

Meeting Your Mission: How Close Does Your Shelter Come?

Y

ou dream that you are a firefighter dispatched to a burning building. You have to climb a ladder to the 12th floor. As you climb, you struggle with your heavy equipment, concentrating only on getting to the top so you can tackle that fire. You hear screams for help and it seems to take forever to reach the 12th floor. Then, you look up and freeze with terror as you realize that the ladder is against the wrong building. You wake up feeling exhausted and frustrated.

Climbing the ladder represents all your hard work and the efforts of other staff at your humane society or animal control department. Putting out the fire is your agency's objective. Frustration is what you feel when you realize that all your work is not producing the results you expected.

Every agency, whether government-funded or nonprofit, should take time to assess where they've been and where they're going. If you work for an animal control agency, how well does it protect people from animals? If you work for a nonprofit humane organization, how well does it protect animals? How well does your organization treat the animals in its care? How well does it respond to the public's needs?

The three articles that follow offer advice and inspiration to help your animal control department or humane society assess whether or not it has its ladder against the right building.

The Road to Success: Have You

With so many roads to travel, it's easy for humane societies and animal control agencies to choose wayward paths. The HSUS's Robin Weirauch provides a checklist to help you judge whether your agency is staying on track.



By Robin Weirauch

Do you remember the hand-painted sign above the entrance road to MASH 4077 that read “Best Care Anywhere”? That MASH unit on television was often understaffed and operated under the worst conditions. It was always running out of necessary supplies but never running out of patients. Somehow the staff managed to keep sight of their mission and the need to give the best patient care possible.

In many ways, life at an animal shelter is like life at the 4077th. The medical staff had to cope with a senseless war that seemingly had a very simple solution; and they had to face, day after day and year after year, unending, senseless cruelty. How did they cope and manage to fulfill their purpose under such impossible conditions? Just watch a few reruns and they'll remind you: The staff focused on their mission—to provide the best care possible—and channeled their frustrations and anger into humor, hard work, and compassion for their patients, each other, and even the “enemy.”

In much the same way, your animal shelter—whether rich or poor, small or large—can strive to provide the “Best Care Anywhere” and fulfill its purpose of protecting lost, homeless, abandoned, and mistreated animals.



WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

What is your humane agency's purpose? It likely boils down to what can be called the Big Three:

1. Instilling humane principles into society
2. Preventing cruelty and/or suffering
3. Enforcing animal protection laws

The Big Three serve as guideposts for humane organizations moving forward on the road to success. The actual wording varies, but most nonprofit humane organizations' charters and mission statements include the first two basic con-

cepts. The third concept, enforcement, may mean either having law enforcement powers yourself or ensuring that agencies that have such powers effectively exercise them.

The Big Three also serve as guideposts for government-run animal control departments. You may be thinking, “Wait! Humane societies and animal control agencies have different objectives. How can you lump them together?”

Protecting animals and protecting the public are not mutually exclusive tasks. In fact, accomplishing any one of the Big Three necessarily accomplishes at least one of the other two as well. Enforcement of a leash law designed to protect people, for example, can both prevent cruelty (by protecting the animal) and teach humane principles (by educating that animal's owner about responsible pet ownership).

Of course, the methods that various humane societies

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Checked the Map Lately?

and animal control agencies use to fulfill their purposes vary. Some humane societies operate a shelter. Others don't operate an animal-care facility but achieve the Big Three through education and outreach. Animal control agencies don't always operate shelters either, but they enforce laws and often engage in public outreach.

Your agency has its own unique organizational culture, policies, and mix of activities, all of which contribute to

ative attitude. In some shelters you feel welcome; in others, defensive.

In agencies with a perceptible negative attitude, shelter staff tend to keep communication with the public to a minimum. Members of the public are perceived as the enemy; any attempts to teach them are deemed futile. Staff become unwilling to give visitors the time of day, let alone patiently explain why it is important to have their animals spayed or neutered. Any small attempts to communicate often become fire-and-brimstone preaching rather than sensitive, patient teaching.

One prominent shelter, for example, received numerous complaints from the public about the agency's adoption process. "People were complaining that our staff were overly judgmental and in some ways, condescending—which of course was not our intention," says Belinda Lewis, director of the Fort Wayne (Ind.) Department of Animal Control. "After a critical review of the process and our staff approach to adoptions, we made some changes. As a result, we not only experienced a 32 percent increase in adoptions between 1990 and 1994, but we no longer dread reading about ourselves in the letters to the editor!"

Fort Wayne's adoption criteria remained exactly the same. It was the change in *delivery* that made the difference. People will not return to a grocery store, a doctor's

office, or an animal shelter if they don't feel they were treated well, respected, and welcomed. An animal shelter hangs out a shingle because it wants people to visit, adopt, donate, and volunteer. If people are subconsciously (or consciously) repelled by the staff's attitude, they will not willingly return.

achieving your purpose. To determine how well they advance that purpose given your limited human and financial resources, you need to examine them one by one and then keep, adjust, or drop them. As best-selling author Steven Covey says, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." Here's a checklist to help you determine how well your humane society or animal control agency is moving ahead on the road to success—keeping "the main thing the main thing."

DOES YOUR SHELTER HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE?

Experience has taught us that you get a certain "feeling" when you walk into an animal shelter. It's hard to describe, but it seems to boil down to a detectable positive or neg-

DOES YOUR SHELTER MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS OF ANIMAL CARE?

If your shelter doesn't set a good example of caring for animals, you'll undermine the goal of instilling humane principles. When visitors observe that the shelter seems overcrowded, looks dirty and cluttered, or smells foul, they're not given the message that animals deserve proper care.



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What is your humane agency's purpose? It likely boils down to what can be called the **B I G T H R E E** :

1. Instilling humane principles into society
2. Preventing cruelty and/or suffering
3. Enforcing animal protection laws

Some shelters defensively retort, "We're doing the best we can with what we have." But most would find the same conditions and excuse unacceptable from a potential adopter. A pleasant, clean shelter is not an expensive luxury. Any shelter can provide proper care if it meets each animal's basic needs.

Reevaluating the number of animals you keep in your cat room and kennel areas can be a first step toward meeting animals' basic needs. Does your shelter's population density prevent staff from noticing—and helping—that kitten who has trouble eating from the food dish chosen for her? Or the puppy who has worked himself into a frenzy because he isn't receiving enough attention? Similarly, if your cats always have upper respiratory problems, are you addressing the environmental causes or simply sending the cats home in need of medication? Maintaining the animal population at a manageable level is not only more humane; it may also increase shelter "business" because it presents to the public a less chaotic, more inviting environment.

Even shelters that do keep the population to manageable levels need to ask hard questions. For example, is it justifiable to keep unweaned, motherless puppies and kittens or feral, terrified animals at the shelter—in the hope

that an adoption "some day" is worth an often miserable existence today?

Ultimately, your shelter must examine whether it has fallen into the trap of the double standard. If you don't take the time to provide a warm, clean, low-stress environment for animals—complete with periodic human attention and appropriate veterinary care—then you shouldn't expect adopters to do so. If you find yourself or others at your shelter saying, "Please understand, animals come into the shelter with all kinds of problems; we just don't have time to give them what they need," you're in the trap! And more importantly, you're not meeting the needs of the animals in your care.



DOES YOUR SHELTER MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS OF EUTHANASIA?

If you were able to choose the way you would die, could you honestly say "I would be willing to be euthanized by the compassionate hands of the staff at my animal shelter"? If not, your shelter may be violating its mandate to provide a humane death to animals who must be euthanized. And you will have a hard time, personally, dealing with animal euthanasia.

You'll also have trouble earning the public's confidence and support. If people do not believe that animals receive a good death at your facility, how can you convince them that your shelter is a better alternative than abandonment or that an old and suffering animal should be "put out of his misery"? If public perception is that the animals suffer while being killed, or that the staff at your facility are cold-hearted, you will not succeed in advancing your goals.

Does your shelter have a list of euthanasia criteria and does your agency provide fair and reasonable guidance to staff who make euthanasia decisions? Shelters can easily acquire a negative reputation over such factors as euthanasia selection and length of stay, leading the public to question shelters' motives. People may think that staff "only keep their favorite breeds" or "they hate cats" or "the animals are always thinned out before the weekend to save money."



DOES YOUR SHELTER MAKE OBJECTIVE JUDGMENTS ABOUT WHICH ANIMALS TO TREAT?

It is important to evaluate whether or not the money spent on treating individual animals for illnesses or injuries is reducing your ability to run other programs that may help more animals.

This is a tough area to evaluate, but an old axiom favored by Star Trek's Mr. Spock can be useful here: "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." Eval-



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Staff of shelters that fail to provide a basic level of care to animals should learn proper methods of sheltering as a first step to fulfilling their missions.

uate how often you can afford extraordinary medical care for a single animal without compromising basic care for all animals. Take a hard look at whether critical dollars should be spent on animals suffering from such diseases as parvo or distemper. Perhaps you'll decide that their suffering should be ended through euthanasia. The freed resources can then be directed toward improving your shelter's animal health protocol and encouraging people to vaccinate their pets—efforts that help prevent the spread of deadly diseases in the first place.

✓ DOES YOUR SHELTER MEET THE COMMUNITY'S ANIMAL SHELTERING NEEDS?

The people and animals in your community need a humane, accessible animal shelter. Does your agency's shelter accept both dogs and cats? Is the shelter available to



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In their efforts to help the greatest number of animals, shelters are often faced with such questions as, "Are we in the position to commit to the intensive care of an orphaned, unweaned kitten?"

DRAWING A BETTER MAP

After journeying part way down the road of self-examination, you may find that, on your way to success, you need to take a different route.. Maybe your programs and services aren't enabling you to achieve the Big Three. Here's how to draw yourself a better map.

- 1. Analyze—and take preliminary steps to correct—your agency's "ills."** Does your staff need training, better coping skills, a policy and procedures manual, or performance evaluations? If so, start correcting those oversights. Is the board of directors or other governing entity functioning effectively? Do its members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and the agency's mission? All agencies need strength at the top.
- 2. Examine your community's animal problems.**
 - List all the known ways animals are used for profit in your community and the abuse to which they may be, or currently are, subjected.

- List the types of animals known to be living in your community—such as exotic animals who may be subjected to confinement as pets or exploited for profit.
- List any animal problems (including crimes) that you suspect are occurring.
- List the local agencies that have jurisdiction over these problems and determine whether or not those agencies are addressing them.
- Obtain statistics and records on the types and number of complaints received from the public.
- Solicit information from other agencies regarding any animal control/protection problems they are experiencing or about which

they receive complaints.

- 3. Plan how your agency can help solve these problems.** Identify a realistic number of important problems your agency believes it can effectively tackle. Under direction of the board (for nonprofits) or appropriate officials (for public animal control departments), develop a strategic organizational plan so you know where you'd like to be in two years, five years, and beyond.
- 4. Learn more about specific issues and problem areas.** For example, learn about animal collectors from agencies that have successfully handled cases involving collectors.

Continued on the next page

Measuring adoption success solely in terms of how many animals have been placed ignores the most important ingredient in a successful adoption: quality.

all animals in need at all times? If your organization can't provide space—because it is a non-euthanasia or limited-euthanasia facility that takes in animals only when space allows or accepts only “adoptable” animals—have you taken steps to ensure that crucial sheltering services are available through other agencies? If more than one humane agency serves your community, has anyone determined whether, collectively, they humanely meet animals' and people's needs?

✓ DOES YOUR SHELTER DEFINE ADOPTION SUCCESS BY QUALITY, NOT JUST QUANTITY, OF ADOPTIONS?

Measuring adoption success solely in terms of how many animals have been placed ignores the most important ingredient in a successful adoption: quality. Adoption qual-

ity can be measured by such factors as the number of animals who are spayed or neutered after adoption and the number of returns. These numbers, and other criteria, need to be monitored and evaluated.

While a good adoption contributes to your goals, an inferior one can hinder them. What makes an adoption good or bad? In good adoptions, the animals and adopters are carefully screened—the animals for health and temperament, the adopters for compassion, commitment, and capability (the “three Cs”). In good adoptions, the animals are spayed or neutered before they go home with adopters, or sterilized within a specified time after adoption. In good adoptions, animals are treated as part of the family and become “good citizens” who are not allowed to roam, be a nuisance, or harm people, property, and other animals.

In short, high quantity gained through promotion of

DRAWING A BETTER MAP *continued*

Answer these questions:

- What causes the problems?
- How do other communities effectively handle and prevent animal-related problems?
- What other agencies can work with you on the problems, and what solutions do they advocate?

Take full advantage of quality training opportunities (like The HSUS's Animal Care Expo). Do your best to keep room for them in your budget. You can spend far more money trying to reinvent the wheel than it costs to provide continuing-education opportunities for staff and administrators.

5. Educate the public about the problem. Once they are fully aware of a problem and understand how it affects them and their community, people care. Remember that many people have never been exposed to the concept of spaying or neutering or the connection between abuse of animals and violence toward humans. You live and breathe it, but they usually have to

- hear about it at least several times before it fully registers.

Educate the public and other agencies about:

- *Why they should care.* Virtually all improvements for animals benefit humans too, but the benefits need to be made apparent.
- *What they can do.* People are frequently uninformed about our issues. Show them some clear and simple things they can do to help.
- *What you are doing.* Are you keeping your efforts a well-kept secret from the public? Asking people for their support, financial or otherwise, is much easier when you've informed them about your accomplishments and goals.

6. Adopt an attitude of cooperation. Keeping a cooperative spirit is a challenging goal for many organizations. If particular agencies have been negligent, negative, or nearsighted, consider how you might work with them. Maintaining or building bridges is easier than repairing

- burned ones, particularly those you set on fire.

How do you start? You might review the techniques recommended by leading experts. Best-selling books like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Covey and *Verbal Judo* by George J. Thompson will show you how, through simple changes in your behavior, you can get others to respond to you in more positive ways—ways that will help you achieve your goals. Your local library has a wealth of helpful books written for “business people.” Read some of them. After all, you are a “business person” too.

7. Recognize your limits; don't try to do it all. Unless you have a magic wand, you must set feasible, practical priorities. Focus on those issues that will have the most impact on your overall goals. Otherwise, you will spread your agency too thin, exhaust your budget, and have little to show for the expenditures.

To combat animal cruelty and neglect, ACOs and humane officers should routinely emphasize prevention and educate pet owners about proper animal care.

shelter animals is commendable; high quantity gained through relaxation of standards is not.

ARE CRUELTY COMPLAINTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY BEING HANDLED EFFECTIVELY?

If your agency lacks the authority and resources to investigate cruelty and enforce animal laws, you must ensure that someone is meeting those responsibilities. The existence of local, state, or federal animal-protection laws does not guarantee that regular law enforcement or other humane agencies are enforcing them effectively—or at all.

Ensuring that cruelty investigations are “being handled” goes beyond simply recognizing that it’s the job of someone else. Your agency should gladly cooperate when necessary. For example, you might offer to house seized animals or secure other appropriate space. You might suggest and



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help arrange specialized animal-related training for police officers.

Here are some questions to help you determine how well the animals in your community are being protected:

1. Does the public know how to report animal cruelty or animal emergencies? Is the appropriate phone number readily available to visitors or newcomers to your community? For example, if some-

one is visiting your community after regular business hours and discovers an injured or emaciated dog, can they call 911 or find the appropriate phone number in the yellow pages?

2. Is the police department familiar with the proper procedures for contacting your agency after hours? If you supply the police with a laminated, easy-to-read sheet that summarizes what your agency does and how to contact you, they’ll likely appreciate and use it.

3. Does your investigations program emphasize prevention? Enforcement must entail more than a jail sentence, a fine, or an escape hatch that allows pet owners to surrender their animals to avoid running-at-large citations. The long-term solution to animal-cruelty problems is getting people to care for animals responsibly. Do your investigators only respond to complaints, or do they look for ways to solve problems before cruelty occurs?

Further, if they respond to countless complaints about dogs tied outside in the dead of winter, does your agency distribute public service announcements (PSAs) to the media about winter pet care?

4. Is there a spirit of cooperation among animal agencies, law enforcement, and other public service agencies (such as the health department and the prosecutor’s office)? Many community animal problems get solved only when several agencies collaborate. If you foster the attitude, “We’re the good guys; they’re the bad guys”—either

• **8. Be a leader for the cause, but enlist the help of as many others as possible.** Sometimes you’re so busy trying to accomplish something that you feel it would take too much time to ask others for help. This is a particularly speedy way to burn yourself out. Unfortunately, people usually don’t help unless you ask them to. Once you get into the habit of asking others to help and planning for their participation, you’ll be amazed at how much more you can accomplish and how much your attitude improves.

• **9. Empower people to do some things for themselves.** There are times when you are morally obligated to act, such as going out at 3 A.M. to rescue an injured dog on a highway. But there are also times when callers can solve problems themselves with guidance from you and other staff.

• **10. Remember that persistence pays off.** Believe in your goals and repeatedly deliver a polite, rational, and consistent message to the public and government officials. As long as you deliver your message in a way that enlightens rather than alienates, your efforts should bring long-term success. In our business, the best way to lose is to give up. ■

Because it contributes nothing to a humane agency's goals, removing animal carcasses may be a task better suited for a government agency like the sanitation department.

publicly or privately—both you and the animals lose.

5. Have you done all you can to ensure that judgments, sentences, and animal dispositions after a cruelty case prevent further cruelty? For example, have you taken the time to share your knowledge of the link between cruelty toward animals and violence toward humans with the main players in the judicial system? Have you suggested the kinds of judgments most effective in preventing further neglect or abuse of animals? North Royalton (Ohio) animal control officer Sandy Grattan routinely provides prosecutors and judges with printed material pertaining to the animal issue at hand. "It is working," she says. "They do read the material and are becoming more aware that there are other problems tied to animal issues." One judge who read Grattan's materials gave the maximum penalty to a man convicted of stabbing a dog 31 times during a domestic argument.



Central Coast Times

are not as simple as loading up some pups and kittens, walking around a facility, and counting human smiles. For sure, people benefit from pet-facilitated therapy programs. But given the high cost of human resources and the fact that these programs contribute little

toward preventing cruelty, shelters might do better to persuade health-care professionals to arrange for people to bring their own pets to nursing homes and similar facilities.

The rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned and injured wildlife is another popular and worthwhile service that nonetheless may be spreading your agency too thin. Is your organization trying to fill this need? Would animals be better served by an organization that specializes in wildlife? Recognizing your limits allows you to be more effective.

Even some traditionally tax-supported services such as picking up dead animals do little to further the Big Three. If your humane agency is charged with the task of removing road kills, you may want to try persuading government officials to transfer that job to an agency like the sanitation department. Your limited human and financial resources would be better spent on PSAs that urge the public to reduce driving speeds in and near known animal crossings, watch for glowing eyes, keep domestic animals off the streets, and call the right number for emergency help.



NAHEE

DOES YOUR AGENCY PROVIDE HUMANE EDUCATION?

The most common way in which humane agencies provide humane education is by visiting elementary school classrooms and teaching kids about pet care. Such visits certainly teach kids important principles, but they may not be the most cost-effective way to reach large numbers of children

with a varied humane message. Programs like "Adopt-A-Teacher," offered by the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education in East Haddam, Connecticut, can help humane educators work smarter instead of harder. Such programs expose kids to strong humane messages each month.

Humane education should include adults. In fact, it should pervade the humane agency's work—from problem-solving encounters in the field to rabies clinics. Everything a humane agency does is humane education.

DOES YOUR AGENCY PROVIDE THE RIGHT SERVICES?

Your humane agency's secondary programs may be popular and successful. But are they taking staff time and resources away from more essential services? Are they helping you achieve your basic mission?

For example, many agencies feel morally obligated to ferry animals to and from nursing homes as part of pet-facilitated therapy. But worthwhile animal-visitation programs

BEST CARE ANYWHERE

Regardless of your agency's particular mix of activities, you are part of a field that continues to struggle for recognition of its contributions to the quality of community life. Remember that your work is an important but still misunderstood endeavor. By thinking about communities that do not enjoy the benefits of a quality animal control program, a humane shelter, or an organization championing the necessary issues, you can remind yourself and others of the kinds of frustrations, suffering, injury, and danger that either used to take place in your community or could have existed if not for the efforts of your agency.

The road to success may feel like a war zone, and you may become battle weary, so here's some parting advice: Stay focused on your clearly defined and understood purpose, check your road map from time to time to avoid unnecessary detours or wrong turns, keep your seatbelt and helmet on (the road can be mighty rough), and don't forget to watch a MASH episode now and then for some perspective, good humor, and inspiration. ■

The Adopt-A-Teacher program, in which children receive issues of KIND News each month of the school year, can help agencies and educators instill a humane ethic in children.

Seven Basic Policies for Every Animal Shelter

Is your public or private animal-care facility meeting the basic needs of animals and the public? Find out by comparing the seven of the most essential shelter policies with those of your facility.

POLICY # 1

Accept every animal brought in.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: For a shelter to be a true haven for lost or unwanted animals and provide a comprehensive service to the public, its doors must be open to all animals. A shelter that turns away an animal being surrendered, or asks someone to keep the animal until space opens up at the facility, risks losing that animal to abandonment or some other cruel fate. Similarly, a shelter that cannot accept an animal found running at large or rescued in a cruelty case is not acting in the animal's best interests.

Shelters exist, first and foremost, to protect animals. Euthanasia of shelter animals to make room for others is a tragic necessity that prevents animal suffering. An organization that cares for homeless animals but doesn't accept every animal may be doing admirable work as an adoption center or a limited-access refuge, but it isn't providing the full complement of animal sheltering functions needed in every community. A facility that doesn't accept every animal can supplement an animal shelter, but it can't substitute for one.

Some private shelters are not authorized to take in strays from areas where they do not have contracts with municipalities or counties. Together with the governing entities, such shelters should arrange for any strays brought to the shelter to be housed there until they can be transferred to an appropriate facility.

POLICY # 2

Do not charge a fee for surrendered animals.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: This policy ensures that any individual who wants or needs to give up an animal is able to do so without obstacle. A shelter should encourage the public to bring stray and unwanted animals to its facility.

Some shelter staff and administrators argue that shelters should make it difficult for people to give up their owned animals to convey the message that pets are not disposable property. But if someone inclined to give up their pet is denied the opportunity to take the animal to a shelter—or made to feel guilty when they call the shel-

ter to ask about surrendering the pet—the results can be disastrous. Such a person may give the animal to anyone who will take him—even a stranger—without ensuring the animal's well-being. Or the person may keep the animal, in inhumane conditions—for example, chained to a doghouse or otherwise neglected. Or the person may abandon the animal in the suburbs in the naive hope that a sympathetic individual will take him home. Shelters should work to prevent, not encourage, these situations.

People surrendering animals *should* be encouraged to make a donation to the shelter, which should institute programs to help pet owners solve pet-behavior or other problems that may lead them to give up their pets.

POLICY # 3

Maintain a clean, comfortable, safe, and healthy environment for each animal.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: Animals, like humans, are sentient beings who deserve to live in a humane, disease-free environment. A shelter should examine animals soon after they arrive and place them in appropriate housing areas of the facility. Animals should be separated by species, sex, age, and health status. They should be housed in a way that minimizes stress and disease transmission and should be provided with proper food and water, human attention, protection from the elements, adequate ventilation and heat, and veterinary care when needed.

Animals should be housed in a way that affords them comfort, minimizes their stress, and reduces disease transmission.



POLICY # 4

Hold stray animals for a minimum of five operating days, including a Saturday.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: Whether or not this is written into your local animal control ordinance (and it should be), a minimum holding period of five operating days allows owners of stray pets time to reclaim their animals. For example, a healthy animal picked up on Thursday at 11:17 A.M. must not be adopted out or euthanized until the following Tuesday at 11:18 A.M. If your shelter is closed on Sunday or a holiday, then that animal must be held until Wednesday at 11:18. If a stray enters the shelter on Monday, the animal must be held until Sunday morning to give the owner a chance to come in on a Saturday. Given budgetary and space constraints, shelters should be wary of extending the required holding period beyond five days; shelters should instead evaluate strays on a case-by-case basis after the required five-day holding period ends.

POLICY # 5

Screen prospective adopters using adoption standards.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: A shelter's adoption program should seek to find responsible, lifelong homes for animals suitable as family pets. It should not simply aim to find homes for as many animals as possible. A shelter should have set guidelines and standards for determining which animals are made available for adoption and which potential adopters are likely to care for animals responsibly.

Equally important is how the shelter *applies* its adoption standards. Shelters should not apply their standards so rigidly that they ignore an applicant's special circumstances. Also, shelters should conduct adoption screening fairly and compassionately so that they do not alienate prospective adopters.

POLICY # 6

For euthanasia, use sodium pentobarbital administered by well-trained, compassionate individuals.



Sodium pentobarbital administered by trained, compassionate staff is the method of choice for companion animal euthanasia.

HSUS/Johnson

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: Animal shelters have a mandate to provide a humane death for those animals whose lives must be ended. The consensus among veterinarians and other experts is that the barbiturate sodium pentobarbital, properly administered via injection, provides the most stress-free, painless death. It is the method of choice for companion animal euthanasia, recommended by The Humane Society of the United States, the American Humane Association, and the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Carbon monoxide can provide a humane death for certain animals, but only if proper procedures are followed. The most essential procedures include using only commercially compressed carbon monoxide in cylinders, using a chamber free of leaks and other defects, loading animals into separate compartments, and never exceeding the chamber's recommended load capacity. Because carbon monoxide is an unacceptable method of euthanasia for animals who are old, sick, or younger than 16 weeks of age, such animals must be euthanized using sodium pentobarbital. Shelters unable to obtain sodium pentobarbital for such animals must make appropriate arrangements with local veterinarians.

Shelter personnel often lack adequate training and experience to euthanize animals such as reptiles, fish, chickens, and pigs. A shelter should prepare for all contingencies by developing an arrangement with at least two local veterinarians willing to euthanize such species of animals.

POLICY # 7

Spay or neuter all animals at time of adoption, or guarantee that all adopted animals are later sterilized.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: A shelter must not perpetuate pet overpopulation by sending unsterilized animals back into the community.

Unlike a system that requires follow-up by shelter staff to ensure that adopters have their animals spayed or neutered, a sterilization-at-adoption program guarantees that no shelter animals will reproduce. Shelters with such programs but without on-site veterinary facilities usually have staff or volunteers deliver animals directly from the shelter to cooperating local veterinarians, who perform the spay or neuter surgeries. (Animals younger than six months of age are taken to veterinarians proficient in early-age spaying and neutering.) Protocols for vaccinating animals and ensuring that they are appropriate candidates for surgery are developed in conjunction with the veterinarians. Adopters typically pick up their new pets from the veterinarian's office. To avoid unnecessary surgeries, spay/neuter appointments should be made with veterinarians at the time of adoption, not before.

For shelters not yet able to institute a sterilization-at-adoption program, a policy or ordinance that requires adopters to have their animals spayed or neutered within a specified time (known as mandatory spay/neuter) is the next best thing. However, even a low percentage of non-compliance by adopters means that shelter animals will contribute to pet overpopulation. That's why shelters must aggressively follow up on adopters to strive for 100 percent compliance. ■

Rebirth of a Humane Society

A former board president describes how her humane society's board of directors responded after the treasurer announced that there was only \$72.88 in the operating account.

By Wanda Muhlke

Just a few years ago, the Humane Society of Sarasota County (HSSC), Florida, was a ramshackle facility, struggling for direction and financial stability. Although the 40-year-old organization received nearly 4,000 animals annually and served a community of 275,000 people, it was still largely a “mom and pop” operation.

Little did I realize, when I signed on as a volunteer in 1990, how serious HSSC's problems really were. As I began coming to work at the shelter on Saturdays, it quickly became apparent that I was on my own. No one trained or supervised me. There were no written instructions and, incredibly, not a single orientation session.

Over the next few months, many volunteers became increasingly frustrated about the lack of volunteer coordination and other management problems. Unknown to us, a revolution was already taking place on the board of directors. An earlier split between HSSC and the county over animal control had left the organization with a significant funding deficit. The split and ensuing problems had caused more than half of HSSC's board members to resign over the previous two years, leaving the organization with five directors. Staff and volunteers felt that the board and management were running the organization into the ground.

A March Toward Change

At a March 1991 annual meeting attended by 60 people, including many volunteers, I was elected to a seat on the board after being nominated from the floor. (The HSSC practice of not sending ballots to the membership had previously ensured that the organization would continue to be run by a small clique.) I, along with another volunteer nominee from the floor, became part of HSSC's “new regime.”

Many tasks lay ahead of us. HSSC lacked the basic procedures, written policies, and accountability required to operate a shelter successfully. The \$387,000 budget had been developed haphazardly; the numbers had little relevance to actual expenditures or predicted revenues. Other than a raffle initiated in 1990 (which netted \$21,000), HSSC hadn't sponsored any significant

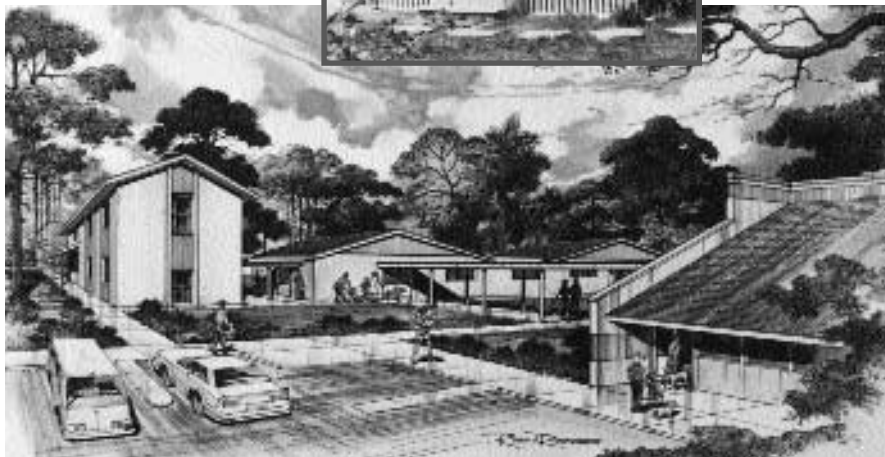
fundraisers. We faced a \$62,000 deficit, and HSSC had no endowment with principal and interest to dip into. At one of my first board meetings, the treasurer announced that there was only \$72.88 in the operating account and only a \$30,000 line of credit with the bank. It appeared that the organization's previous directors had foolishly counted on bequests.

During 1991 we slashed the budget by \$70,000 and were forced to shorten operating hours. We took other, more positive, steps. We revised our bylaws, developed new written policies and procedures, appointed a new volunteer coordinator, began to mend fences with members of the veterinary community, instituted a direct mail campaign, and added a remit envelope to our 12,000-circulation newsletter (the resulting contributions not only covered our production costs but also provided money for other programs). We introduced a “Prevent A Litter” campaign—the first of many positive public relations efforts. And we began our “No Cost Spay/Neuter Program.” Through this innovative program, run in cooperation with the Southwest Florida Veterinary Medical Association, anyone who did volunteer shelter work (anything from laundry to mowing) for a predetermined number of hours could receive a certificate redeemable for a free spay or neuter surgery.

In late 1991 the board undertook the difficult task of

Ground-breaking ceremonies held November 28, 1995, inaugurated construction of the new animal care and education facilities planned by the Humane Society of Sarasota County.

Inset: HSSC's original animal-care facility, circa 1952.



Wanda Muhlke was president of the board of directors of the Humane Society of Sarasota County from 1992 to 1994. She is presently serving her second term as a board member.

"This is a healthier, friendlier, more aware, more stable, more democratic, more credible, and more caring organization than it was last year at this time—than it was even two months ago. Now, this just didn't happen by accident. It happened because most of you on the board chose to work together as a team; you made decisions, took actions, and stood together as a team. It happened because you weren't afraid to make tough decisions and stick by them. It happened because you wouldn't bend or bow to intimidation. It happened because you took problems or stumbling blocks and made them into opportunities."

—from the farewell address of Humane Society of Sarasota County board president Carolyn Simmons, May 1992

finding a new executive director. We hired someone with an MBA degree, a specialization in finance, and no previous experience working for an animal protection organization. Given HSSC's management and budget problems, she was exactly what we needed.

With a capable executive director things gradually improved. During 1992, the organization's 40th anniversary, I took on the role of board president. The board grew from 15 to 20 directors. During that year, we began what seemed an enormous, three-phase undertaking: repairing our present facility, building new kennels and work rooms, and building an education facility with a second-story caretaker's apartment.

Thanks largely to one volunteer whose mission became media relations, we acquired a new, positive public image. We applied for and received grants. Through hard fund-raising

work, positive public feedback, and a few small bequests, our operating coffers grew to \$200,000 by June 1992. Later that year we received two magnificent bequests of \$260,971 and \$362,890. Happily, we now faced a new challenge: we needed an investment plan. We undertook this responsibility with zeal.

Looking Back on Achievements

Nearly five years later, as we begin 1996, we can proudly look back on our accomplishments. The No Cost

Spay/Neuter Program instituted in 1991 has provided for the spaying or neutering of 3,500 animals. Membership has grown from 700 to more than 1,200. The number of financial supporters has also increased dramatically. Humane education and outreach programs have matured and multiplied. Volunteers are more involved, and we've added several new staff positions, including a part-time cruelty investigator/humane officer.

These achievements have been made possible by creative management, competent leadership, and increased resources. The 1995 raffle fundraiser, which now includes a silent auction, raised \$59,000. Another spring fundraiser, Hot Dogs and Cool Cats, is a \$100-per-plate black-tie dinner and fashion show. This event, in its third year, grossed \$56,000. Our budget has grown from \$387,000 in 1991 to \$558,000 in 1995.

The crowning glory has been the success of our \$800,000 building campaign. We defied the warnings of nonprofit experts. Those experts, including one who directs a prominent local foundation, told us it was unwise to begin a capital campaign without having an endowment in place that would ensure adequate funds for present and future needs. We had no choice. It was either build or watch the shelter crumble around us.

Without the commitment and determination of our executive director, our campaign chairperson, a handful of board members, and some wealthy supporters, we would not be celebrating this accomplishment. People give to those who have demonstrated a commitment to their cause and have first given significantly of their own financial means. Even the director of a prominent local foundation (who is not an animal lover) gave a \$100,000 topping grant to our building campaign. Our next priority is an endowment campaign.

Every organization experiences growing pains. The message is to keep growing, and not be complacent. In new and better ways, HSSC is fulfilling its mission and making a huge difference in the lives of unwanted and abused animals in Sarasota County. With the right leadership and vision, your organization can do the same. ■

STRENGTH AT THE TOP: THOUGHTS ON ASSEMBLING AN EFFECTIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

By Wanda Muhlke

Much has been written about how to gather a good, working board of directors. (Some well-known authors on the subject include Jerold Panas, author of *Boardroom Verities*—my favorite—and James Wolfensohn.) At our humane society—the Humane Society of Sarasota County—the nominating committee provided the impetus for some of the most important changes made to our board. From this committee stemmed all our efforts at self-evaluation and reorganization.

We have defined what we need from potential directors, including a commitment of ten hours per month. We look for what some experts call the "seven I's": Integrity (impeccable character), Intelligence (wisdom and good judgment), Investment (generous giving), Influence (high visibility), Intestines (a readiness to make tough decisions), Involvement (active and hearty commitment), and Inthusiasim (zealous advocacy). If you can attract, and keep, people with these qualities, your organization will move ahead on the road to success.

A humane society is only as strong as its board of directors, which must be a cohesive group with varying skills. The board must hire qualified individuals capable of carrying out its directions. Once a framework of policies and procedures has been devised, directors shouldn't interfere with everyday operations. It is the board's foremost responsibility to ensure financial success and see that the society's mission is sound and being fulfilled. ■

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