

# Coffee Break

## What's the most common misconception the public has about your organization? What would you like them to understand about your work, your colleagues, and the animals?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break. Some of you talked about how often people think your work is too sad, while others were surprised by how many people seem to expect your animals and services to be free. To read more of your answers about what the general public gets wrong, visit [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak).



JENNIFER LONDON/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

The biggest misconception visitors/adopters have is that everything is given to us "free," so they wonder why we charge adopters for a pet. We have to constantly explain that we do not get government money, and all of our products and services are not free. Many people remember the days of free puppies being handed out from a box by some child at the grocery store. [They want to know] why are we charging for a mutt—we should be giving them away. We find educating adopters about why we charge takes a lot of our time. Many people also think we must make lots of money, otherwise why would we be charging? ... There is also a lot of confusion as to what a "rescue" is. Many think we are animal control and can solve their complaints about neighbors, etc.

—Karen Burns, VP/Kennel Manager  
Pet Resource Network  
Otsego, Michigan

As the volunteer coordinator for my facility, I encounter many misconceptions from new volunteers as they come aboard into our animal care programs. One of the biggest misconceptions is about how and why animals end up in a shelter. They are too often viewed as sad and pathetic animals abandoned by their owners and suffering from horrible separation anxiety and mental stress. While this is sometimes the case, many of the animals we receive through intake are happy and healthy and have only landed here due to uncontrollable or unfortunate circumstances with their previous owner. Things like moving, medical emergencies, financial problems, work, school or family crisis are often the reason animals get relinquished. Many owners are horribly distraught at having to give up their animals, and the animals they are relinquishing are sound, happy, and healthy creatures that simply find themselves in a temporary state of homelessness. Our main purpose is to act as an "animal re-homing service" for our community and to find new homes for all these great animals. Many people don't realize that it is the stress of the shelter environment itself that often makes animals sad, depressed, sick, or behaviorally challenged. But it is no different than when a human becomes stressed by a big move, major life change, or sudden change in environment. Our job is to minimize this stress as best we can with socialization, good animal husbandry, good daily care, and companionship. Provided these simple things, most animals will recover from their stressed states and become, once again, the happy, healthy, and playful animals they were in their homes. What helps them most is consistency and routine, not the barrage of overly sympathetic love and attention, which most unknowing people and volunteers want to shower upon them. This is one of the hardest things to convince volunteers of and often the general public as well.

—Fred Adesso,  
Volunteer Support Coordinator  
San Diego Humane Society  
San Diego, California

Seemingly daily we shelter employees hear someone say, "I could never do your job because I love animals too much." The public needs to know that it is because we love animals so much that we do our jobs; year after year, whiskered face after whiskered face, tears upon tears, and smile after smile. It is our deep love, devotion, and dedication to animals that keep us coming back. It is the happy stories, the cheerful tear-filled adoptions and reunions, the relieving of suffering, and the need to educate the public that keep us coming back.

—Cindy Carlson, Lead Kennel Attendant  
Henderson Animal Shelter  
Henderson, Nevada

That we put animals down and do not take good care of them in the pound (shelter). Although our shelter is not a "no-kill" shelter, we do not put any animals down that are truly adoptable. We have no restrictions on the time frame to hold an animal. We have recently put on two assistants to make sure that there will be coverage and adequate care. We work well with all the local welfare groups to help us place the dogs, and even have offered our local [nonprofit], Strays & Others, the use of our facility to show and adopt their animals.

—Mary Ann Kleinschmitt,  
Animal Control Officer  
Town of New Canaan Animal Control  
New Canaan, Connecticut

Unfortunately, the biggest misconception is that there is something wrong with a dog that ends up in the shelter, when many times the opposite is true. I have seven dogs; three are Delta-registered therapy dogs, and two more are in the process of becoming therapy dogs. When I am out in public and tell people that Shadow (one of my Delta dogs) was a shelter dog, the first words are, "I did not know shelters had such nice animals!" This is a perception we are trying hard to correct.

—Sandra Wittliff, Board Member  
Waco Humane Society  
Waco, Texas

People feel that our work is depressing and joyless, which is totally wrong. There is joy to be found in helping a dog that has known nothing but neglect and abuse find its forever home. There is joy when you find out that the dog is now a therapy dog bringing joy to others. How can it be depressing to see the happiness on the faces of the adoptive family? How can it be depressing when we get an e-mail from the family saying "thank you" for helping them find their new family member?

—Kathleen Fuller, Volunteer/Web  
Manager  
Shelter Paws Dog Rescue  
Cincinnati, Ohio

We operate in Southeast Louisiana, where a local university study indicated 80-90 thousand intact animals reside within a two-parish (county) area. While people in this area love their animals, they are not the most responsible or knowledgeable pet owners. Many dogs spend their entire lives on the end of a chain or in small pens. Our organization has a "fenced yard" and home visit requirement for adopted dogs. While this requirement does not guarantee that this will be a perfect home, we feel that, along with a vet and character reference, we have done our best to place a pet in the best home possible. Many people strongly disagree with our policy regarding a fenced yard. We only wish people would realize we want our pets to be safe and happy in their new environment.

—Faye Adams, Volunteer  
HOPE for Animals  
Thibodaux, Louisiana

**Animal Sheltering congratulates Faye Adams of Thibodaux, La., whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. HOPE for Animals will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!**

**Next question: What's the funniest or most surprising thing your organization has ever received as a donation? Were you able to use it? If so, how?**

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak) or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 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](http://animalsheltering.org) for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.