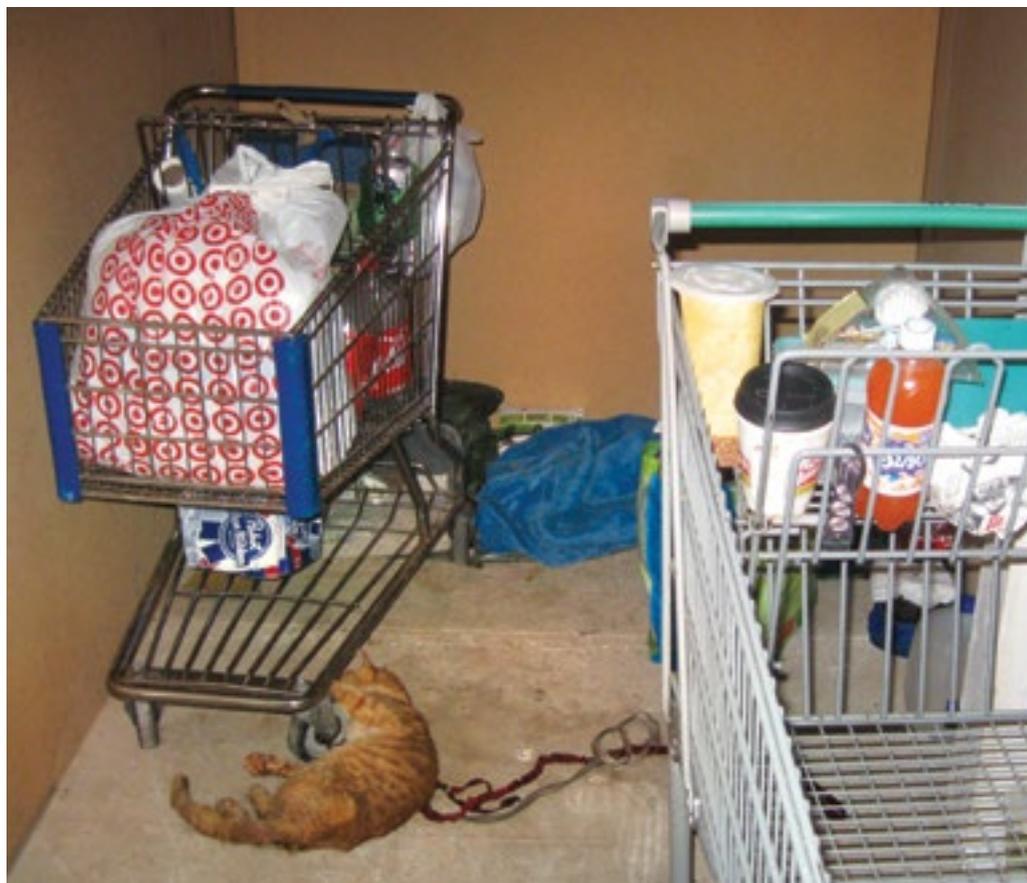
Facebook followers, all wanting updates on his status.

Once the cat looked like he'd turned the corner, the staff dubbed him Milagro—Spanish for "miracle."

It turned out that his former owner was Anthony Glenn Johnson, a homeless man, who had left the cat in his storage unit and then failed to return to care for him. Johnson, who said he had found the cat in a field, was sentenced in July to 30 days in jail and ordered not to own another pet for the next five years, according to *OregonLive.com*.

Among those who'd heard about Milagro were Scott and Joanne Godfrey of Portland, longtime supporters of the shelter. Scott volunteers as an adoption counselor, and Joanne has fostered several cats from OHS.

"I saw the story on the news, and it was just heartbreaking, and I thought, 'Well, let's just keep watching [to see what happens]," Joanne says. A few weeks later, the shelter's foster



Milagro was picked up by Austin Wallace, an animal cruelty investigator at the Oregon Humane Society, after the storage facility's owner/manager heard the cat crying from inside the locked unit.



Joanne Godfrey cuddles Mr. Beanfield—formerly Milagro—during a post-adoption follow-up visit to the Oregon Humane Society, so staff members who'd helped nurse the starving and dehydrated kitty back to health could see how far he'd come.

department called her to ask if she would take Milagro. Joanne, who had taken in some special-needs cats in the past, agreed.

When she met Milagro at the shelter, he was frail and thin, and so weak that he couldn't even lift his paws to climb into a litter box. So the Godfreys had to use a shallow serving dish for him instead. His muscles had atrophied from starvation, and he had lost some of his sight due to the prolonged lack of nutrition. On a diet of high-protein cat food, Milagro slowly regained weight, grew stronger, and became fast friends with the couple's six other cats (all adopted from OHS).

Joanne gave the shelter twice-weekly progress reports, and by the time the foster care department suggested it might be

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- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download a poster about the benefits of adopting a one-of-a-kind mutt.
- To learn more about the Humane Society International internship that Ana Claudia Borges de Almeida participated in, go to hsi.org/internships.
- To see a model of the URI Care Cost Calculator discussed in "Value Added," go to sheltermedicine.com/documents/uri-cost-calculator.
- We couldn't fit into print every response to our Coffee Break question about the best approach to adoptions, so visit animalsheltering.org/publications/magazine/coffee_break.html to read more of what readers had to say.
- And don't forget to join our Facebook community at facebook.com/animalshelteringmagazine!

time to find Milagro a permanent home, the Godfreys had already decided to adopt him themselves.

The couple felt that "Milagro" didn't quite roll off the tongue, so they borrowed from the title of a 1988 Robert Redford movie, *The Milagro Beanfield War*, and rechristened him Mr. Beanfield.

And the cat who'd arrived at the shelter in a precarious condition now leads the good life, enjoying (accompanied) trips to the couple's garden, exploring the garage, and waiting outside the shower till Joanne's done, so he can take a drink.

"He has such a fat belly," Joanne says of the orange tabby contentedly snoozing by his water dish. "I'm looking at him now, and he just rolled over, and he's got this pooch." **AS**

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[scoop]

She Came a Long Way, Baby

An animal welfare advocate from Brazil learns the ropes at the ASPCA

BY ARNA COHEN



Jennifer Lander, left, director of medicine at the ASPCA's Adoption Center in Manhattan, and Ana Claudia Borges de Almeida return Cypher, a 6-year-old miniature pinscher, to his kennel.

In a brightly lit room outfitted with Formica and stainless steel, Ana Claudia Borges de Almeida watched a veterinarian at the Manhattan branch of the ASPCA examine a recently spayed cat. Thousands of miles from her home in Camacari, Bahia, Brazil, the shelter's clean, modern environment was a far cry from the newspaper-covered kitchen tables in the muddy, impoverished villages that are her usual workplaces.

Borges de Almeida was in New York as part of a Humane Society International (HSI) program that brings animal welfare advocates from developing countries to the U.S. to observe and interact with their counterparts in American shelters, learning approaches they can take back to their home countries to help the animals and people in their communities.

The only shelter serving Borges de Almeida's region in Brazil is an overcrowded, rundown facility 15 miles away in the state's capital city of Salvador. Little more than a warehouse for strays, the shelter offers no spay/neuter services. To help with the rampant animal overpopulation in and around Camacari, in 2007 Borges de Almeida founded AnimalViva, a nonprofit organization providing free spay/neuter surgeries. Relying on grants, donations, and the sporadic services of volunteer veterinarians, AnimalViva has spayed or neutered more than 3,600 owned and homeless cats and dogs in local villages.

The program also includes an educational element. "There is a high [level] of violence toward animals in my community," says Borges de Almeida. "The quality of life for an animal is far from desirable."

To change attitudes, volunteers employ music, art, and theater to teach schoolchildren a kid-friendly version of the "Five Freedoms," a set of necessities many animal advocates cite as the basics of a decent existence for any creature—freedom from pain, freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from fear and distress, and freedom to express their normal behaviors.

Borges de Almeida says she has seen changes over the past four years. The number of animals roaming the streets has decreased, and children are developing more empathy for them. After a project last year in which students took photographs of street animals and displayed them in school, Borges de Almeida noticed a child placing bowls of water around the community, trying to help the animals.

"It makes me think that it's not a long process, that we can make a change using education, get a quicker response than we think," she says.

Interning in New York, Borges de Almeida shadowed staff in key areas of the ASPCA's Manhattan shelter, learning from staff working in adoptions, media, fundraising, and behavior. She was particularly interested in the organization's mobile spay/neuter unit, something she hopes to acquire for AnimalViva. She was also delighted by the ASPCA's cat enrichment techniques. "It was amazing to see little cats watching TV before going to adoption," she says.

The internship program is a much-needed, and much-appreciated, source of training and encouragement for those struggling to improve conditions in countries where animal welfare is not necessarily a priority. The challenges they face—lack of funding, shortage of manpower, need for community education—are the same as those faced by animal welfare organizations here, but the levels of resources and prevailing community attitudes toward animals are often very different. The field experience allows the

interns to establish relationships with shelters that are successfully meeting their challenges and can serve as resources for information and advice.

This year's 14 interns, hailing from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, were selected from a pool of 40 applications, twice the number as the year before. Participants spent a week at host shelters in Southern and Mid-Atlantic states before meeting up at The HSUS's Animal Care Expo in Orlando, Fla., where they attended workshops and presentations that specifically addressed economic, logistic, and cultural issues with which international animal advocates grapple.

The conference provides the interns a forum in which to share their passion, problems, hopes, and ideas. "I learned a lot and experienced things that I would never had had a chance to see in Kenya," says Isaac Maina of the Africa Network for Animal Welfare. "I was able to meet and interact with many participants, which was real mentoring to me."

Borges de Almeida, too, went home with fresh ideas for fundraising and building a solid volunteer corps as well as a new network of colleagues to whom she can turn for support and assistance. She has stayed in touch with her ASPCA mentor and fellow Brazilian, Fernanda Mara Netto, manager of customer relations at the shelter's adoption center, and stopped in to visit during a vacation trip to New England in July.

The sense of belonging imparted by participating in the internship program is as powerful as the information and skills the interns take away from it. "The international people often feel that they're out there on their own, and they're not," says Donna Pease, international coordinator for Animal Care Expo and the internship program at HSI. "We're in the same boat." **AS**

To learn more about the HSI internship program, go to hsi.org/internships.

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Wild Thing—I Think I Love You

Vermont humane investigator branches out into innovative wildlife control business



A group of curious young raccoons peers down from the rafters at an outdoor shelter at Pine Haven Refuge, one of the wildlife rehabilitators used frequently by JoAnn Nichols of Into the Wild.

Most wildlife removal companies called by homeowners deal with unwanted wild animals by killing them—they're often drowned, gassed, or shot. If they escape this gruesome fate, they're trapped and released into unfamiliar territory, which can be fatal.

JoAnn Nichols is a different breed of wildlife control operator.

In 2010, the Burlington, Vt., resident started Into the Wild, a business that offers homeowners a much kinder service. Nichols practices humane exclusion, an eviction method that requires knowing the species' biology and habits, and using the appropriate materials and approach to solve conflicts without harming the animals.

Nichols—who worked with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife for months to develop a permit for her business—appears to be the first humane wildlife control operator in the state. The department had never issued a permit for an operation quite like hers before, she says.

She also discussed her plans with staff from The HSUS's Urban Wildlife program, which ad-

vocates that nuisance wildlife control operators (NWCOS) practice humane exclusion.

Now, thanks to Nichols—a licensed wildlife rehabilitator with years of experience—so-called “nuisance” animals who get into buildings (such as raccoon or opossum moms seeking a protected place to give birth and care for their young) are getting a second chance to resume their lives in the wild.

In her years as a wildlife rehabilitator, Nichols has gotten calls from upset homeowners who didn't realize the wildlife nuisance company they hired would actually kill the animal after the removal. No one in Vermont was offering a humane alternative, so Nichols decided to fill the void.

Nichols doesn't relocate the animals she evicts. She takes a better approach, as she did last spring when a mother raccoon entered a home's attic vent space. She removed the mother, collected the babies, sealed the entry point, and put the babies in a nest box outside. When Nichols checked back, the mother had relocated her young.

Nichols does a lot of education, teaching homeowners about various species, their unique needs, and their place in the environment. “I think it's important for people to understand how to coexist humanely with animals, and as we build homes and take up more space, it's going to become a larger issue,” she says.

Into the Wild is just her latest effort to help animals. She's also a part-time humane investigator and animal care provider at the Humane Society of Chittenden County in South Burlington. According to Amanda Blubaugh, the shelter's operations manager, Nichols is currently the only humane investigator in the county—Vermont's most populous.

Nichols also runs her own nonprofit, Ivana Iguana Wisdom and Rescue, working with exotic reptiles who have strayed, or been abandoned or abused. She has 30 to 40 reptiles in her house at any time, and her goal is to rehabilitate and rehome them with people who have the expertise and resources to handle them. Among the species present are green iguanas, a bearded dragon, a Chinese water dragon, ball pythons, Columbian red-tailed boa constrictors, and various turtles.

Though she's licensed to rehabilitate a wide variety of species—a list of wild mammals the length of your arm—she specializes in reptiles. “Ever since I was a kid, I wanted a green iguana, and when I moved to Vermont, I saw one that was up for adoption through another agency. ... She lived with me for 10 years before she passed away,” Nichols says.

She decided to start trying to help other iguanas who needed homes, and that led to working with other reptiles. Now, cold-blooded creatures are her hobby.

Joanne Bourbeau, Vermont state director for The HSUS, has known Nichols for 10 years, and says she is a great resource for shelters that need advice on wildlife calls. Nichols gives workshops for law enforcement officials and other humane investigators about how to handle wildlife during cruelty complaints.

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Bourbeau lauds Nichols for her professionalism, her ability to work with a variety of people, and the diversity of her skills. "It's great to have somebody I can turn to" on sheltering and wildlife issues, she says.

Of all Nichols' activities, her work with Into the Wild has been the most satisfying. "It's really important for people to understand and become educated about wildlife and how to live humanely with them," she says. "[Wild animals] are such an important part of our environment, and they're worth saving—they add beauty to our world." **AS**



Wildlife control operator JoAnn Nichols—holding an opossum she removed during a call—founded her own humane wildlife exclusion business, Into the Wild, in 2010.



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Taking the Roads Less Traveled

Nonprofit battles pet overpopulation in rural Eastern Pennsylvania

They begin arriving soon after 8 a.m. on a beautiful June day when the Tractor Supply Co. in Hazleton, Pa., opens up. But these early birds aren't birds—they're 23 cats and three dogs.

Their owners have brought them to the parking lot for a low-cost sterilization. A volunteer registers the patients, fills out paperwork, and waits for the spaymobile to arrive.

At 8:30 a.m., the big blue truck pulls into the parking lot. Barb Loch, clinic director of the Eastern Pennsylvania Animal Alliance (EPAA), hobbles out of the driver's seat. Just two months after having one of her knees replaced, Loch prepares for an eight-hour day on her feet.

"If you need both knees replaced, they tell you to do it all at once. Because if you do one knee first, you'll never do the other," she says.

Veterinarian Kim Mah speaks to all the owners when they fill out their paperwork to make sure they understand the risks of surgery. Mah left traditional veterinary practice after 10 years to focus on providing spay/neuter services for EPAA. "I like the routine of doing surgery," she says. "Every animal is a little bit different. The veterinarian has to do anesthesia, too, and there's no such thing as routine anesthesia."

At 9:30 a.m., Loch and Mah enter the truck to begin surgery. The volunteer stays with the cats and dogs waiting in their carriers on the loading dock. The spaymobile has come to the parking lots of the Tractor Supply stores in Hazleton and Wilkes-Barre twice a month for the past year, sterilizing a total of 580 cats and 70 dogs.

Two years ago, EPAA was just an idea in the minds of a group of concerned citizens in Monroe County. The clinic began operations in May of 2009 with less than \$10,000 capital. During the first few weeks, EPAA's two employees didn't know if they were going to get paid, says board president George Kitchen. "All the donations went to buy equipment." The organization had no



Barb Loch, right, clinic director for the Eastern Pennsylvania Animal Alliance, helps veterinary technician Lynn Castiglia administer a shot to a dog named Bella.

money in the bank to pay salaries when it opened its doors.

Kitchen hired Loch to run the new spay/neuter clinic, and says she deserves the lion's share of the credit for making it a success. Loch had already transitioned the Center for Animal Health and Welfare in the Lehigh Valley into a no-kill shelter and started a spay/neuter clinic there. She and the shelter's veterinarian, Lori Milot, resigned from that organization to start working for the newly formed nonprofit EPAA. "It took a community to start this clinic," Loch says. "So many animal welfare groups pulled together to get it off the ground."

In the early days, the clinic used a borrowed surgery table, donated space in an H&R Block office, and an anesthesia machine rebuilt from two machines that were being discarded by a shelter in Philadelphia. "For about \$500 and the cost of some tubing, we got an anesthesia machine worth \$5,000," Loch says.

It helped that Loch had extensive contacts. She received tips on where to buy used equipment from veterinary surgical supply companies. A veterinary practice in nearby East Stroudsburg, owned by doctors Claire and Sammie Thompson, hosted a fundraiser—

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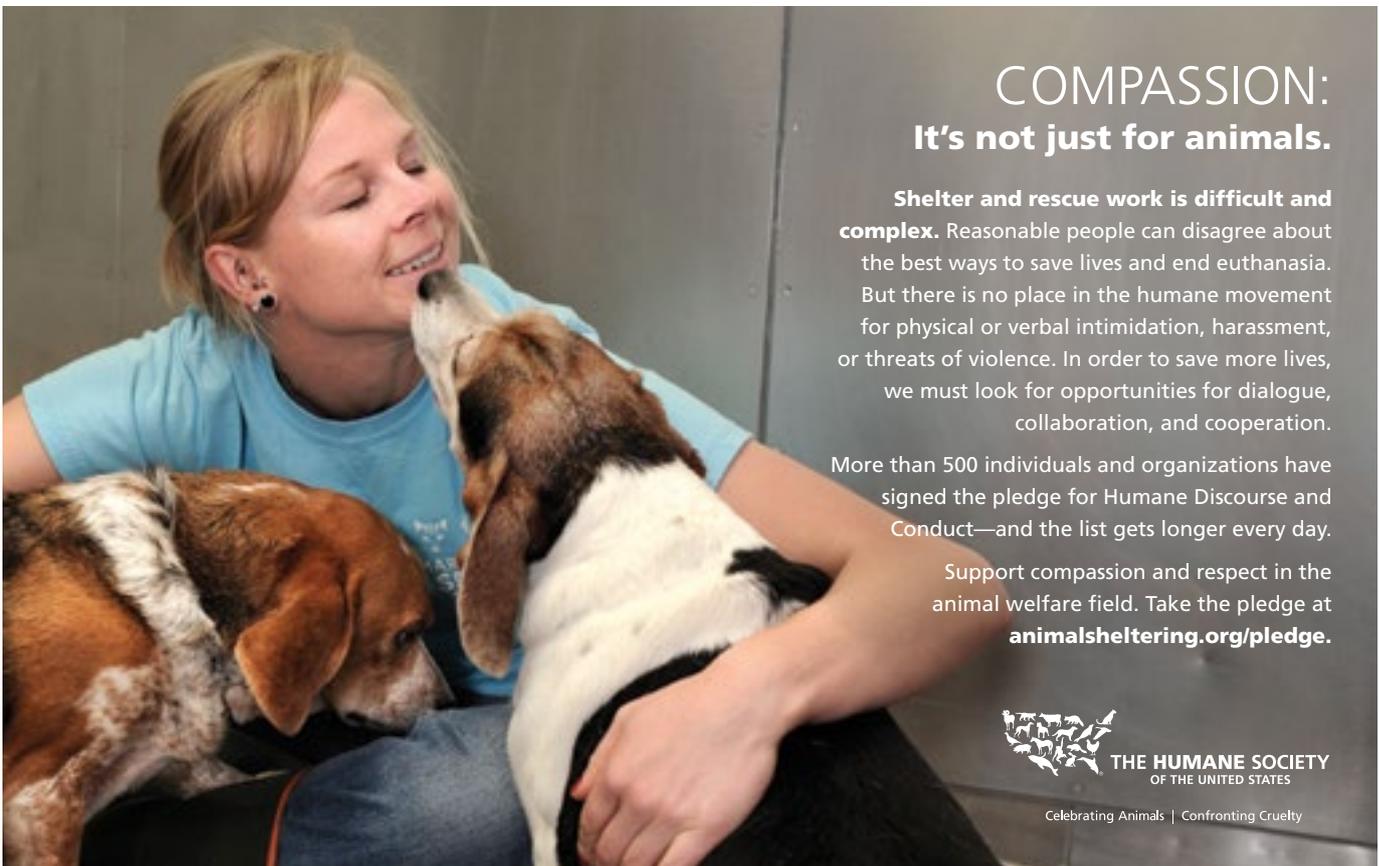
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Clinic director Barb Loch vacuums fur off a cat she just shaved in preparation for surgery.

Operation Catsnip—and gave the new clinic its autoclave for sterilization of instruments.

Today, the clinic has its own office space in Brodheadsville, as well as the spaymobile, purchased in the first six months of the clinic's operation thanks to an anonymous donation of about \$12,000. With the spaymobile, "It's like having two clinics," Loch says. EPAA also employs a part-time vet, Julie Hoberman, who specializes in cats, and two vet techs, Karen Bowers and Lynn Castiglia. They have a few loyal volunteers who answer phones, schedule appointments, and do laundry. In its first two years of operation, EPAA has spayed or neutered close to 10,000 animals.

The spaymobile usually goes out two times in a week, often traveling far away from EPAA's base in Brodheadsville. "We went to a community in Masthope Mountain near the New York state border that had a feral cat problem," Loch recalls. "It took us two hours to get there."

Reducing the overpopulation of cats is Loch's next big mission for EPAA. "I want to hit the feral cat problem hard," she says. But first she needs grant money, an administrator for a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program, and a few dozen volunteers to trap, transport, and care for the cats. "I have about three more balls in the air than I can juggle right now," she says.

The spaymobile makes monthly visits to A Pocony Country Place (APCP), a residential community in Tobyhanna, to do TNR. APCP serves as an example of how hard it is to find volunteers to help run a feral cat TNR pro-

gram; only about six women volunteer to help with the program in a community of 13,000 people. They trap over the weekend and transport the cats to the community's clubhouse. The spaymobile comes on Monday, the male cats are released on Tuesday, and the females on Wednesday. The volunteers have to feed the cats and clean up the clubhouse over the four or five days of the TNR.

"We would like to do it more than once a month, but we need more volunteers," says APCP board member and TNR coordinator Eileen Lawrence.

A few days after the clinic at APCP, the spaymobile was parked in the parking lot of the Hazle Beer and Deli in Wilkes-Barre, a regular stop on its schedule. Carol Coffee, who owns the deli, has been running her own TNR program for 10 years. One winter, there were so many cats living in the creek bed next to the deli, Coffee decided she had to do something. She estimates that she has sterilized about 2,000 cats since then—often using money out of her own pocket—without ever starting a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Asked how much she has spent in 10 years, Coffee replies, "I have no idea." A conservative estimate of the cost to spay 2,000 cats is at least \$50,000. She and EPAA now work in tandem to battle local pet overpopulation, and the organization has lifted some of her burden.

A flier by the cash register inside the deli reminds customers that the EPAA spaymobile will be in the parking lot once in June, twice in July, three times in August, and every week in September. Even the local Petco store tells customers to bring their newly adopted pets to the Hazle Beer and Deli if they need a low-cost spay or neuter.

Before Coffee found EPAA, she took homeless cats to a local vet who gave her a wonderful discount, though he cautioned her that she might not be making a difference for all the money she was spending. "He told me, 'You're spitting in the ocean,' and I said, 'Somebody's gotta spit.'" **AS**

Kietryn Zychal is a freelance writer and do-gooder at large who lives in northeastern Pennsylvania. Check out her website at kietryn.com.

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The technical stuff: Our preferred file format is PDF/X-1a:2001 with crop marks at least .125 inches from artwork. Accepted alternate file formats are QuarkXPress, InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop. If an ad is submitted in a format other than PDF, graphics and fonts must be included — images must be CMYK and 300 dpi. Line art must be at least 600 dpi. The dimensions must be (or must be adjustable to) full page including bleed: 8.375 inches by 10.75 inches; live area/non bleed: 7.125 inches by 9.5 inches.

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Cat Lady Takes on IRS—and Wins

Court decision emphasizes right of animal welfare volunteers, especially fosterers, to deduct expenses

Jan Van Dusen, a 59-year-old former family law attorney in Oakland, Calif., claimed more than \$12,000 expenses as a charitable deduction on her 2004 tax return—money she had spent housing, feeding, and providing medical care to scores of foster cats living in her home.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) said “No.”

That dispute led to years of wrangling between Van Dusen, a longtime fosterer affiliated with Fix Our Ferals and other Oakland-area nonprofit animal welfare groups, and the IRS, eventually leading to a 2009 showdown in U.S. Tax Court.

In June, Judge Richard Morrison finally ruled in her favor: The decision allowed her to take a charitable deduction for most of the expenses she incurred.

“I was just stunned. I was so shocked,” says Van Dusen, who represented herself in tax court.

The outcome came as a relief to Van Dusen, and it also has implications for volunteers around the country. The decision will affect how the IRS treats the millions of dollars in tax deductions that volunteers take each year, in order to be reimbursed for money they spend on behalf of all kinds of IRS-recognized charities.

The case is clearly a personal victory for her, but it doesn’t set a legal precedent so much as it offers clarity on the law that’s already on the books, according to Lester Thompson, a senior manager in federal tax services for Ernst & Young who has led workshops at Animal Care Expo to help animal shelters and rescue groups to better understand tax rules.

The IRS asserted that Van Dusen’s care of the foster cats was a personal activity, and that it wasn’t possible to discriminate between what she was doing for her own seven cats and the many foster cats in her care—in effect, that all of them were just her pets.

“But [the judge] said that it was clear that those feral cats were part of a program



being operated by Fix Our Ferals, and for that reason, it was in fact a charitable activity,” he says.

Van Dusen offered a variety of records—carbon copies from her checkbook, credit card statements, receipts for pet food and cleaning supplies, utility bills—to show her expenses, but they didn’t distinguish how the resources were allocated.

“She’s not buying separate food for her pets and separate food for the other cats; they’re all comingled. And comingled recordkeeping presents a challenge,” Thompson says. “The IRS likes to be able to identify what portion of every expense is deductible and what’s not, and the case documentation shows they had a problem with her recordkeeping.”

The judge ultimately decided that 90 percent of her veterinary and pet supply expenses, and 50 percent of her cleaning supply and utility expenses, were used for Van Dusen’s care of the foster cats, and allowed that portion to be deducted.

One sticking point was that Van Dusen didn’t know that in order to claim deductions of \$250 or more, she needed not only a canceled check, receipt, or other record; she also needed a letter from the affiliated charity, acknowledging the expense on its behalf.

Because she lacked such a letter, her claimed deductions for several big-ticket expenses—namely, veterinary bills—were disallowed.

Still, Van Dusen got most of what she wanted, and her case serves as a reminder to shelter fosterers, TNR folks, and rescue volunteers: Keep good, clear records and receipts for your good works, and you may be able to keep more of your money.

Van Dusen plans to keep fostering. “Yeah, people usually don’t get completely out of this,” she says, though she’s trying to get her numbers down. “I think a friend of mine is dropping a cat off—excuse me.” **AS**

To read the entire decision, go to ustaxcourt.gov/InOpHistoric/VanDusen.TC.WPD.pdf.

Trends in Animal Welfare Salaries

BY PATTY GOODWIN

How have salaries and benefits for animal welfare positions changed over the years? Through its partnership with Mountain States Employers, the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) has been collecting “pay intelligence” for 18 years, to help animal welfare professional leaders ensure they are paying comparable or better wages than industry best practices.

The 2011 survey had a record 148 participants reporting salary data for 44 positions. We extracted 20 positions that have been consistently surveyed, averaged the base salaries, and looked at the percentage increases for the last 10 years compared to 2011. Positions were sorted into three categories—Top Management, Supervisory, and Clerical/Technical. Table A displays the three categories and their average percent increases compared to the 2011 weighted average salary.

Top Management positions include CEO/executive director, assistant director/

deputy director, veterinarian, head of operations, head of fund development, and head of human resources. Supervisory positions include head of community relations, shelter manager, animal control/field operations supervisor, kennel/animal care manager, and volunteer manager. Clerical/Technical positions include animal control/field officer, humane educator, executive assistant, data entry clerk, accounting assistant, publications coordinator, dispatcher, animal care attendant, and adoption counselor.



On average, there is not a substantial difference between the three categories. When comparing data, Top Management has had the greatest gains in average salaries, but Clerical/Technical positions have shown higher average increases over the last two to four years.

Base salaries are only part of total compensation packages. Also collected in the

SAWA Conference Schedule

- 2011 Annual Conference, Burlingame, Calif., Nov. 13-15
- 2012 Management Conference, St. Louis, Mo., June 13-15
- 2012 Annual Conference, St. Petersburg, Fla., Nov. 4-6

SAWA surveys was the percent of employees eligible for bonus/incentive pay. On average, more employees are eligible for bonus/incentive pay than they were 10 years ago; with average annual pay increases being so low over the past few years, employers are using bonuses as a method to reward top performers and recognize achievement of specific goals. For the Top Management category, an average 35 percent are bonus/incentive eligible in 2011 versus 31 percent in the 2001 survey; Supervisory an average 30 percent versus 28 percent; and Clerical/Technical an average 25 percent versus 20 percent 10 years ago.

Compensation is one of the top reasons employees will stay with an organization. As shown in Table B, turnover for 2000, 2002, and 2004 remained high for all areas, but overall has gone down steadily.

The total for all areas includes categories not listed above. Participants calculated turnover rates based on the formula of total number of separations for a year divided by the average number of employees during the same year.

For a copy of the complete 2011 report, visit tinyurl.com/2011SAWASaSurvey. The report includes salary data for 44 surveyed positions and is displayed by annual budget and geographic location; it also includes data on benefits and personnel practices. **AS**

Patty Goodwin is the director of Surveys of Mountain States Employers Council Inc. and a SAWA member.

Table A: Weighted Average Percent of Increase

	LAST 2 YEARS 2009-2011	LAST 4 YEARS 2007-2011	LAST 6 YEARS 2005-2011	LAST 8 YEARS 2003-2011	LAST 10 YEARS 2001-2011
TOP MANAGEMENT	4%	10%	18%	26%	32%
SUPERVISORY	5%	9%	20%	19%	29%
CLERICAL/TECHNICAL	7%	11%	19%	21%	28%

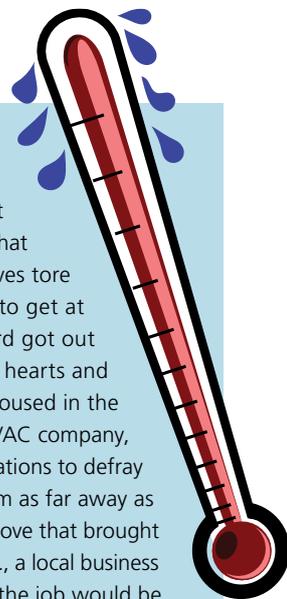
Table B: Average Staff Turnover (full-time employees only)

AREA	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002	2000
ADMINISTRATION	14%	17%	17%	17%	35%	18%
ADOPTIONS	28%	36%	34%	46%	49%	58%
FIELD OPERATIONS	18%	26%	22%	26%	45%	33%
ANIMAL CARE/KENNELS	37%	47%	47%	63%	63%	69%
VETERINARY SERVICES	24%	27%	23%	42%	46%	47%
ALL AREAS	29%	33%	33%	36%	47%	46%



You can go home again. Devastation rained down from the sky in April when tornadoes swept across the South, destroying property and taking lives wherever they touched down. Judy Pugh of Tuscaloosa, Ala., was at home when a twister struck; an interior wall fell on her, which she says is the only thing that kept her from being carried away. Though her house was leveled, she and two of her three cats survived. Her third cat, however, was nowhere to be found. Pugh visited the wreckage every day, hoping against hope that 10-year-old Cadie would turn up. And here's the twist to this twister story: One month after the tornado hit, a meteorologist from Channel 42 in Birmingham, Ala., was interviewing Pugh in her yard when Cadie strolled up the front walk. Pugh scooped him up and burst into tears. "I have everything I want now," she said. "I have all three cats." Cadie was not wearing ruby slippers and couldn't say whether a Good Witch had tipped him off on how to get home.

Coldhearted thieves leave shelter in a sweat. It wasn't dogs or cats who were targeted in a robbery at the Animal Welfare League in Chicago on June 30—it was the air conditioner. During a miserable heat wave that jacked temperatures into the 90s for days on end, thieves tore apart the Wabash Avenue facility's two rooftop units to get at the valuable copper piping and coils inside. When word got out about the theft, residents and businesses opened their hearts and wallets to make sure that the more than 100 animals housed in the shelter would not be in danger. Trane Inc., a national HVAC company, lent the shelter portable air conditioning units, and donations to defray the \$25,000 cost of replacing the system poured in from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska. In all, \$32,000 was raised, but in a move that brought executive director Linda Estrada to tears, the Corrigan Co., a local business called in to do the repairs, told her to keep the money; the job would be done for free. "These three brothers, the Corrigans, were wonderful," says Estrada. "It was the hottest days that they were up there morning, noon, and night working, donating all their time." The brothers also arranged for the Carrier Corp. to make a gift of the massive air-conditioning units, enabling Estrada to put the donated funds toward giving the nearly 80-year-old building a sorely needed update.



Free-fur-all. Lollypop Farm had it all—cats, counselors, customers. The only thing missing on July 7 was ... adoption fees. The fur flew when the shelter, also known as the Humane Society of Greater Rochester, held a one-day "Priceless Purrs" adopt-a-thon, waiving adoption fees for all cats, including kittens. Adopters flocked to the shelter and its two satellite adoption centers, often waiting for up to two hours for the chance to take home a dream furball. "We did not get one complaint," says Gillian Hargrave, Lollypop's vice president. "They totally understood that this was a big day and there would be a wait." By early afternoon, all 34 of the shelter's available kittens (4 months and younger) had been spoken for, and by the end of the day another 74 juniors (5 months to a year) and adults had found new homes for a grand total of 108 cats, a record for one-day adoptions at Lollypop. People who arrived at the tail end of the day didn't go home empty-handed—they received a coupon for a free adoption to be redeemed within one week. Though a bit apprehensive that waiving the fee might attract people adopting "for the wrong reasons," Hargrave found she didn't need to worry. "People who just want a free cat aren't willing to go through what can be a two- to three-hour wait, a sit-down with a counselor, and [everything else] they have to go through in order to get a cat," she says. She also found that almost every adopter made a donation at the completion of the process. The adopt-a-thon was so successful that another one is already in the works.

Express yourself. Having trouble finding the right words to convey your emotions? Never fear, use your ears! Inspired by cats, who have no trouble relaying their feelings through their ears, the country that brought us sushi and the Walkman now presents Necomimi! A mash-up of the Japanese words for “cat” and “ear,” the device from Neurowear consists of an electronic headband sporting oversized, fuzzy, cat-shaped ears that move in response to the wearer’s brain wave activity. The ears flop down when the wearer is relaxed and spring to attention when the wearer is excited by something, like eating a doughnut or looking at a cute guy. The developers claim that products like this could ultimately be helpful for those who are verbally disabled, easing frustrations by helping them show feelings. We’ll just stick with our mood rings, thanks.



New baby news. It’s not your typical new baby announcement. Age: 6 years, Weight: 10 pounds, Length: 24 inches, Eyes: Gold, Hair: Calico. It’s a furbaby announcement! Pet parents can send one of their own by adopting a pet at one of the 3,800 shelters that are members of the lams pet adoption center network during the company’s 12th annual Home 4 the Holidays campaign, which runs from Oct. 1, 2011, to Jan. 3, 2012. They can then broadcast their joy online by visiting lams’ Facebook page and downloading a customizable announcement to share with Facebook friends and family. For every announcement shared, lams donates a bowl of food to pets in need. Those who aren’t quite ready for pet parenthood can still get in the act—lams also donates food for every “Like” the page receives during the campaign and for the purchase of specially marked bags of lams cat and dog food. Shelters interested in joining the lams adoption center network can get more information at animalcenter.org/home4theholidays.



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What do you think is the best approach to adoptions?

Are there certain requirements organizations should never budge on?

What are the most important things to do when interviewing potential adopters?

Those are the questions we asked for this issue's Coffee Break. You responded by telling us about the policies, screening skills, and animal evaluation methods you've developed to try and ensure that animals adopted from your shelter find the best possible matches.



The Danbury Animal Welfare Society's adoptions are about making the right match between people and pets. Volunteer adoption counselors interview prospective adopters to guide them toward animals that fit their lifestyle. A few things we don't budge on: everyone living in the home must meet with us and the animal before the adoption is approved; at least two personal and one veterinary reference; and facilitated animal introductions by our training director to spot red flags with a prospective adopter's current companion animal(s). We also give adopters a sense of the financial responsibilities of caring for an animal, since most people factor in food and grooming but may not have considered veterinary expenses beyond routine care. We also realize that circumstances may change, so our adoptions don't end when the animal goes to its new home. We follow up and make sure our adopters know we are there to help—and happy to do it!

—Melissa Sader, volunteer
Danbury Animal Welfare Society
Danbury, Connecticut

Our adoption philosophy has shifted in the eight years I have been here. We used to be very strict, [but] that did not seem to make much sense when so many animals were being put down. We now concentrate on education rather than exclusion. We still turn some people away. We do not want to place an animal in an unsafe situation, but we no longer demand perfection.

—Peggy Brown, community outreach
Humane Society of North Texas
Fort Worth, Texas

We evaluate our dogs so we know a bit about their personalities, energy level, and preferences. When an adopter comes in, we feel it's important to ask, in a nonjudgmental way, how they plan on caring for the dog and what sort of lifestyle they live. They may think they want a high-energy dog because it's cute, but if we discover they work all day or are inactive at home, we explain to them about the dog's needs and lean them toward animals that are more appropriate to their personal lifestyle. We explain that a bad match leads to an unhappy dog, and that an unhappy dog will develop behavior problems that will make the owner unhappy. By catering to the owner's desire to have a well-behaved dog, we're usually able to convince them to find a better match.

—Alyssa Walker, front office manager
Cache Humane Society
Logan, Utah

We are a guinea pig rescue, and our adoption process requires an application, a phone interview, and a half-hour, in-person training session, because education furthers the human/pet bond and offers a better chance at permanent placement. We also have minimum-square-foot housing requirements for the guinea pigs and other small exotics.

—Amanda Peterson, president
Arizona's Piggie Poo Rescue Inc.
Phoenix, Arizona

We adopt out one dog at a time. Each dog is an individual, and each home is different. Our dogs come from varied backgrounds and generally require a fair amount of rehabilitation before they are ready for adoptions. With that said, we are open to all homes. Our dogs are placed with plenty of assistance, if needed, after the placement, so no rule is written in stone. We screen adopters for cases of animal cruelty and ask about any dogs that may have passed away from negligence. These are probably the only two things we are firm on with each adoption. It is my belief that many shelters are too strict with adopters, to the detriment of the dogs. No home is perfect, but I can find the perfect home one dog at a time.

—*Laura Azevedo, founder
Canines in Transit
Wallingford, Connecticut*

I think the most important thing about adoptions is dialogue. Talk to the potential adopter and find out what their expectations are in the new adoptee. Looks may be what drew them to the dog they're applying for, but the temperament, activity level, and social skills of the animal are what's going to keep them in the home. They've likely chosen to adopt a pit because of some positive experience or trait of the dog. We make sure that we know what that is, so that we can meet their expectations. If their previous dog was super chill and just hung out on the couch, the last thing we want to do it put a seriously athletic dog in their home. The dog and the adopters may both be awesome, but we're failing them if we place them together.

—*Kim Smith, president, board of directors
Pit Bull Rescue San Diego
San Diego, California*

At the Calgary Humane Society, we understand that people make the difference. Without people, we would not be in a position to help as many animals as we can, almost 8,000 animals every year. We knew that in order to save more lives, increase donations, and reduce the need to euthanize healthy, adoptable animals, we

needed to look at how we were presenting ourselves to our public. We save more lives by working together to create a compassionate, nonjudgmental environment where everyone is welcome. We follow an "open adoption" policy where we get to know our adopters, and work with them to find the best animal to welcome into their home. We listen to our adopters and get to know them. Everyone knows that companion animals are easily obtained in the community, with little to no questions asked, so it is imperative that we inform people about the benefits of adopting from us!

—*Christine Landry, department head
of adoption/weekend shelter manager
Calgary Humane Society
Calgary, Alberta*

We find the best approach is to ask open-ended questions like, "Tell me about your pets." Questions that get people talking about their past or current pets reveal more than anything about the type of pet owner they are and will be.

—*Nancy Rubino, rescue coordinator
Partners for Animal Welfare Society
(P.A.W.S.)
Greenfield, Indiana*

The most important thing we do is let adopters talk! Usually people (or their children) will hang themselves if they are not great adopters. We have a couple of rules we will never break. We never let an animal leave unaltered, and we make sure that the adopters' current animals are altered, too. Most people just need education and aren't planning on breeding their animal. With other adoption rules, you can be a little more flexible. It depends on the dog and the household it may be entering. Mostly we just make sure the dog or cat finds its purr-fect match.

—*Allison Gillespie, adoptions counselor
Saint Frances Animal Center
Georgetown, South Carolina*

Congratulations to Alyssa Walker, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, Cache Humane Society in Utah, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appétit!

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an email or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.

The ASV Guidelines in Real Life

PART FOUR:

The Foster On-Deck System at the ARL of Boston

BY SANDRA NEWBURY, D.V.M.



In 2010, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) released a document several years in the making: *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*. Developed by a roster of veterinary experts, the standards are designed to “balance animal welfare science with practical and realistic recommendations for shelters,” and to provide a vision based on the needs of animals, which, the authors noted, remain the same regardless of how individual organizations’ missions and resources may differ. Here, we feature the fourth in a series of stories using real-life shelter examples to demonstrate how the ASV guidelines can be applied within the sheltering and rescue field to create better and more humane outcomes for the creatures we care for.

When kittens who are too young to be adopted show up at the shelter, what if all you needed to do was call the person who signed up to take foster kittens that day to say, “They’re here!”?

What if, instead of putting the kittens in a general housing area at the shelter, introducing them to whatever infectious diseases and stressors might be waiting, you could examine the kittens, screen them for potential problems, and send them right into the protective care of a trained foster parent?

What if you could schedule all the points of care the kittens will need before they even leave the building?

This kind of efficient system can be put in place, with some hard work, proactive recruitment, and excellent planning. The payoff for the kittens lasts them a lifetime. And there’s a positive ripple effect for all the other animals in the shelter, which can be measured in increased capacity for care, decreased risk of infectious disease, more time for enrichment, and even opportunities for improved housing.

This kind of system is at the heart of population management. According to the Association of Shelter Veterinarians’ *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, “Population management describes an active process of planning, on-going daily evaluation, and response to changing conditions as an organization cares for multiple animals. Effective population management requires a plan for intentionally managing each animal’s shelter stay that takes into consideration the organization’s ability to provide care ... ”

This example is not just a dream. In 2010, the Animal Rescue League of Boston (ARL-Boston) worked with the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program to implement the Foster On-Deck System as part of an overall feline population management strategy. Assistant manager Melissa Tanguay coordinated the program. Tanguay reports that the shelter has “seen such a positive difference from managing our foster program in a more proactive way: happier staff, happier foster parents, and healthier foster animals. It has been a win-win for everyone.”

So how did they make it happen?

Planning Pathways

The ARL-Boston has worked to develop pathway planning, a crucial element of making this kind of program work. Pathway planning is a method of actively tracking each animal’s shelter stay from the moment they arrive (or even before) to the moment they leave.

The idea behind pathway planning is that each animal is on the road to an outcome from the very beginning, and in order to make that outcome positive, each step should be anticipated, scheduled, and completed on time. Capacity needs and limits (such as staffing, housing, and other resources) can be evaluated for each individual pathway, helping to target priorities or identify problems.

Pathway planning does not mean an animal can’t change direction; it just means that each animal is understood to be going somewhere, with a plan in place for how to get there. Pathway plans for each animal should be evaluated daily. The pathways themselves should also be monitored regularly to be sure they are running smoothly. For example, is the adoption pathway backlogged with animals waiting for spay/neuter? What’s causing the delay? How can it be eliminated? Would rearranging the clinic’s schedule help?

Many shelters have developed innovative lifesaving systems for getting animals through the shelter quickly and efficiently. These systems use good management and proactive planning to reduce risk for the population as a whole and for the individual animals.



No Surprise is a Good Surprise

Here is a hypothetical example of the kind of planning that can allow a shelter to save more lives: Say a woman calls to say she has found a healthy, friendly, 6-week-old male kitten and plans to bring him into the shelter that afternoon.

This shelter knows that, due to laws in its particular state, it will not be able to place the kitten up for adoption for another two weeks. Rather than have the kitten come in, a shelter staffer calls an “on-deck” foster parent, who has signed up and received training at the beginning of the season. Knowing that they’re next in line, the foster family is already prepared to accept the kitten.

The kitten is evaluated at entry by intake staff and found to be in good condition. He is checked for a microchip, vaccinated, dewormed, and screened for infectious diseases. His picture is posted in the shelter and on the shelter website. The shelter cross-checks any reports of lost kittens. The foster parent (or, if the shelter has created one, an on-call foster kitten delivery service) arrives later that afternoon to transport the kitten to his foster home.

The intake staff schedule an appointment for the kitten to come in for an exam and to get neutered, revaccinated, and dewormed before being made available for adoption in two weeks. If the kitten is reunited with his lost family, the

appointments will be cancelled. This same scenario goes on multiple times a day, all week long.

In this example, a pathway of foster-to-adoption is planned even before the kitten enters the shelter system. Assignment to that category was made based on an understanding that the kitten was healthy, friendly, and too young for adoption. If circumstances change—for example, say that at intake, the staff discover the finder did not accurately describe the kitten—the pathway may change.

In this example, there are several critical points where the kitten will need some kind of care to be able to continue along the pathway toward adoption. The kitten will need an intake exam; pick up for fostering; foster care; an exam upon his return from foster care; neutering; and placement in an adoption housing unit (unless he gets adopted directly from his foster home). Waiting time at any of these points of care will cause the length of stay for the kitten to grow longer.

As the guidelines state, “Adequate staffing must be available to ensure that each critical point of service (e.g., vaccination or medical evaluation, spay/neuter surgery, or a physical move to adoption) is delivered promptly. Delays resulting in even one to two additional days of care may result in crowding and poor animal welfare in facilities that operate near maximum capacity. Expected demand for these critical points of service should be estimated based on the expected numbers of animals who will need each service and the length of time it takes to complete each procedure (e.g., number of animals needing evaluation or spay/neuter surgery prior to adoption).”

The worst place for a delay to occur is in the shelter. Kittens have higher susceptibility to disease and require specialized care to keep them healthy and happy. The best place to have delays would be while the kitten is in foster care—but even in foster care, extended stays will mean a longer time for space to open in that foster home, and thus a decrease in capacity. Additionally, in many communities, kittens tend to have the best chance of adoption when they are very young, so delays in making this kitten available may decrease his potential for adoption.



The Planning Process

ARL-Boston has done an excellent job of planning this pathway to make its Foster On-Deck system work. Its first assessment was to compare intake numbers to likely outcomes for kittens. Based on previous years' statistics, the shelter believed it would be able to place most healthy kittens coming in—if it could keep them healthy.

Early in the year, well before kitten season, shelter staff evaluated data to estimate how many of the entering kittens would likely need foster care because they were stray or too young. ARL-Boston realized it would need, on average, the capacity to allow one litter each day to go to foster care throughout kitten season.

Tanguay and her team created a written plan, including a list of goals in several categories. (Their goals were comprehensive enough to include a category for foster parent appreciation—an important element of continued recruitment!) They proactively recruited foster homes, increasing capacity for care. They trained foster parents and assigned them to tiered levels of care difficulty. And they created the Foster On-Deck System, so that foster parents would be ready and waiting when kittens came in.

They created an online document that shows foster parents and ARL staff who is “up to bat” next. Foster parents can see where they are in the rotation, and make adjustments if they are going out of town or just need a little more rest “in the dugout” before taking on a new ball of kitten energy.

The shelter evaluated its staffing for intake procedures, allowing enough time for a thorough evaluation of kittens—including all the procedures necessary prior to foster placement. It recognized that intake capacity is crucial. If this initial critical flow-through point has inadequate capacity, then kittens would never even be able to get on the pathway.

The shelter also evaluated its capacity for spays and neuters, to be sure it would have adequate opportunity to provide surgery for foster kittens promptly when they returned from foster care. Shelter staff evaluated housing space in the adoptions area, to be sure returning kittens wouldn't wait “in the back” for space to become available. The shelter even reorganized its surgery schedule to allow for more Friday surgeries, to coincide with higher weekend adoption rates for kittens.

The volunteer-driven foster kitten delivery service is still on the ARL's goal sheet. It had been planned in case foster pickup in Boston's after-work rush hour was causing delays—but so far, kitten pickup hasn't been much of a problem, so the league has that element “on deck” itself for now!

Through careful planning, lifesaving capacity is maximized. Length of stay for kittens is minimized to what is only absolutely necessary, both in the shelter and in foster homes. Kittens stay healthy and get the enrichment and socialization they need, and the shelter has more time and space to “go to bat” for everyone else. **AS**

To learn more about the population management strategies ARL-Boston has used, see the ASPCApro webinar from their series on the ASV's Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters at tinyurl.com/3tyalng.





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LIVES' ON THE LINE

Animal control and welfare work can be dangerous. How can we reduce the risks?

BY MARK KUMPF

When animal control officer Bobby Evans reported for duty at the Bellmead Fire Department on June 18, 2007, he probably expected it to be a typical Monday morning. After checking in around 8:30 a.m., Evans—the lone ACO for the community located near Waco, Texas—headed to the shelter to check on the animals. When Evans failed to respond to radio calls, Bellmead fire chief James Karl went to the pound around 10 a.m. to check on his officer, only to discover that he'd been murdered—shot in the back multiple times.

With no evidence of a struggle and no recent threats, authorities were at a loss. Texas Rangers and the FBI quickly joined in the investigation, hoping that a combined law enforcement effort would help find his killer. As the reward fund built to more than \$20,000—with donations from the Texas Animal Control Association, The HSUS, the National Animal Control Association (NACA), and others—the case was featured on *America's Most Wanted* in September 2007. A break led investigators to two suspects already in jail on unrelated drug charges. James Ramirez and Jerry Newland Jr. were later charged and convicted of Evans' murder. Newland was sentenced to life in prison while Ramirez was sentenced to serve 90 years.





Every day, animal control officers and humane investigators face unpredictable situations with limited knowledge, stepping onto unknown turf where they may encounter a dangerous animal or—more likely—an angry member of the public. What can they do to protect themselves?

animal control safety

Evans was well-respected. His daughter Crystal, in tears, was barely able to finish a statement at a press conference shortly after her father's death. "All he ever wanted to do was make a difference in the world, whether it be helping that one person or saving that one animal," she told the press.

Sadly, Evans' death is not unique in the animal welfare field. Others, including officers, shelter workers, and volunteers, have faced threats, serious assaults, or even been



ACOs—like Allan Corman of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, shown here—can increase their safety by staying in touch with colleagues and their dispatcher while out and about.

killed in the line of duty. Sometimes they've been in the wrong place at the wrong time; sometimes their facility has been targeted by criminals—and sometimes tempers have flared with tragic results.

I've seen the dangers at close hand. During my career in animal control, I have been threatened, assaulted, and even run down by a suspect attempting to avoid a ticket. In that case, instead of receiving minor citations for not having a dog license, the suspect ended up convicted of assault along with hit-and-run.

In one particularly terrifying situation at my former job in Norfolk, Va., humane officer Dee Bardin and I pursued a stray to a house where we were confronted by a despondent owner who, after threatening us and destroying property in her yard, retreated to her house—which, we were soon informed by a family member, was filled with weapons. Crouched behind our vehicles for cover, we waited for the tactical response team to arrive. Luckily, negotiators were able to resolve the situation without anyone being injured.

But almost all of the officers in my unit in Norfolk were victims of some form of assault during their careers, and it's hardly a problem specific to the city.

In December 2009, Baltimore animal control officer Jermaine Barnes was shot and wounded while investigating a complaint of dogs being kept illegally in one residence and seizing a dog from another call. Barnes had parked curbside

and was completing paperwork when a gunshot shattered the driver's window and struck him in the hand.

Barnes was treated at the Maryland Shock Trauma Center and later released; he suffered significant damage to his hand and had to undergo multiple surgeries.

Interim health commissioner Olivia Farrow noted in a statement that animal control is a dangerous job, but a necessary one in order to protect public welfare by ensuring that pets are properly vaccinated, dangerous animals are caught, and hurt or endangered animals are rescued. According to Farrow, Barnes never returned to work after the incident.

Animal control officers put on their uniforms and go into the field many days knowing that ours is a dangerous job. But even animal welfare folks who don't typically work in the field face danger. In 2008 in Christchurch, New Zealand, Kerry Downey, co-founder of a group called Cats Unloved, received a call from a local state housing tenant claiming he would kill a cat left behind by a previous tenant if no one came to collect the animal.

Downey served as office manager at the Cats Protection League and usually routed such calls to other volunteers, but this time, she volunteered to fetch the cat. The next morning, Downey did not report to work, and calls to her telephone went unanswered. Her body was found two days later; she had been killed. No one has been charged. A friend of the victim noted in an interview with the *Sunday Star Times* that the volunteers were often threatened or abused when responding to similar calls.

A Long History

Captain Jeff Christner of the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA started compiling a list of line-of-duty deaths in 2002. Using news archives and information from fellow officers, his list reaches back to 1906, when a Cincinnati dog warden died from rabies after being bitten on the hand by a stray dog.

Unlike information on the deaths of police officers or firefighters, the records for animal control casualties have



While the public envisions animal control officers' work as simply rounding up stray dogs, the reality—and the dangers—are much more complex.



In their day-to-day work, field officers can encounter dangers that range from fractious animals to the environmental and health hazards that can accompany a severe hoarding case.

not been tracked or consolidated in any one location. Christner says his project started as casual research. He expected that someone would “eventually pipe up and say it’s already been done.” Instead, his project is the only list of its kind, and continues to grow as he compiles additional accounts. Christner says he knows there have been other line-of-duty deaths, but that some sources have been understandably reluctant to talk about them in detail. Some fear retaliation for disclosing unfavorable information about their employer. One officer who asked not to be named says their agency routinely disciplines officers for any injury because “all injuries are preventable.”

Posting to an online forum, Christner noted that “the list may not be 100 percent accurate and does include some police officers who were killed in the line of duty performing animal control-related duties.” Road-related deaths were most common, but Christner says that overall it looks like more officers were shot and killed as a result of animal control-related activities.

ACOs have been beaten or shot by animal owners, accidentally shot with their own weapons, and by other officers on a call. Despite these situations, most ACOs still are not issued body armor (commonly known as bulletproof vests).

Commenting in response to the posted line-of-duty list on the website ACOFunStop, one ACO noted, “This year was my 16th year in the field. I have been shot at twice. ... I lost track of the knives, machetes and swords that have been pulled on me. ... Our agency carries very little protective gear. In a county with a population of over 900,000, we have 14-16 officers and the only thing we carry is a ‘bite stick.’ We have no body armor, weapons, or even pepper

spray and have been told that we should always carry a clipboard in the event of a dog attack. I am constantly ‘knocking on wood’ that my day is safe, but it does bother me when county management clearly says in a meeting, ‘As long as no one has been killed or injured, we do not need to make any changes.’”

Threats from Within

Most threats officers encounter result from disgruntled animal owners. But over the past few decades, there have been increasing threats from an unexpected and troubling source: other animal lovers. In some cities, leaders and employees of major shelters have been physically threatened because local advocates take issue with how their agencies are being run. Reports from jurisdictions like Los Angeles and Miami have covered organized campaigns aimed at individuals—campaigns that have included smear tactics, public protests, petitions, and acts of vandalism.

The chief focus of these attacks often centers on the emotional and polarizing issue of euthanasia. Several national groups have been concerned about the increasing nastiness of these battles over policy, and The HSUS has sought to reduce the level of animosity through the implementation of a Humane Discourse Pledge. Organizations and individuals may electronically sign the document and, in doing so, pledge to work on animal welfare issues without personal attacks on animal welfare personnel. Physical or verbal intimidation, violence, and acts of terrorism are not solutions to animal welfare problems.

With the myriad dangers confronting animal control and animal welfare professionals, some organizations have taken



Taking in mistreated or stray animals, many officers have been threatened by angry owners. Nationwide, criminal penalties for assaulting an ACO often carry lesser degrees of punishment than those for assaulting other public safety officers.

official positions on equipping and training field staff. NACA lists recommended equipment for field officers, including ballistic vests, pepper spray/citronella, and bite sticks. The organization also provides guidelines for training certification and conducts training for use of the equipment and the procedural guidelines in its training academy, offered throughout the United States.

As a nationally certified animal control officer, I've had a great deal of training in animal services procedures, which included defensive tactics and animal handling (both companion animal and livestock). I've also been trained in dealing with difficult people, and conflict resolution. The difference between a tense situation and one that's actually dangerous is often just a matter of degrees; frequently, a potentially dangerous situation can be prevented just by learning to sound friendly and nonconfrontational when dealing with citizens. A smart officer learns when an ag-

gressive tone and body language are necessary, and when they're more likely to make a situation worse.

Courses from NACA, my local police departments, and The HSUS have provided a variety of tools, strategies, and tips that have helped me safely return home from each shift. In some situations where prevention was not possible, the training served to minimize the injuries I suffered. Many of us bear scars that remind us to be more alert the next time. Training helps us share those experiences, so that others may successfully avoid some of the mistakes, mishaps, or trips to the hospital.

Legal Inequalities

Misha Goodman, vice president of NACA and a 28-year veteran of the animal control field, regards officer safety as a critical issue for any agency. Goodman's personal experience includes being physically assaulted, confronted by a shotgun-wielding dog owner, and threatened with stabbing. "Animal calls can be very emotional, and distraught pet owners can do just about anything," says Goodman, recalling a man whose dog had been picked up as a stray. Facing down a shotgun-wielding owner telling her, "You're not taking my dog!" Goodman called for additional law enforcement, resulting in the man's arrest.

Most animal control officers and animal welfare workers fall outside extended legislation that covers police and firefighters. Many states have enhanced penalties for crimes against traditional law enforcement and public safety officers, making some offenses felony-level or even capital crimes.

But Goodman explains that, nationwide, animal control officers face inconsistent classifications, and criminal penalties for assaulting them often carry lesser degrees of punishment. In her case, for example, the physical assault conviction resulted in only a minor fine. In Virginia, assaulting an animal control officer is a misdemeanor, but injuring a police dog is a felony.

Recently in Ohio, after a Franklin County dog warden was the victim of a severe assault while attempting to apprehend a stray dog, state Rep. Nancy Garland (D) of the 20th House District introduced a bill that would raise the penalty for assaulting a dog warden, humane agent, or animal control officer from a third-degree misdemeanor to a fifth-degree

Resources

- For information on the animal control officer memorial, visit the NACA website at nacenet.org/memorial.html.
- To sign the Humane Discourse Pledge, go to animalsheltering.org/pledge.
- The recommended equipment and safety list from NACA is available at nacenet.org/guidelines.html.



In October, the National Animal Control Association opened the Memorial Wall and Gardens, a permanent tribute honoring animal control officers who have died in the line of duty.

felony, equaling the protections for other law enforcement officers. This bill has the support of the Ohio County Dog Wardens Association for recognizing the dangers that all animal welfare professional face when performing their duties.

Medical provisions such as “Heart and Lung” acts recognize that heart attacks are line-of-duty injuries for public safety officers—but again, ACOs and others are often omitted. Efforts to include them have repeatedly failed, as local and state officials are against “incurring additional costs” or facing increased salaries. Although Bobby Evans was a volunteer firefighter and worked under the fire department, his position as an ACO was not classified as a public safety officer. As a result, his family was not eligible for the life insurance benefit that other public safety officers receive in Texas.

Animal control officers often face a lack of support, but they support each other by sharing suggestions to help protect each other against work-related and on-the-job threats or dangers. Most are simple, commonsense ideas such as avoiding fatigue by getting proper rest and not skipping meals. An officer’s physical condition can make a significant difference when he faces a challenge or crisis. Other safety strategies include having an unpublished home telephone number, keeping social networking contacts for work and personal life separate, and practicing what is known as “situational awareness,” both on and off the job. Exchanging

information on problem cases, people, and animals can keep colleagues alert to potential hazards.

Each day, thousands of animal protection professionals leave their homes and loved ones to safeguard the millions of animals and citizens in the United States. Like their fellow law enforcement and public safety professionals, some of them don’t make it home at the end of their shifts. Their compassion finds them at work striving to do their best, despite budget cuts and challenges. Departments all over the country face layoffs, reductions, and outright elimination. Unfortunately, animal care and control doesn’t attract the attention that other public safety offices garner, resulting in a loss of services that goes unnoticed by the general public until a high-profile attack or animal hoarding case occurs. Then, locales find themselves without appropriate staff, resources, or the ability to respond. Officers are working to educate the public and elected officials that a well-trained, properly funded and equipped animal services staff is the best solution.

Some local departments recognize officers’ sacrifice, but until recently, there hasn’t been a national memorial to animal control officers. That has just changed. On Oct. 1, the National Animal Control Association Memorial Wall and Gardens was dedicated and opened at the organization’s headquarters in Olathe, Kan., a suburb of Kansas City. The wall is inscribed with the names of fallen officers and set against a garden backdrop where visitors can reflect on their losses and honor their memories. **AS**

Mark Kumpf is the director of the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center in Dayton, Ohio. He has been in the animal welfare field since 1989, is a former president of the National Animal Control Association, and a Certified Animal Welfare Administrator.



The author, left, discusses a case with Adam Parascandola, director of animal cruelty issues at The Humane Society of the United States.

VALUE ADDED



Quantifying the results of sheltering and animal welfare programs

How do you show donors that your work is, well, working?

BY JYOTHI VINNAKOTA ROBERTSON, D.V.M.

I LOVE ANIMALS. Don't we all? That's why I'm in the field of animal sheltering. That's why you're reading this magazine. It's our passion for animals that brings us together.

Most of us appreciate the vital role animal welfare organizations play in our communities. They help animals. They help people develop relationships with animals. They support communities. They make the world a better place.

But not everyone in our communities is an animal lover. How do we explain the importance of our programs to public officials who must account for spending decisions, or to financial institutions and granting foundations that select where to give? How do we demonstrate to people outside the sheltering sphere that programs designed to help animals will produce a tangible benefit for their community? How do we convince people who don't have strong bonds with animals that our projects are valuable, not only socially but economically? How do we then measure and express this social value in our field?

Broadly defined, "social value" is the value that nonprofit organizations, social ventures, social enterprises, and nongovernment agencies create within their targeted communities. These ventures improve society in ways that may not be quantifiable in monetary terms. Examples include programs to help educate children, provide medications for the poor, and employ disadvantaged people.

There may not be an obvious financial return for the investment that funders make in these programs, but the eventual benefit to society is clear. Giving children access to good education, for example, leads to lower school dropout rates, less crime, more productive citizens, and eventually, a higher standard of living for the entire community.

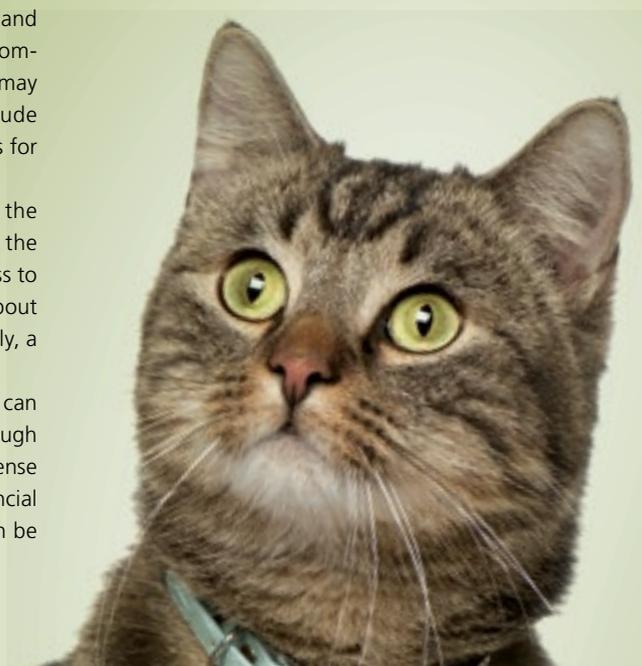
A price cannot be placed on a child's education. Or can it? By counting the cost of educating an at-risk child through high school and comparing that cost to the greater expense of incarceration, schools can demonstrate a direct financial and societal benefit to educating a child—one that can be

understood and appreciated by even those taxpayers who don't have children.

Demonstrating Value

The continuum between social value and economic value is now being bridged by socioeconomic metrics that include such financial comparisons. Since value terms are subjective, some aspects of social value are lost in these calculations, but these measurements allow people who may not agree about the subjective elements (i.e., the importance of well-educated children) to discuss and compare the financial merits of a program.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is one metric that is being used by many nonprofits to calculate social value in socioeconomic terms. In a for-profit business, investors expect a return on their investment (ROI), which is calculated in financial terms. They place a specified amount of money into a venture that, they hope, will lead to a greater return than the initial amount spent, or a net gain. The end result: People make money.



quantifying results

In contrast, SROI analysis includes monetized items, but also takes into account those aspects of social ventures that are not usually calculated financially. SROI analysis identifies the key stakeholders involved in an issue and examines the relationship between the resources available for a project and the expected outcomes for each stakeholder. If an item can be monetized, it is; those that cannot may be addressed in a number of ways (such as being given financial “proxies” to calculate potential returns). For example, if a project’s intended outcome is to increase the likelihood that a young person will enter college, one proxy could be the comparative income earned by a person graduating high school versus a person dropping out of high school.

We can utilize similar metrics in animal sheltering to bridge the gap between social value and economic value. In the simplest terms, our organizations save animals’ lives. Our most basic sheltering metrics include live release rates to reflect the proportion of lives saved.

But what is the economic value of one life saved? Does the cost of saving one life exceed the cost of euthanizing? Shelters must account for the expense of housing an animal in their facility: staff time, food, cleaning supplies, physical space, and utilities. Euthanizing an animal would eliminate most of these costs from the equation. If we compare these numbers, we could argue that it would be more cost effective to euthanize animals than to save them.

Thankfully, such utilitarian arguments do not rule our society. The challenge—and also the rationale—for using measurements such as SROI is to determine the economic value of a social return so that people do not take a purely utilitarian view of social decisions. We generally agree: Some things are worth the expense.

Quantifying Complex Issues

Using SROI analysis as a framework, sheltering organizations can place a dollar value on aspects of their work that can be monetized through financial proxies.

For example, rather than placing a price on the life of an animal, an “animal care day” can serve as a proxy for calculating costs for a shelter. One animal care day is defined as one day that an animal spends in an animal shelter. If an animal spends 10 days at a shelter, it would contribute 10 animal care days to a shelter’s total number of care days.

In a study recently conducted by our team at the University of California-Davis, we tabulated the number of care days over one year that nine shelters spent caring for cats with upper respiratory infections (“sick care days”) and the number of care days spent caring for cats without upper respiratory infections (“healthy care days”). Our analysis showed that some shelters spend almost a quarter of their resources caring for cats with URI, demonstrated as the percentage of sick care days out of the total number of care days

for that individual shelter. When we account for medication, staff time, separate cleaning supplies, and isolation housing for a sick cat, the cost of one sick care day far exceeds the cost of one healthy care day. Undoubtedly illness will lead to longer lengths-of-stay as well, adding to an overall net cost that is greater for sick animals than for healthy animals.

Through our research, we further determined that one way to decrease the number of cats acquiring URI at a shelter is to decrease cats’ stress by housing cats in double-compartment housing units. The overall size of each individual cat’s housing unit will increase, and disease transmission will decrease by reducing handling necessary for routine care.

It takes an initial upfront investment to make this improvement, so some shelters may be reluctant to make the change to larger, compartmentalized housing units. However, using animal care day calculations, a shelter can show stakeholders that the cost savings of decreasing the number of sick care days at a shelter would offset the cost of improving housing units, resulting in an overall net benefit.

To conceptually understand these calculations using the SROI model, we define an animal in a home (as opposed to a shelter) as having the highest likelihood of staying healthy. Then, the overall social return on improving housing would be to have cats quickly adopted into homes where they are less likely to become ill and where they are no longer costing the shelter money—again, not the chief concern of animal lovers, but often of great importance to funders. In this way, the social value of keeping cats healthy is presented in socioeconomic terms that can be readily appreciated by those requiring hard numbers.

Showing Them Their Money

Presenting social value in these concrete terms becomes important in the programs that animal shelters promote as well. Let us examine spay/neuter programs as an example. Many animal shelters operate subsidized spay/neuter clinics. Salaries for staff (including surgeons and technicians), materials costs (including building maintenance), are often higher than fees that might be placed on services provided (surgery, microchips, vaccines).

The direct *financial* return on these programs is generally negligible compared to the costs. Yet we all know that the social return of spaying and neutering animals is tremendous, for both the individual health benefits and the community effect of decreasing the number of homeless animals.

There is value at many levels for all the stakeholders involved: value for the individual animal (health-related, since animals are likely to live longer and remain healthier when altered), value for the community (fewer strays/unplanned litters, less risk of disease spread), value for government (fewer animals for animal control to pick up). The social value that these programs create is large, but the immediate monetary rewards may not be readily measurable or apparent. Thus, it becomes necessary to determine a monetary return for the individual animal, community, and government.



It All Adds Up

Our team at the Koret Shelter Medicine Program has developed a URI Cost Calculator that will allow shelters to assess the cost of illness in their facilities. One benefit of placing illness in financial terms is to demonstrate a cost savings when illness is reduced through improved management. Let's examine the following scenario:

A shelter houses 100 cats in single-compartment, 2-foot-by-2-foot, stainless steel cages. On average, the staff finds that 60 cats will be ill with URI (60 percent morbidity). They attempt to treat all of these cats in their facility (rather than sending them to foster homes).

Using the cost calculator, they input the daily staff time and fixed costs for housing a healthy cat versus housing a sick cat. The cost of URI is roughly \$6,500 per month for their organization. If they reduce URI morbidity to 40 percent of the population, the cost of URI will decrease to \$4,330, resulting in a cost savings of \$2,170 monthly.

This organization decides to drill portals in its cages to create double-compartment housing for 50 units. The cost of portal construction and installation is on average \$80 per portal, leading to an overall cost of \$4,000. Within two months of

installing the portals, if the shelter's URI morbidity decreases to 40 percent, the organization will recoup the cost of implementing the change.

It takes a concerted effort to improve the welfare of cats in shelters, but research clearly demonstrates that improved housing significantly decreases URI risk. Placing management changes in concrete financial terms allows organizations to assess the economic impact of improving health and well-being.

Check out the URI Cost Calculator at sheltermedicine.com/documents/uri-cost-calculator.

Now let's say that a funder or donor has to choose one program to support among four or five different spay/neuter programs. How do they make their choice? Do they base their choice on the number of surgeries each group accomplishes? The number of animals placed? Or should they base it on an overall decrease in the number of animals coming into shelters from the community the program serves?

A person's decision to support a program should be based on something more tangible than anecdotal social value. Sheltering organizations should present valid socioeconomic measurements (such as an SROI analysis) to demonstrate to funders how their organizations will provide the best social and financial return for a funder's investment. You can place a monetary value on those things that can be monetized, and also incorporate a nonmonetized form of demonstrating and quantifying your impact. This may take the form of an animal care day, live release rates, or something that we have yet to consider.

Organizations should define their mission and how they perceive success for programs within the framework of that mission. Mission and interests define value, and a particular mission perspective will lead to particular questions. For example, if an organization's mission is "to end the euthanasia of homeless animals due to pet overpopulation," then success must be based on the organization's ability to impact pet overpopulation and euthanasia. Projects targeting spay/neuter of community pets and the measures of success that ensue would fall within this organization's framework. However, if the organization's mission is "to end the needless suffering of homeless animals," a different set of questions and measures would result.

Stakeholders' engagement is a key component in determining which programs to pursue when using socioeconomic

metrics. Different stakeholders ask different questions. Not everyone needs or wants to know the same things, so different measures should be used for different purposes. There is no single agreed-upon measure of success.

In the examples above, the "stakeholders" are all those people who are affected by sheltering programs. They include civic leaders, municipalities, investors, grant makers, funders, and private citizens. It also includes all of us, as employees, contract workers, or volunteers associated with sheltering facilities. And, importantly, there are the animals. Accounting for their preferences may be a challenge, but we should not forget that they're the ones we're working to help.

We need to spend time creating a system to compare social mission investment and activity. When presenting our programs to funders, grant makers, government officials, and other stakeholders, we should give them valid reasons for choosing our programs that go beyond social value and include fiscal value. Doing so legitimizes the work that we do. It allows for more effective programs and increased transparency. Most importantly, it leads to more effective methods of helping animals. **AS**



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Finding the Alpha Dog

How to land a great executive director for your shelter

BY JIM BAKER



Nancy McKenney, who started as the new executive director at Marin Humane Society in March, had the kind of skills the search committee wanted: leadership and management abilities, strategic planning and fundraising experience—and bunny-cuddling skills to boot.

When the McKamey Animal Center in Chattanooga needed an executive director in 2008 for its brand-new facility, its search committee advertised the position nationally on several career search-engine websites and by word-of-mouth, yielding more than 190 résumés.

The committee heard back from lawyers, accountants, store managers, personnel specialists, kennel workers, nail technicians, veterinarians, students, and more. Only about 1 percent of the applicants had any shelter experience. “We even had an exotic dancer apply,” search committee member

and emeritus board member Barby Wilson recalls, laughing. “I think that’s the mentality ... people think, ‘Oh, I love animals—it’s not a problem, I can handle that job.’ And it’s not like that at all.”

The shelter was conducting its search for a new leader after the departure of its previous head, who’d been on the job for less than a year. Wilson says she’d had impressive credentials, but ended up being the wrong fit for the shelter.

The second time the Chattanooga shelter’s search committee members went looking for a new executive director (ED), they

learned from their earlier experience. The mechanics of the search process stayed the same—advertising locally and nationally, gathering résumés, interviewing and culling candidates—but other elements of their approach were different.

During their first search, they’d been focused on their capital campaign. With the new building finished, their conversations with candidates the second time around focused not on getting a building built, but rather on policy and procedures, Wilson says.

The search committee had also learned not to get overly anxious and hurry to

hire someone, and not to search for ways to make a résumé fit the job. The second search committee, according to Wilson, was much more savvy and probing in the interview process.

But what *really* made the process different was that this time, committee members had the advantage of watching one promising candidate on the job, working at the Chattanooga shelter as interim ED. That was Karen Walsh, who had been involved in several fundraising events for the capital campaign. She was a member of the teaching staff in the veterinary technician program at Chattanooga State Community College, and she had worked as an animal control officer years before in Virginia.

And she had business experience, which the search committee really wanted in its new leader. Walsh had run a successful restaurant for five years. The search committee approached her about serving as interim ED while the shelter looked for a permanent replacement. Walsh agreed, and indicated that she'd like to be considered for the top job, too. Even as some members



Being able to communicate a vision for the organization is key, says Steve Jacobson, right, executive director of the Animal Welfare Society in West Kennebunk, Maine.

of the search committee were insisting that the next ED should be a “big-time shelter person from out of town,” Wilson says, Walsh was bringing chaos into order right before their eyes.

The committee ultimately decided it didn't need to search any further. “Karen had a very balanced résumé with a strong business background, sheltering experience, and vet tech experience, balanced with excellent interpersonal skills,” Wilson says. “No other candidate brought that combination of attributes to the table.”

Let the Right One In

Being an executive director is a tough job—just ask anyone who's ever tried her hand at it. There are so many “hats” to wear: leader, manager, fundraiser (also known as “donor schmoozer”), spokesperson, strategic planner, animal advocate ... the list goes on. That's why it's so important to hire someone who—sticking with the hats metaphor—has a head that will fit into all of them. Plus,

you've got to find someone who's a good fit for your community and your shelter's particular philosophy.

Conducting such a hire is no small task, judging from the short tenures of many shelter EDs. Some leave after just a few short, tumultuous years—or are pushed out by boards or advocates that are unhappy with them, whether for reasons of performance, personality, or that amorphous, hard-to-define problem of “unsuitable fit.”

Times have changed in the way shelters go about hiring an ED. It used to be enough to have a passion for animals and a commitment to the field, according to Inga Fricke, director of sheltering and pet care issues for The Humane Society of the United States.

These days, she says, it's not enough to just have shelter operations knowledge, or skills limited to any one field. “You have to have a balance nowadays. A good ED is somebody who is flexible, adaptable, who has a really strong foundation in a variety of areas. Obviously if they *aren't* quite as strong in one area, they really have to have support staff that's very strong under them that they can rely on,” Fricke says.

Finding that perfect leader can be tricky, but with the right kind of preparation, it is possible to come up with just the right candidate.



Karen Walsh's experience as a licensed veterinary technician and as an animal control officer was a strong factor in her getting the job as executive director at the McKamey Animal Center. Here, she helps ACO Jay Nicholson with a German shepherd found running at large.

You help animals. We help you.

The right preparation includes advance planning and conceptualizing; if your organization knows where it wants to go, it's a lot easier to find the right person to drive you there.

Do They Have What it Takes?

Jane Luiso, a former executive director of the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago and past president of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA), has helped many shelters find candidates for executive director jobs. Luiso now works for the Chicago-based Kittleman & Associates, an executive search firm exclusively serving nonprofit organizations and institutions.

These days, Luiso says, shelters often want their leaders to have strong business skills, and they may also be seeking a head who'll fill certain skill gaps in their management team. That means finding people who know how to work with a board of directors, understand financial statements, and have experience managing staff and a grasp of fundraising.

Candidates who have that combination of talents frequently come from the nonprofit sector, but they also, increasingly, come from

Finding that perfect leader can be tricky, but with the right kind of preparation, it is possible to come up with just the right candidate.

the business world, equipped with sales and marketing skills and the ability to go out and "sell" their organization to donors and the wider community, according to Luiso.

Wilson thinks this is paramount. "To be successful, and to be able to provide appropriate and compassionate care ... a shelter must first be run as a business. Do hire someone who can grasp all the aspects of running a business, from the financial side to the personnel side," she says.

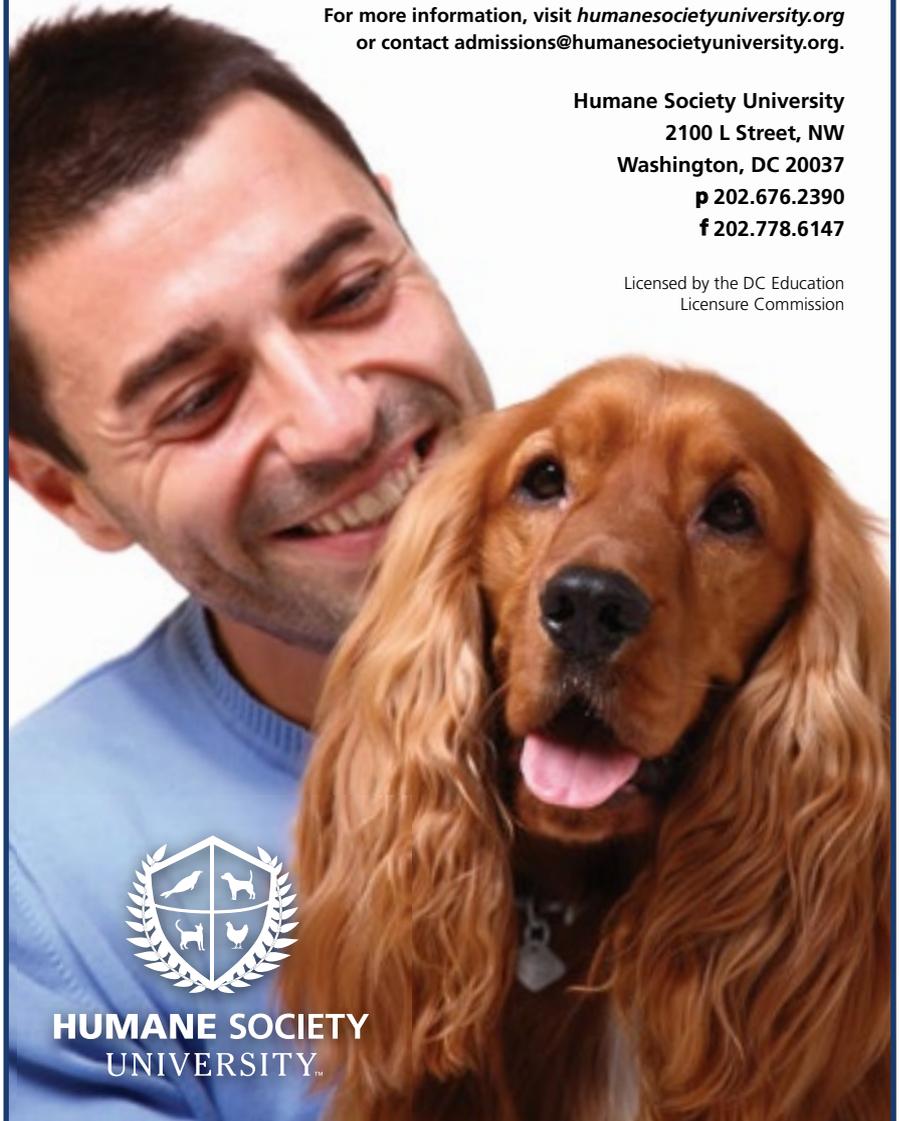
This is not to say that operational knowledge and skills aren't important—they are. But they're not always necessary

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Shelters are increasingly complex organizations to run, and candidates who are seeking the top job must have a firm grounding in how nonprofits operate. Nancy McKenney of Marin Humane, left, confers with vet tech Andrea Reese, as veterinarian Belinda Evans performs surgery.

for a candidate to have in her background. It really depends on the kind of shelter she's being hired for, says Luiso, who notes that operations skills may not be needed for the ED of a very large shelter, where the director of operations would handle much of the hands-on operational work. But it might be different at a small or medium-sized shelter, where, Luiso says, the organization might be light in that kind of expertise and need the ED to have more sheltering knowledge.

Take a Good Look

Then, of course, some job candidates have qualities that boards and search committees should avoid like the parvo. Sources contacted for this story had some definite ideas about this.

For example, avoid zealots, who can't see the shades of gray in many of the ethical dilemmas common to sheltering work. Avoid those with a "my-way-or-the-high-way" approach to managing people. Or a candidate who loves animals, but has less enthusiasm about working with the two-legged variety. Not to mention the folks who look great on paper, with impressive credentials, but lack the practical skills to succeed in a shelter setting.

Also deserving a yellow flag, Fricke says, are ED hopefuls who make sweeping promises to accomplish challenging goals without any evidence that they have the skills and experience to actually do it. "They have the passion, but they don't have the know-how to get there. No track record, and no real practical understanding of what that's going to take."

Hiring people like these can be a recipe for disaster. But how can you spot one before you hire one? By being careful, and doing your homework.

Warren Cox, executive director of SPCA Inc. in Lakeland, Fla., has worked in the sheltering field since 1952. He's served as ED at more shelters than he can remember, and also served as interim ED many times, helping boards find candidates for the top job. In fact, that's how he started out at SPCA Inc.

He's learned a few things about the hiring process along the way, such as: Learn about the candidate's background. That's essential, yet it's often done only cursorily by board members. "They should look at the [person's] résumé with an open mind, and then do their research," Cox says. "A lot of times I've found out recently they're putting things on their résumé that aren't honest; it's probably half true, but it's fudging it."

Wilson advises that it's important to dig deeply into a potential ED's background; there is often more than meets the eye. Don't forget to check references, and utilize Internet resources—Google can be a wonderful thing.

If possible, one way to glimpse the reality is to simply visit the candidate's current shelter. "If I was a board member, and I was going to hire somebody, and I knew that they came from [a certain] place, I'd have somebody stop by, and take a look at that agency, and see what they thought," Cox says.

A common mistake Cox has seen shelters make is to interview a candidate once, and then reach a decision. The process should be more complex than that, designed to reveal more about a potential ED than a single interview can provide.

"Sometimes you can see a person at an interview, and they're just totally dynamic; they overwhelm the board," Cox says. "But they don't have that candidate come back, and really interact and get to know the staff, or have other people interview them, and that person is hired, and it was really kind of like a smokescreen."

It's important to dig deeply into a potential ED's background; there is often more than meets the eye. Don't forget to check references, and utilize Internet resources —Google can be a wonderful thing.

Cox encourages shelters to invite candidates to "come back for a whole day, and meet as many people as they can, even meet with community leaders, because it's very important to see if that person can interact with everyone."

Again, when you're looking for the right person, it helps to know what you want them to do in the job. That means taking your time, and carefully considering what qualities and skills the new ED should have. What is your shelter trying to do over the next five years? The next 10? What professional skills will help an executive director guide the shelter team toward accomplishing those goals?

Say your shelter wants to focus on increasing adoptions and reducing euthanasia, for example. Does your candidate share that vision? How would they go about achieving it? Some of these qualities are harder to quantify, getting at the roots of an individual's philosophical approach to sheltering, as well as animal welfare in general. Wilson argues that it's essential that any prospective ED understand (and share) a shelter's mission and operational philosophy. During the hiring process, the search committee should discuss the candidate's perception of the "big picture," she says, as well as his or her perception of what constitutes the fundamentals of shelter operations.

Often it boils down to "the vision thing," which sounds awfully intangible. But Steve Jacobson, executive director of the Animal Welfare Society in West Kennebunk, Maine, believes it's part of the reason he was hired. Coming from an insurance background, Jacobson's business experience impressed the search committee, but its members also liked that he had an idea of where he'd like to take the shelter in the future.

"I went into my interview ... with a vision. Even the use of the word 'vision' was pretty important," he says. He shared his thoughts about improving the shelter's PR, customer service, and facility. He sketched some ideas on increasing adoptions and growing the donor

base, and for transforming the shelter into more of a regional, rather than strictly local, organization.

"I realize that these items aren't unusual or very exciting," he says, "but verbalizing these as goals during the interview gave the committee reassurance of what I wanted to do."

Yes, Goldilocks, There is a Just Right

All this makes it sound like hiring the right ED is like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack.

But when shelters do things right, they can find the right person. Earlier this year, the Marin Humane Society in Novato, Calif., was looking for a new leader. It was a time of rapid—and often rocky—transition for the organization. The shelter's longtime ex-

ecutive director had retired in 2007 after 26 years in the job; she was followed by two more EDS who left in quick succession.

The board engaged a search firm, and created a criteria matrix to help refine the interview and selection process. "We were looking for a proven track record across the board: leadership and management skills, strategic planning experience, fundraising, government and community/media relations, advocacy, board relations—all packaged in a person with a style that would fit well in our community and with our staff," says Laura Goff, chair of the search committee.

Nancy McKenney emerged as the best candidate, and took over as CEO in March. She'd previously spent 19 years as CEO at the Humane Society for Seattle/King County. She has a master's degree in non-profit leadership, and she's a past president of SAWA, among other accomplishments.

McKenney thinks it was a combination of her sheltering experience, her firm grasp of strategic planning, and an ability to work with the board and staff during a time of transition that led the search committee to choose her as the new ED.

The job of being a shelter ED—you could argue that it's more of a calling, really—is one of the more difficult professions out there. Wilson notes that her shelter's search committee often felt that the job description should have included a line that said, "Must be able to walk on water, while alligators are just below the surface, nipping at your feet."

An amusing image, but it's true. An ED has so many roles to play, in addition to dealing with what sometimes feels like a new crisis every day. Hiring the right person—one who will allow a shelter to grow, innovate, and carry out its mission—is a process that requires care and patience. It's an important decision, so give the hiring process, and the gravity of the position, their due. The community and the animals will be the better for it. **AS**

For more about the skills needed for humane society staff to rise from their current positions to ED, read Jane Luiso's SAWA column, "Rising to the Top," in the September/October 2011 issue of Animal Sheltering.



These days, it isn't enough for a shelter ED candidate to "just love animals"—you've got to be able to understand financial statements, raise funds, and know how to manage people. Jacobsen confers with Animal Welfare Society co-managers Bobbi Allen and Kirstin Minnini.

Playing with a Purpose

Aimee Sadler shows shelters how to socialize dogs through play groups

BY JAMES HETTINGER



Aimee Sadler, an animal trainer who specializes in play groups to socialize dogs and straighten out problem behaviors, finds an attentive audience at Longmont Humane Society in Colorado.

At the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), animal care attendant/enrichment coordinator Brian George has a simple summation of the play groups the shelter began running earlier this year: "It's about letting dogs be dogs, you know?"

Dogs in the BARCS play groups run and play in fenced yards furnished with hoses, small plastic swimming pools, sand, beach umbrellas, basketballs, volleyballs, and tennis balls—"everything we can think of," George says.

"When they're out in play group, it's great stimulation for them physically and mentally," he explains. "So when they're back

in the kennel in their cages, their cage behavior is just really improved. The better behaved they are in the cage, the better their chances are of getting adopted."

The play groups, which have quickly become an essential part of the enrichment program at the shelter, grew out of a two-day training session conducted at BARCS last spring by Aimee Sadler, a veteran animal trainer specializing in behavioral problems.

The director of training and behavior for both the Longmont Humane Society in Colorado and the Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation in New York, Sadler travels the

country teaching shelters how to implement play groups. Having grown up in a home with multiple dogs, she says the approach comes naturally to her. Some shelters resist the idea, fearing that fights will break out. Sadler shows them that the groups can be run safely, no matter what breeds you have, if you divide the dogs according to compatible play styles.

Sadler touts what she sees as the many benefits of play groups. They're a natural way for dogs to blow off steam and counteract the stresses of shelter life. Through group interactions, dogs teach each other how to behave, addressing such problems as resource guard-

ing, dog-on-dog aggression, and on-leash reactivity. Letting dogs “get their ya-yas out together” is a more efficient use of staff and volunteer time than having people walk dogs individually, Sadler notes, and cleaning the kennels can go quicker if the timing is coordinated with play group so that the cages are empty.

Some may worry about the possibility of play groups causing an increase in disease transmission, but Sadler asserts that more enrichment means less stress, which equates to less disease. It’s important to vaccinate dogs upon intake, and to limit play groups in the event of medical concerns such as the presence of parvo. Your medical team and your behavioral team need to work together and be flexible, Sadler advises. Each shelter should take its resources into consideration and weigh the program’s risks and benefits.

In the excerpted interview below, Sadler discusses her techniques with *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: How did you first get into play groups for dogs?

Aimee Sadler: I think I was born into it. Seriously. My mom always rescued dogs. We had a farm in upstate New York, and I remember we had like 17 dogs at one point, hanging out. They all came in the house at night, so they weren’t kept in kennels. That’s how I was raised, around animals like that. It just always felt very intuitive and natural to me.

Can you walk through a typical scenario at a shelter?

When I’m teaching shelters, a lot of times they say, “Do you want to walk through the kennels, and see the dogs’ behavior in the kennels, to pick which ones you want me to bring out to play group?” And the notion that I’m trying to get across to everybody is: That’s not going to tell me anything meaningful. Their behavior behind the barrier, or on the leash, has nothing to do with their ability



Dogs taking part in play groups at the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter get to release their physical and mental energy while learning social skills.

to be social with dogs once they actually have access to them. There’s tons of dogs here—let’s just let them play.

Everybody’s afraid of dogfights or people getting injured, but if you’re handling things correctly, you don’t create [panic and pull] dogs apart. That’s how bad injuries often occur, by handler error, more than the dogs actually doing it to each other. They get into arguments, just like we do, and they work it out, and they can settle disputes, and they can build a skill set in settling disputes.

It’s really nice if you have a couple of yards that are attached, so that you can divide dogs based upon play style. I focus more on that than on actual size. I don’t do anything based on breed—nothing. It’s more just taking a look at them when they come in and doing a quick visual assessment of what you think they’re going to be. We’ve learned that we can’t really predict, but the handler gets to decide: That dog looks edgy; that dog looks like it’s going to need more one-on-one support; or that dog looks like he’s just so happy to play, but he’s pretty rowdy, so let’s not put him in with these more gentle dogs. Then eventually the goal is we open up that space and let everybody flow together.

At the Longmont Humane Society, we’re

averaging about 100 dogs on site. On average, about 80 of them are rated to go to play groups. So we have this pool of socialized dogs who rotate around and meet multiple dogs, and as a result of that, there’s an amazing service that we provide to the community. If somebody has a dog that’s been deemed dog-aggressive—either they’ve had an incident, or they’re just afraid of their dog’s behavior—we have this pool of socialized shelter dogs that we can [use to] help smooth out their dog-aggression issues—[whereas] it’s not appropriate for them to go to a dog park, for example. You don’t want somebody bringing their dog-aggressive dog to the dog park to try to work it out. So it’s actually a phenomenal support system for the community that we happen to specialize in socializing dogs and letting shelter dogs play.

And we have dogs who have been sent to us from other places in the country, that were taken in from cruelty, fight busts, hoarding cases—intact dogs of every breed that then help us smooth out dogs in the community that are having problems. They’re actually like therapy dogs for other dogs.

It’s about using play groups to let the animals show us who they want to be when there isn’t someone there to give them information about how they should behave.

How do you go about ironing out some of their aggressive behaviors?

Sometimes I’ve identified, “You know, that dog is just going to launch on anyone. They don’t care if it’s male or if it’s female.” So I’ve



Play groups can help show shelter staff which dogs get along well with each other. When you know more about their dog-to-dog social skills, you can make better adoption matches, notes trainer Aimee Sadler.

[q&a]

identified that dog as dog-aggressive. It's rare that that happens. Muzzles are a really great way to start. You can prevent them from following through, reinforcing the behavior of fighting, and you pick other dogs who will be able to emotionally and physically withstand this one being incredibly rude. With a muzzle, you don't have to worry about the damage. As a handler, you don't have to overhandle the situation. You're setting them up to be able to step out of it and let another dog teach them: "That is ridiculous. Don't be doing that to me." And you choose dogs that are going to communicate clearly with that one, and teach them another option.

It depends on what dogs you have available. It's important that you have the right kind of dogs to communicate clearly with the one that's having the trouble. Sometimes you need dogs that are very strong in their personalities, very assertive, and then sometimes you want dogs that are so happy-go-lucky playful they're like, "Dude! What's your problem? Chill out." You have to pick which one you think is going to suit. That comes from experience. This is definitely something you have to have some intuition about. It's not something that I'll ever write a manual [about]—it's more basic strategies, basic principles of learning, basic personality types and play styles in dogs, and then getting a feel for how to put that together for yourself.

And I can't tell you that I've been successful every single time, that every dog that's sent to me for dog-aggression issues, I'm able to resolve that issue. Sometimes what I can do is actually identify, "Yes, this dog is actually dog-aggressive—it will fight with a male or a female, and I can tell you that unequivocally, because I've given them an opportunity to show me something different, and this is what they choose to do." Sometimes that's the answer, and whether that dog is an adoption candidate then depends upon what agency is responsible for [him], what community they're going into, [and] what adoption follow-up resources are available.

What do the dogs get out of this style of play?

They get to burn energy in a different way than going on a walk with somebody. If you think about coming out of a small enclosure, and then being on a 6-foot leash, and going



Kimm Tarantino, a volunteer at the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter, watches two dogs burn off some energy in a play yard.

for a 15-minute walk, that's probably, for a lot of dogs that have arousal issues, more of a frustrating experience—frustrating for the handlers and the dogs. But this actually allows them to get their ya-yas out differently—full physical and mental expression.

So your message has generally been well-received?

There's an intuitive piece to letting dogs run around and play in large groups. Some people are truly scared of it; they've either had bad experiences, or it doesn't feel natural to them. Some people just have a really strong resistance to it. I always coach shelters: Don't make the decision that, "OK, our training and behavior person is the one that's going to run play groups," because maybe that person doesn't feel comfortable with it. But maybe you have a kennel attendant that's like, "Hey, I worked in doggie day care before. I love doing this stuff." Allow for a natural comfort level and natural intuition about it to take the lead. Because then you'll be more successful, rather than trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

The overall goal is you'll have better-adjusted dogs and a higher release rate?

Yes, definitely a higher release rate, because it helps you to combat behavioral deterioration from a typical kennel environment.

[And] let's say you're getting taxed for space. Now you can start putting dogs together and having them cohabitate in a healthier, more appropriate way, and the process of how you get there is also faster. It used to take two kennel supervisors, they'd do their best guess to think which dogs would do OK together, and then they would go outside and walk them on a leash next to each other, and then they'd do an on-leash introduction, and then they'd put them in the kennel, and sit and observe them for 15 minutes. We're talking about two staff people for 30 minutes, to try to get two dogs to live together.

Now, they run out to play group, we notice, "Oh, those two are playing great together, so when that one goes in, instead of putting him in No. 37, go ahead and put him back in No. 46, with Eddie." So it's just an efficiency thing there. You have much more comprehensive information about what their dog-to-dog skills are. We can tell [potential adopters], "Here's our population of dog-social dogs." We can do much better adoption matches.

Am I advocating stuffing as many dogs into kennels as possible, as a result of play groups? No. But what I'm suggesting is there's a possibility that you might have many dogs living in your single dog runs who would be much happier with a companion with them. If that's the case, identify that, and don't make an across-the-board policy that we won't let dogs live together unless we're overcrowded, because you might be missing an opportunity to better enrich a couple of dogs.

What would be your pitch to a shelter that had heard about play groups and wanted to know more?

The pitch is that, remember, it's actually the more natural state for a dog to be in. They are supposed to be pack animals. And that the benefits far outweigh whatever risks you have in the back of your mind. I can't promise anybody that dogfights won't happen, but the big picture is we've been doing it all over the place, and everybody's feeling a huge relief as a result of implementing a program like this. **AS**

Bully Breeds and Leery Landlords

How breed discrimination affects your shelter

BY BRAD POWERS AND CHERIE TRAVIS



In the last Humane Law Forum (“After the Adoption,” July/August 2011), the primary subject was the post-adoption liability of shelters. The column also touched on the legal possibility of holding landlords liable for tenants’ pets.

To limit their liability, many landlords have incorporated breed-specific bans into rental agreements. These typically target perceived “bully breeds” (dogs who appear to be mostly pit bull), along with rottweilers, Dobermans, and German shepherds. Breed discrimination has also been utilized by homeowners’ and condo associations and insurance companies as a means to control the types of dogs present in shared living spaces.

Recently, one of the authors was contacted by the head of a local shelter who had become frustrated by breed discrimination, specifically in relation to pit bull-type dogs. Like shelters in most cities, Chicago-area shelters are frequently filled with pit bulls, but at the same time, pit bulls are a common target of breed discrimination. It can be difficult to find responsible potential owners who want to adopt a pit bull—but even more difficult is finding one of those adopters and having to tell her she can’t take that animal because her landlord forbids it.

In a society that prides itself on social equality, why is there such a willingness to categorize and discriminate against our pets?

More practically, how do you keep breed discrimination from hindering your ability to advocate for animals?

Legality of Canine Profiling

Various governments, often responding to the (arguably irrational) fears of their constituents, have voted to enact varied breed-specific laws. For example, in Ohio, all pit bulls are included in the city’s definition of a “vicious dog.”

That’s right: In all of Ohio, your dog is legally vicious if it (1) has killed a human, (2) has injured a person, (3) has killed a dog, or (4) happens to be a pit bull. Any pit bull! A puppy. A friendly, well-trained adult with no

[humane law forum]

signs of aggression. Under the law, pits are all considered to be vicious, all of the time. Until recently, the City of Toledo had an ordinance preventing residents from owning more than one pit bull and requiring that all pit bulls be muzzled 100 percent of the time when out of the owner's home.

If that ordinance offends you, you're not alone. In *City of Toledo v. Tellings*, an Ohio citizen challenged the law as being unconstitutional and took his argument to the highest court in Ohio ... and lost. In 2007, the Ohio Supreme Court found the state law and the Toledo city ordinance to be perfectly valid. The court reasoned that the government had a right to enact laws dealing with private property, which included animals, and that the government had a "legitimate interest in protecting citizens against unsafe conditions caused by pit bulls." This decision was based on testimony that pit bulls cause more damage when they attack and cause more fatalities than other dogs. (These "facts" are highly debatable, but were nonetheless part of admitted testimony in the case). Breed neutralists may be pleased to know that in October 2010, the Toledo City Council unanimously passed an ordinance that bases the dangerousness of the dog on the animal's actual behavior, not breed. Further, the Ohio state Senate is currently considering a bill that will remove pit bulls as a breed from the state's "vicious dog" definition.

Reacting to local breed discrimination laws, several state legislatures have enacted statutes preventing local governments from passing breed-specific ordinances. For example, the California Health and Safety Code states that no specific dog breed, or mixed-dog breed, shall be declared potentially dangerous or vicious, and that breed-specific ordinances may only be enacted relating to mandatory spay/neuter programs. Florida, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas all have statewide bans on local government breed discrimination.

The important thing to remember is that these states only limit the *government's* right to discriminate by breed. Discrimination by private entities—including landlords, home and condo associations, and insurance companies—is not covered by these state laws.



If a rental agreement tries to discriminate against certain dog breeds, a pet owner might be able to challenge it legally as too vague to be enforced.

The bottom line is that you should know your state and local laws so that you can better inform adopters and their landlords, neighbors, and insurers, should the issue come up during the adoption screening. If your shelter is in Texas, for example, a landlord who discriminates against pit bulls in a lease agreement may want to know that there is a state law preventing the government from engaging in that same behavior. Calling attention to that law may convince the landlord to make an exception for your adopter. If your shelter is located in a city where the government itself actively engages in breed discrimination, then you probably won't want to waste your breath arguing with a condo association that is just following the city's lead. As a shelter, you have to weigh whether you want to place a dog in an area where its breed is targeted, or decide to adopt or transfer the animal to a different location.

Private-Sector Discrimination

The breed discriminators who most directly affect your ability to adopt out so-called "bully breeds" are generally private citizens and entities. Landlords, residential property owner associations, and insurance companies are not government entities, so the laws preventing breed-specific bans do not apply to them.

So beyond demonstrating that they're out of step with state law, is there any way to prevent these private parties from discriminating against certain breeds?

Enterprising and tenacious animal advocates have posed a variety of legal arguments to try and stop breed discrimination. While there are too many potential theories to discuss in this article, we will mention a couple that might apply to your shelter. The theme to remember is that none of the following arguments have been overwhelmingly effective.

Vague or Ambiguous Contract Language

If a potential adopter is faced with private-sector breed discrimination, it will most likely be found in a legal document, such as a contract or an agreement. Under the law, if any part of the agreement is unclear or ambiguous, the judge may choose not to enforce that provision. So, if your landlord or condo association tries to restrict you as a pet owner, and the restriction is either not in writing, or the writing is not clear, you may have a legal argument that the restriction is too vague to be enforced.

Some breed advocates have used the vagueness argument in an attempt to invalidate breed-specific public laws and private regulations. For example, in *Hearn v. City of Overland Park*, the challenger of the breed-



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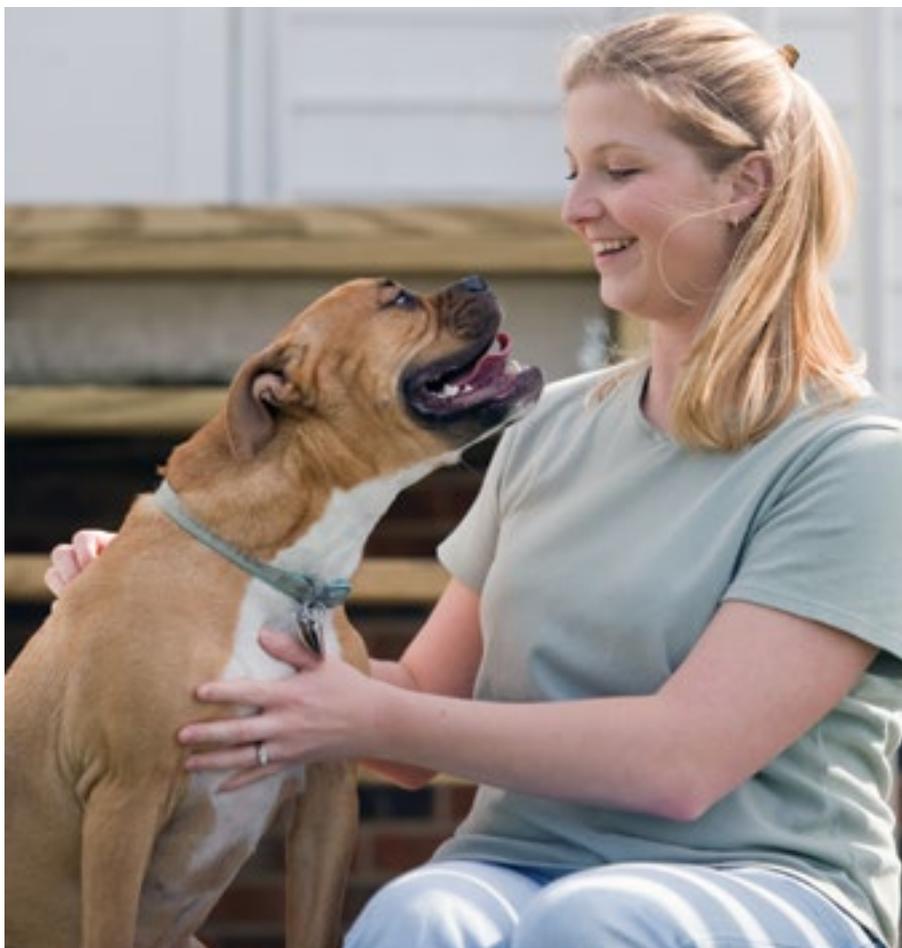
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Shelters and rescue groups should ask potential adopters whether their rental agreements prevent them from owning dogs of certain breeds and sizes.

specific law said that any breed-specific limitations are impermissibly vague, because it is inherently difficult to identify the “breed” of a given dog with absolute certainty. But the challenge was unsuccessful: The court acknowledged the guesswork that goes into breed identification, but ultimately found the law valid, and refused to find the ordinance unconstitutional. Interestingly, the appellate court in *City of Toledo v. Tellings* found Toledo’s breed-specific legislation to be unconstitutionally vague due to the difficulty of identifying a dog’s breed without DNA testing. Ultimately, the appellate court’s decision in *Toledo* was overruled by the Supreme Court of Ohio, but this is still an indication that the vagueness argument can work.

The *Hearn* and *Toledo* cases both involved a state “action”—the enacting of an ordinance—which is typically more susceptible to

constitutionality arguments, including vagueness challenges. It didn’t work in those cases, and the bottom line is that if local or state courts are reluctant to find breed discrimination by the government to be unconstitutionally vague, then it is even less likely that the argument will work for a dog owner trying to challenge restrictions imposed by private entities.

Statutes of Limitations and Waivers

What if a pet owner is technically subject to breed discrimination by his landlord or condo association, but the landlord has not enforced the provision, even though he had noticed that the banned breed was on the premises?

The pet owner may be able to argue that the landlord or condo association has waived the right to enforce the breed ban against

his pet. In *Malmgren v. Inverness Forest Civic Club, Inc.*, a Texas court found that a property owner association could not prevent a long-term resident from owning a pet potbellied pig, even though the association had a clear restrictive covenant against livestock. The court reasoned that the property association knew that the animal was there and failed to file the lawsuit seeking a permanent injunction banning the animal in a timely manner.

This category of defense against private breed discrimination is most relevant where you are dealing with an owner who already owns a targeted breed and is in your shelter, either to give the animal up because of the private discrimination, or the owner is interested in getting another type of dog that is discriminated against by the landlord or insurance company. The first situation is more common than the second, but both hinder your ability as a shelter to manage your shelter population and find good animals great homes.

Points to Take Home for Pits to Take Home

While there are several state laws preventing the government from discriminating against “bully breeds,” there has not been a major trend or successful force to prevent private bodies such as landlords (who often have rules based on their insurance companies’ requirements), insurers, and property owner associations from discriminating. So as a responsible shelter or rescue group, you must try to determine whether an adopter has restrictions that will hinder his ability to properly care for a breed-banned dog.

During the adoption process, you should ask potential adopters about whether their lease agreements contain any pet restrictions, including size and breed limitations. If there is a breed restriction, inform the adopter that the adoption cannot be processed until the issue is resolved. Give the adopter an opportunity to discuss the issue with the landlord, insurance company (good luck!), or property owners’ association.

If the private entity will not budge on the issue, then you cannot in good faith allow that adopter to leave with a breed-targeted dog. Give him the opportunity to select another animal from your shelter.

To Label or Not to Label?

Some shelters intentionally refuse to identify any dog by breed because of the stigmas attached to particular breeds. Other shelters have been known to mislabel breeds in order to help get them adopted. This includes mislabeling a pit bull as a "boxer mix," or labeling any bully breed as an "unknown mix." While refusing to label your dogs by breed is well within the prerogative of each shelter, it is highly unadvisable to *intentionally mislabel* the breed of a dog. Honesty is always the best policy. While you do not have a duty to DNA test a dog, you do not want an animal returned to your shelter by an adopter who thinks he's getting a boxer until he's informed by his landlord that the dog is a pit, leaving the tenant in violation of his lease.

That said, there are all-too-common cases of dogs being identified as pit bulls when a DNA test would show otherwise. And if a client is being forced to surrender a beloved pet due to a discriminatory rule, you might consider advising the person to seek a DNA test. It's impos-

sible to overstate how greatly interbreeding has resulted in dogs who appear to be "pit bulls," but in fact are a mix of multiple other breeds.

Sorting it all out can be tricky. Despite your personal feelings about breed discrimination, as a responsible shelter or rescue, you have to operate within your local reality, whether that reality is based on the law or just private discriminatory practices. When dealing with the adoption of a targeted dog, the best approach is to know your state and local laws relating to breed-targeting; determine whether an adopter is limited by private-party breed discrimination; and ask the potential adopter to obtain a written waiver to the restriction, or have the adopter consider another nontargeted breed in your shelter. At the end of the day, if the adopter just cannot be separated from his new pet, have her consider moving to a living situation where a dog is judged not by the color of his coat, or the muscularity of his physique, but by his behavior and suitability as a pet. AS



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Brad Powers is a licensed attorney in California who has focused his legal career on studying animal law and supporting animal welfare. He prosecuted dangerous-dog appeals for the City of Chicago Law Department before being appointed assistant to the director at Chicago's Commission on Animal Care and Control.

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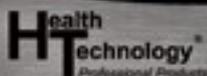
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Food for Thought

Modifying food guarding behavior in the shelter environment

BY LINDSAY A. WOOD, M.A., A.C.A.A.B.



Cooper, a 1-year-old pointer mix, was enrolled in the Humane Society of Boulder Valley's behavior modification program to work on his food-guarding issues. Cooper's face shows the pleasant, anticipatory response staff members look for when working with dogs.

Charlie, a social, wiggly, young miniature poodle mix, was the highlight of my days at the Humane Society of Boulder Valley (HSBV) for a 10-day stretch last spring.

He was a joy of a dog, actively greeting and entertaining visitors, his little white body almost humming with exuberance, his open mouth panting the joys of puppyhood and painting unsuspecting faces with enthusiastic licks. When greeting a dog playmate, Charlie became a bouncy, bounding, white streak of play!

To the casual observer, Charlie appeared to be a fun and enthusiastic dog, a lovely match for many an adopter. However, when approached while enjoying a hearty meal, Charlie guarded his food bowl with inten-

sity, a behavior problem that had rendered him unadoptable at his previous shelter. Charlie displayed the full complement of warning signals when a person drew near his food bowl. Whenever I approached, he commenced gulping large mouthfuls of food and then progressed to freezing over the bowl, growling, and finally exhibiting an inhibited bite.

Dogs like Charlie are the very reason we developed our behavior modification program at HSBV. Recognizing that behavior problems are the most common reason for relinquishment in our community, we made the strategic decision to build a comprehensive training and behavior modification pro-

gram to address the needs of the animals coming through our front doors. Our program focuses on rehabilitating dogs who would otherwise be unavailable for adoption due to a specific behavior problem in one of the following categories: food guarding, body handling sensitivity, dog-dog incompatibility, fearful behavior, or separation anxiety.

Our development of the program originated from a desire to reduce euthanasia in our own shelter. Based on the success we have experienced, we strive to share our strategies with other shelters and encourage the momentum of behavior modification across the country, increasing the lives saved in our own community and beyond.

[behavior department]

We created and piloted our behavior modification program from March 2007 to March 2008. After a successful pilot phase, we formalized the program in April 2008. Since then, 684 dogs have entered the program, representing all five of our behavior modification categories; 17 percent of these dogs—like Charlie—were transferred to us from other agencies unable to place them for adoption due to a specific behavior problem. The program has shown overwhelming success, with 95 percent of the participating dogs completing the appropriate treatment plan with successful resolution of their behavior problems.

In Charlie's case, for example, his social behavior with people and other dogs, his single behavior problem (his resource guarding was limited to food), and his very clear warning signals rendered him an excellent candidate for behavior modification.

Food Guarding: A Life-or-Death Matter

One of the most common components of a shelter behavior evaluation is an assessment of a dog's potential for food-related aggression. A food-guarding assessment usually involves a staff member approaching a dog while he is eating and attempting

to remove the food bowl with an artificial hand. Dogs who display guarding behavior such as a freeze, growl, or bite to the hand are frequently deemed unsafe to rehome and euthanized.

We receive more requests to accept food-guarding dogs from our transfer partners than for any other behavior problem. That's understandable. When unaddressed, food-guarding behaviors can result in bites—sometimes to children, whose shorter height often places them at the dog's face level, increasing the risk of a bite to the face, and who don't always recognize the canine warning signals that adults might see. When we consider the prevalence of food guarding in dogs and the lack of resources most shelters have to devote to rehabilitation, it's clear that a significant number of shelter dogs are facing euthanasia because of this issue.

Understanding Food Guarding in Dogs

To modify the behavior problem, it is worthwhile to consider the biological legacy of dogs and the nature of food-related aggression. Food guarding is one of the most common types of aggression, and indeed, many pet dogs are food guarders.

Understanding the reason for the prevalence of this behavior may be as simple as understanding and acknowledging its adaptive significance. In a natural, nondomestic environment, food guarding provides survival and reproductive advantage for the guarder. A dog who guards his food is more likely to live, and therefore more likely to survive long enough to reproduce. (I find it wildly fascinating that this behavior is still strongly exhibited by the domesticated species with whom we share our homes today. It certainly speaks volumes regarding the evolutionary significance of the trait.)

I have always appreciated behaviorist Jean Donaldson's description of resource guarding as "an equal opportunity behavior problem." At HSBV, we have observed and resolved food guarding in dogs from 8 weeks of age to 8 years, in breeds ranging from miniature poodles to bloodhounds. Food guarding may crop up in any dog, regardless of age, breed, or life experiences.

One of the most surprising things to many people is the large number of dogs who appear friendly and approachable during social interactions, but will rampantly guard a meal. Charlie's display of food-related aggression and my description of him as a friendly dog may appear contradictory, but I have observed some of the loveliest dogs display this specific type of aggression.

Food guarding does not indicate that the dog is an "aggressive" dog. Even friendly, social dogs may exhibit aggression when approached while consuming a satisfying meal. It does not mean the dog is abnormal; it simply means he is a dog. Dogs who display multiple, clear warning signals—freezing, growling, snarling—and a slow escalation between each warning signal are the best candidates for behavior modification. Dogs who show relatively few warning signals, appear to bite explosively, and inflict damaging bites are in a much trickier category with a less favorable prognosis for rehabilitation.

While it's neither unusual nor unnatural, food guarding is certainly a serious concern that can create dangerous and undesirable behavior in our domestic environment. Fortunately, it is usually preventable and quite modifiable—even in the shelter setting.



Staff use an artificial limb known as an Assess-A-Hand to help determine a dog's potential for food-related aggression.



Cooper sits when Lindsay Wood, HSBV's director of animal training and behavior, approaches him to deliver a bowl of food.



Cooper demonstrates his new, enthusiastic response (he lifts his head, and wags his tail) when Wood approaches his food bowl. Wood gives him a treat, so that he considers her approach to be a positive event.

Modifying the Behavior

The goal of the food-guarding program at HSBV is to save more lives in our own shelter as well as in other shelters across the country. To this end, we developed a standard behavior modification plan that allows for efficient treatment of food-guarding dogs within a short period of time. A primary challenge to this endeavor is the design of a protocol that has minimal impact on the dog's length of stay in a shelter and can be easily replicated by other shelters. The treatment plan we developed can be fully completed by two people in less than 14 days and is manageable for shelters lacking extensive resources.

We use only science-based, force-free behavior modification techniques to treat social and friendly shelter dogs who display food-related aggression. Our protocol for food-guarding modification uses two of the cornerstones of behavioral psychology: counter-conditioning and desensitization. These two techniques are used very successfully to treat behavior problems that have an emotional basis, such as fear, anxiety, and aggression.

Counter-conditioning teaches a dog to feel better about a thing or event that ini-



The program has shown overwhelming success, with 95 percent of the participating dogs completing the appropriate treatment plan with successful resolution of their behavior problems.

tially caused him to feel fearful, anxious, or threatened. For example, a food guarder often appears to feel tense or threatened when a person approaches him while eating. The goal of counter-conditioning is to counter or change this emotional response by teaching the dog to look forward to being approached while eating.

We can do this by creating a positive association to our approach and removal of the food bowl. Using our work with Charlie as a typical example, we approached his food bowl and immediately provided him with a high-value treat, usually something really delicious like chicken or even a dollop of meat-based baby food. Over time, our approach became predictive of the special treat, and Charlie began to demonstrate anticipatory, enthusiastic behaviors when we moved toward him, starting to lift his head from the food bowl as we moved near the food dish, lick his lips in anticipation of the goodies, wiggle his body, and wag his tail as we reached him. These enthusiastic responses to our approach were our indicators that we were effectively changing his initial emotional response.

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[behavior department]

Decreasing Sensitivities

For the counter-conditioning treatment to be effective, we have to teach this positive association without making a dog feel threatened, which would potentially trigger his aggression.

To do this, we use counter-conditioning in conjunction with another type of treatment: desensitization. Desensitization involves exposing a dog to a less intense version of the event that makes him feel tense or threatened. The key element of desensitization is that the initial intensity of the event must be so low that the dog feels none of the original tension or threat.

In the case of food guarding, we begin behavior modification by approaching an empty food bowl (an item that the dog does not guard), and then we provide our counter-conditioning treat. Over time, we work up to approaching a bowl filled only with dry kibble and finally to approaching a bowl filled with high-value canned food mixed with kibble. Our moving up to these more intense versions of the trigger is contingent upon the dog demonstrating those anticipatory and enthusiastic emotional responses at each and every step.

Our training and behavior department staff provide two behavior modification sessions per day for each dog. To best ensure successful treatment, each dog goes through the protocol twice with a different staff member each time. The average length of time in treatment is 11 days. Additional daily activity and enrichment is provided through play groups, basic manners training, and walks with our interns and volunteers. Once the treatment plan is complete, the dog is re-evaluated for food guarding by a new person (one who did not provide treatment and is unfamiliar to the animal).

New Beginnings

Once a behavior modification graduate enters our adoption center, we strive to ensure a successful transition into his new home. We recommend homes with children at least 7 years of age, and we provide ongoing support to adopters, including complimentary telephone support, private consultations, and training classes to address any behavior concerns and promote a healthy relationship between the adopter and new pet.

The training and behavior team also collects follow-up information from adopters at two weeks, two months, and one year post-adoption to assess the adoption and help ensure continued success in the home. Our follow-up data indicates very few instances of the behavior resurfacing in the adoptive home, further supporting the long-term success of behavior modification in shelters.

Since we developed the food-guarding program, 89 percent of the dogs who entered it have successfully completed the protocol and passed the retest, demonstrating the efficacy of this type of modification and the resulting ability to rehome many more dogs. Within two days of graduating from our food-guarding program, Charlie found a new home and a loving family. According to his happy adopters, Charlie is a charming and joyful enhancement to their family. He continues to greet them with enthusiasm when they approach his food bowl. Charlie seems to be enjoying his fresh start, and his adopters are delighted with the newest addition to their home!

We are so grateful to be able to provide second chances for so many shelter dogs. For our behavior modification graduates, their stories are only just beginning. Our support of these dogs and their adopters will continue throughout their lives.

We are thrilled with the program's success and the opportunity to help save lives, and we hope our story will encourage and support behavior modification in more shelters. We are happy to provide training to other shelters, and share protocols and strategies to increase the scope of our lifesaving opportunities. **AS**

For more information regarding the behavior modification program, food-guarding workshops, and consulting support from HSBV, visit boulderhumane.org.



Lindsay Wood is an associate certified applied animal behaviorist and director of animal training and behavior at the Humane Society of Boulder Valley. She credits her companion of 10 years, Lyra, for helping get her into the field.



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Reclaiming the Christmas Puppy

Forget the pet store: Ottawa Humane is doing it right

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Every kid, at one point or another, probably had dreams of finding a new puppy in a big, beribboned box under the Christmas tree.

Every kid, of course, except Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and the millions of other children in the world for whom the 25th of December is just another day.

For years, the idea of a puppy for Christmas made shelters shudder—the myth being that the holidays were far too hectic to even think of bringing a new pet into the home, and that holiday puppies were bound to be headed to the shelter soon after they popped adorably out of their beautifully wrapped boxes. But the Ottawa Humane Society has rediscovered the joys of the Santa-delivered pet. And as it happens, it's often folks of other faiths who are playing elf.

"I'll tell you, the humane movement, if there's one message we got out there, it's 'Don't adopt an animal at Christmas,'" says Bruce Roney, executive director of Ottawa Humane, located in the Canadian province of Ontario. "And you know, given people's lifestyles now, with smaller families and such, for some people Christmas is one of the only times of the year when they can take some time off and handle a new puppy. And if you're not having a hundred people coming and going from your house, it may be a perfectly good time to adopt. So it's a little bit about overcoming that, and it's a little bit about the good will in the community, and it's always nice to place more animals."

Adoptions are still screened, Roney emphasizes—the only difference is that the kids don't have to participate in the screening. "We make sure the dogs and cats are good with children," he says. "We do actually test the animals with other children—just not the ones the puppy is going to, so it can still be a surprise."

The shelter has a fairly diverse mix of staff and volunteers, Roney says, and that's been particularly helpful for a program that involves working on Christmas Day when the



In the early hours of Christmas Day in 2009, Josh Silverman made one of Ottawa Humane's first Christmas puppy deliveries to then 10-year-old Darien Oldford.

"Santas" begin picking up the animals to deliver as early as 6 in the morning.

Asked whether she was OK working on Christmas, Ottawa Humane's manager of major gifts laughs. "My last name is Silverman—does that give you a clue?" says Anna Silverman, who's helped with deliveries since the program started a few years back.

Silverman recruited her 24-year-old son Josh to help out, too, though when she pitched him on the idea, she left out the fact that they'd be getting up at the crack of dawn. "When he agreed, he didn't realize it was that early. So I called and said, 'I'm picking you up tomorrow morning at 5,' and he was like 'Whaaa?'"

But she says Josh quickly got in the mood once they made the first drop-off.

Typically, she says, the kids in the family have been wanting a pet, but the parents have engaged in a little disinformation campaign, "telling the kids that it's not good timing, not this year," she says. "And then you walk in and there's so much screaming and smiles and happiness and it's so cool. ... Honest to God,

listen: When a 24-year-old kid says he doesn't mind getting up at 5 in the morning? He told me, 'I cannot believe how good this makes me feel.' And we did it again last year."

And Christians (and members of other faiths) can return the favor on other religious holidays. "We actually did a Hanukah delivery last year," Roney says.

The local media love the program—it's a perfect warm fuzzy story for what's typically a slow news day, he says—and often follow shelter representatives around as they make deliveries of the animals. It really puts the shelter in the right light for the community, says Roney.

Should all shelters be rethinking old myths like "don't adopt black cats near Halloween" and "don't adopt pets at Christmastime"? Can we save more lives by using those holidays to do things right, keeping the celebration but adding some responsible pet owner education?

(Let's just not start getting too literal about Groundhog Day. You know someone out there wants one.) **AS**



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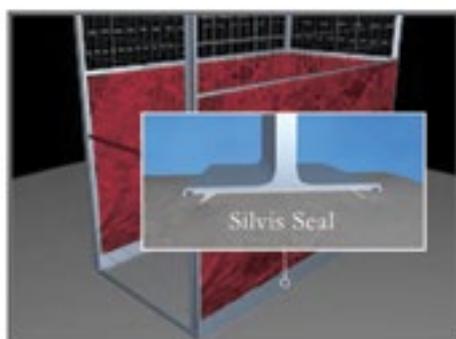
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