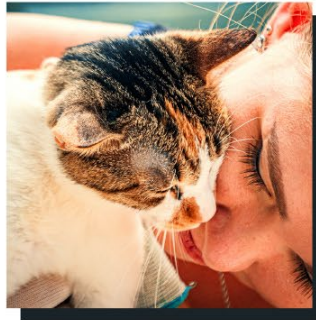
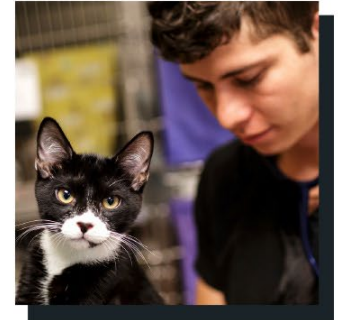
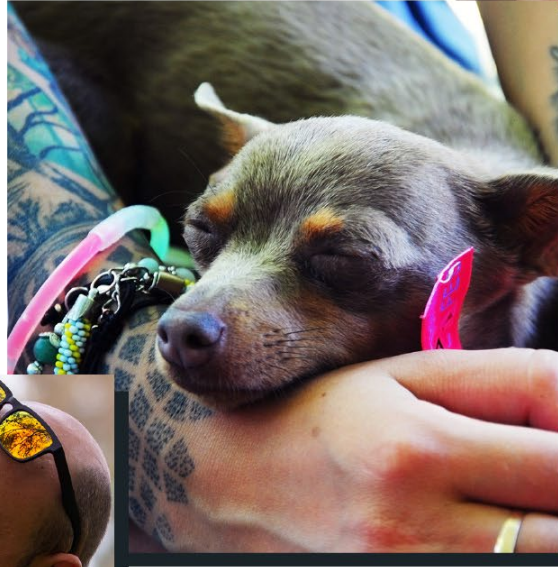
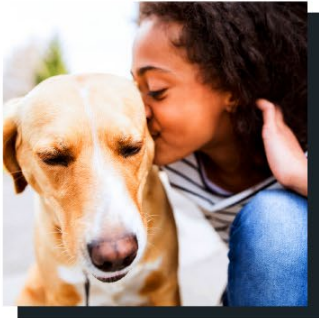
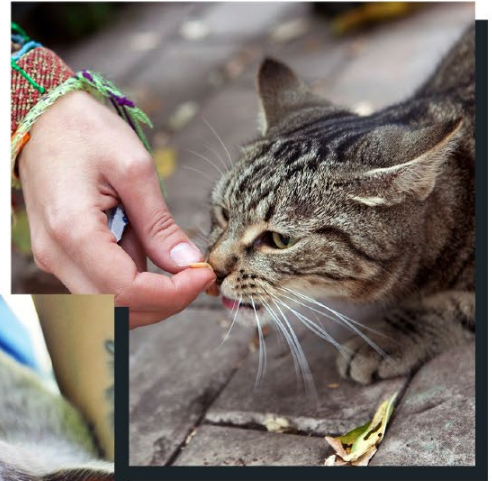




MADDIE'S<sup>®</sup>  
**MILLION PET  
CHALLENGE**



August 2024

# Operational Consult Hernando County Animal Services



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# Introduction to Maddie's Million Pet Challenge Process

Maddie's Million Pet Challenge (MMPC) is a partnership between the University of Florida and University of California at Davis' shelter medicine programs, Team Shelter USA and Open-Door Veterinary Collective. MMPC awarded Hernando County Animal Services (HCAS) a pro bono consult at the request of county leadership. Research was completed before the onsite visit that included a review of the Florida State Statute, local ordinances, historical statistical trends, record keeping, written standard operating procedures, website and social media along with meetings with leaders and staff. During the onsite visit, the MMPC consultants along with 2 veterinary interns and 6 veterinary students toured the campus and met with individual staff and the leadership team to learn more about the processes in place from the point of intake to outcome.

The University of Florida Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program previously visited HCAS to provide a pro bono assessment in July 2021 (as well as in 2011 and 2015). A detailed report was provided at that time with many recommendations that would increase lifesaving at HCAS within the scope of public and animal safety responsibilities. Leadership should continue to use this report as a road map as the recommendations originally provided are still valid and should be implemented.

This report is written for the shelter director and county leadership. All recommendations are based on research and/or successful programs in Florida and nationwide and are in line with all reputable national animal welfare organizations. Many recommendations are simple policy decisions that can be made quickly while others will take several steps, budget adjustments or other actions before implementation.

In addition to the Maddie's Fund partners, these best practices include the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) updated *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, the National Animal Control Association (NACA), the ASPCA, the Humane Society of the United States, Best Friends and Fear Free Sheltering. Human Animal Support Services (HASS) also published an online playbook with a plethora of information and training opportunities that should also be utilized and can be found here: <https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/hass-playbook/> (see Resources). The updated ASV guidelines checklist should also be used to track recommendations and progress: <https://www.sheltervet.org/assets/guidelines/2022-ASV-GL-Checklist.pdf>.

HCAS has not had a full-time vet since the departure of Dr. Brady in November 2023. Various relief vets have aided in the duties; however, it has hindered HCAS's ability to stay up to date with surgeries and vaccinations. Partners have stepped up and are greatly appreciated for their efforts. PetLuv has made a commitment to prioritize feral cat surgeries. As of now, October 2024, HCAS has not been able to secure a full-time shelter vet. However, HCAS has been able to enter into an agreement with a vet for part-time services. This allows the shelter to perform surgeries on site and complete vaccinations, previously being done at various partner locations. Our current relief vet is a well-established high quality-high volume, spay and neuter surgeon.

Recommendations can be distilled into several main goals that should guide and prioritize all leadership decisions:

1. Exhaust all options to intake (with the exception of enforcement cases and sick or injured pets)  
HCAS embraces all options to avoid intake to the shelter. We have active finder to foster programs, foster to adopt programs, and provide support resources to citizens who want to surrender animals because they can't afford food. HCAS provide food through our donation pantry. HCAS continues to try to improve the efforts in the field through our partners at the Sheriff's office, who handles enforcement efforts. Expectation is to have the officers explore all means prior to bringing an animal to the shelter.
2. If pets do enter the shelter, provide appropriate space for each, create a one-touch system and plan of action for their shortest length of stay.  
HCAS acknowledges that efforts to save animals can and has led to extended stays and contributed to overcrowding at times. HCAS embraces the recommendations to establish pathways for animals and prioritizing those pathways. HCAS efforts will be concentrated on featuring highly adoptable animals to reduce stays and open space quickly. HCAS will work to establish a committee to review animals with behavior problems on a weekly basis, increase outreach for these animals, and apply for grants for behavioral training. HCAS knows that not all animals can be reformed but the mission is to try to work with every animal if possible.
3. Discontinue accepting visually healthy cats who were outside (see Admissions) and instead create a pathway for the public to take directly to clinics offering TNR services.  
HCAS will establish a process with surrounding partners to be able to assist the citizens in taking the neighborhood cats directly to those partners, thus leaving space open at the shelter.
4. Establish goal of one dog per run through triaged/managed intake and lifesaving outcomes so the divider door is only closed during sanitation.  
HCAS leadership will re-enforce importance attaining such a goal.
5. Advocate immediately for the placement of all pets back with their owners, into foster, adoption or with rescue. Obvious exceptions are enforcement cases, aggressive dogs or pets who will be euthanized for humane reasons.  
HCAS leadership will re-enforce importance of attaining such a goal.
6. Ensure marketing messages are closely aligned with the ever-changing challenges at the shelter. February 2024 created (reclassified) a new position, Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator (EOC). One of the key job priorities of this position is to increase our marketing and outreach efforts. In addition, this position focuses on building strong relationships with our volunteers. HCAS has a goal to participate in outreach events within the community at least once a month. The HCAS has also recently invested in updated signage and will be rebranding to the Hernando County Animal Resource Center.





Replaced large sign going into the shelter, adding the ability to put up temporary signage as needed for events etc. Replaced the faded, peeling, double-sided 4x8 sign at the highway at the entrance of Oliver Street.



The Shelter is quite a distance off the highway. The above small signs were placed along the route to confirm to citizens they are going the right way.

**Hernando County  
Animal Resource Center**

**Hours**

Sunday: Closed	Thursday: 12p - 6p
Monday: Closed	Friday: 12p - 6p
Tuesday: 12p - 6p	Saturday: 10a - 3p
Wednesday: 12p - 6p	

Best practices suggest that shelters should have later hours to make it more convenient for citizens to be able to come and adopt an animal and not have to take off work. As such HCAS recently changed their public hours to be open later during the week. In addition, this gives shelter staff more time to ensure the animal enclosures are clean prior to the citizens coming to see the animals.

- Schedule Dogs Playing for Life training after adoption and placement staff in place ([dogsplayingforlife.com](http://dogsplayingforlife.com)). Grants are available through Florida Leaders in Lifesaving for municipal shelters to receive Dogs Playing for Life training at no cost.



HCAS - Cat Intake and Outcome								
Year	Intake	Live Release	Adoption	Rescue			Euthanasia	LRR
				Transfer	RTF	RTO		
2018	1,334	1,068	378	468	178	44	178	80.06%
2019	1,647	1,439	381	545	461	52	125	87.37%
2020	1,105	1,080	259	497	290	34	52	97.74%
2021	1,029	873	188	523	136	26	60	84.84%
2022	1,450	1,176	279	694	136	67	106	81.10%
2023	1,434	1,030	346	431	196	57	89	71.83%
2024*-June	982	561	151	304	74	32	40	57.13%

HCAS - Dog Intake and Outcome								
Year	Intake	Live Release	Adoption	Rescue			Euthanasia	LRR
				Transfer	Other	RTO		
2018	1,488	1,422	477	415	1	529	89	95.56%
2019	1,507	1,417	552	321	1	543	53	94.03%
2020	1,142	1,119	410	298	4	407	31	97.99%
2021	1,284	1,203	484	281	0	438	45	93.69%
2022	1,347	1,171	418	358	0	395	67	86.93%
2023	1,544	1,367	539	361	0	467	64	88.54%
2024*-June	902	660	235	152	0	273	11	73.17%

HCAS - Combined Intake and Outcome								
Year	Intake	Live Release	Adoption	Rescue			Euthanasia	LRR
				Transfer	Other	RTO		
2018	2,822	2,490	855	883	179	573	267	88.24%
2019	3,154	2,856	933	866	462	595	178	90.55%
2020	2,247	2,199	669	795	294	441	83	97.86%
2021	2,313	2,076	672	804	136	464	105	89.75%
2022	2,797	2,347	697	1,052	136	462	173	83.91%
2023	2,978	2,397	885	792	196	524	153	80.49%
2024*-June	1,884	1,221	386	456	74	305	51	64.81%

Figure 1: RTO = Return to Owner; LRR=live release rate. LRR is calculated as live release divided by total live intake. Charts were created using data provided by shelter, consultants are not confident in the current data due to a 3-month interruption of the software earlier this year and the shelter's inability to update records in real-time.

### Positives

- County leadership is supportive of HCAS acquiring modern shelter software
- There is great potential to increase lifesaving within the existing framework through system efficiencies

### Action Steps

- Consultant has connected HCAS with Animals First to receive a free online demonstration (<https://animalsfirst.com/>). This cloud-based software is extremely easy to use and will eliminate the need for paper records while increasing staff efficiency. The annual fee is nominal as it is based on the number of adoptions done at the shelter and includes a fundraising component that allows the adopter to cover the processing fee and include a donation which typically results in covering the costs for most organizations while also increasing donation revenue. Animals First also offers

continued assistance with their knowledgeable team to help resolve issues and maximize efficiency for staff.

The current records management system (BLDSYS) was not designed specifically for animal shelter use and as such inefficient for our needs. In April the County was victim to a network interruption, because of the age of the software's underlying infrastructure, HCAS has been unable to efficiently recover. HCAS procured AnimalsFirst software with an implementation date of October 01, 2024. This is a significant improvement to every aspect of HCAS operations.



- Minimize Length of Stay (LOS). Even the nicest shelters are stressful places for animals and long lengths of stay lead to negative impacts on physical and behavioral health. Every effort should be made for each animal to have as short a length of stay as possible. There needs to be a sense of urgency among all staff for animals to move quickly through the shelter to their live outcome. [HCAS leadership will re-enforce importance attaining such a goal.](#)
- Length of stay should be tracked from the point of intake to the point of permanent placement separated by dogs, puppies, cats, kittens for shelter pets and foster pets. All pets should have a plan of action started on intake with a target goal of less than 14 days in shelter. For those pets in the shelter past 14 days, staff need to identify barriers and brainstorm to expedite live outcomes through marketing, foster, networking, etc. This recommendation is a target goal to minimize LOS and is intended not to increase euthanasia but to increase the organization's ability to assist pets in need in a streamlined manner. [AnimalsFirst is designed especially for shelters and has features that address all the above, implementing in October will aid greatly in the achievement of these goals.](#)
- Record intake and outcome of every animal entering the shelter in real-time in shelter software. This task may seem overwhelming because of the outdated software system in place; however, once Animals First (or other modern shelter software program) is in place it will save staff time and allow the organization to run more smoothly. Staff is spending an enormous amount of time creating paper records and then moving files from department to department. There are so many opportunities for files to become lost, important medical data to not be recorded into the software as well as an incredible waste of paper and storage space. When utilizing modern shelter software, a pet can be entered directly into the system within minutes during the intake process while an exam and preventive care is given. [AnimalsFirst is designed especially for shelters and has features that address all the above, implementing in October will aid greatly in the achievement of these goals. In addition, HCAS will](#)



work with our enforcement officer partners at the Sheriff's office to incorporate intake of the animal in the field.

All information that changes about a pet in the care of HCAS must be updated in software in real-time, including the location of the pet. This can only be confirmed by reconciling the physical location of a pet and their location in the software program. The effective management of individuals and the population is dependent on this practice.

AnimalsFirst is designed especially for shelters and has features that address all the above, implementing in October will aid greatly in the achievement of these goals. HCAS established a process which will be revised specific to AnimalsFirst to audit location daily.

- Inventory should be done daily. Supervisors can print the kennel inventory and hand out paper copies so staff in each section can confirm the presence of each pet in their area. Any discrepancies are then brought to the attention of the supervisor to follow up and reconcile if the staff is unable to.

Implemented and will be aided by real time software and pathway planning.

### Management Response

The existing software utilized for most record-keeping and statistical tracking has been (BLDSYS), which is an older legacy system that multiple County Departments have shared. Management agrees with the assessment comments to upgrade and replace our current system. Hernando County Animal Services has procured, AnimalsFirst, a software specifically designed for shelters. Demonstrations, custom data integration, and setup has been completed and we are expecting full launch to the new system on October 01, 2024. AnimalsFirst will be essential in tracking Length of Stay (LOS) goals, inventory, real-time updates, record keeping, and overall modernization to our logistical needs.

## Website, Social Media and Marketing

Social media and marketing is critical to every organization. Utilizing online platforms is the best way to reach people in the community who can help you as adopters, fosters, volunteers, donors, or general supporters. Transparency is key to gaining support and sharing organizational changes helps people understand that you are still available to help, just in a different way.

### Action Steps:

- Update the website with key information that will ultimately reduce phone calls and intake and increase live outcome that include but are not limited to:
  - Lost and found
    - Update to include pictures of new intakes to increase reunification
    - Sign up with Petco Love Lost to increase reunification through photo matching technology.  
[https://petcolove.org/lost/partner-application/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=lead-b2b&utm\\_campaign=lost-partnership-form-2024-v1](https://petcolove.org/lost/partner-application/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=lead-b2b&utm_campaign=lost-partnership-form-2024-v1)
    - Review Cabot Animal Support Services' website about helping pets get home and the First 48 program: <https://cabotanimalsupportservices.com/services/found-pets/>

- Review Rochester Animal Services' Found pet guide <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/FoundAPet/>
- Incorporate ideas from Rochester Animal Services' lost pets page [https://www.cityofrochester.gov/departments/department-recreation-and-human-services/rochester-animal-services-lost-pet-guide?check\\_logged\\_in=1](https://www.cityofrochester.gov/departments/department-recreation-and-human-services/rochester-animal-services-lost-pet-guide?check_logged_in=1)

Items reviewed and deemed valuable HCAS will follow up on these items.

- Pets available for adoption
  - Ensure pictures and information of shelter pets are auto-uploaded to the website and search engines in real-time. This is an automatic feature of all shelter-specific software.

Animalsfirst will auto-populate the common sites for pets including PetFinder.

- Add information about options on supportive self-rehoming for owners needing to find direct placement of their pets
  - <https://home-home.org/>
  - [rehome.adoptapet.com](https://rehome.adoptapet.com)

HCAS provides an extensive rescue resource list to citizens. The sites noted above have been added.

- Partner with a local animal welfare group such as PetLuv or the Humane Society to sign up for [home-home.org](https://home-home.org) and recruit a virtual volunteer to manage that platform. Home to Home integrates into the shelter's website and Facebook page to provide rehoming assistance including pets in foster care. There is a nominal monthly fee (±\$60/month) which pays for itself when pets find direct placement instead of entering the shelter.
- Include information on the website on living with community cats, the benefits of TNR, what to do if you find kittens and other valuable resources. Resources include:
  - <https://www.charlottenc.gov/cmpd/Animal-Care-and-Control/Resources/Community-Cats>
  - Don't Kit-nap Kittens <https://www.azhumane.org/events/dont-kit-nap-kittens/>
  - Found a Kitten Outside? Here's how to determine what to do <http://www.kittenlady.org/FPACa>
  - Identifying Kittens That Need Help <https://ocgainesville.org/kitten-shelter-diversion>
  - How to live with cats in your neighborhood <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/how-to-live-with-cats-in-your-neighborhood/>

Goal established and assigned to the Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator.

- Add link to HCAS' Instagram account to the website (currently only Facebook is shown on the web page). The volunteers who create HCAS's Instagram posts with ±1,100 followers should be commended for their engaging and informative content. Efforts should be made to grow this platform and ensure it is linked to the HCAS Facebook page which has an impressive ±29k followers.

Goal established assigned to Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator.

- Create engaging Facebook posts with photos and videos of the pets available for adoption or foster

- Don't be afraid to ask the public to foster or adopt sick animals. Create posts on HCAS's Facebook page with photos of the actual pets in need to recruit new community fosters instead of relying solely on a handful of local partners who are also over capacity.
- Ask staff and volunteers to create short TikTok or Reels videos of the animals as they see them being cute and awesome. HCAS's current TikTok account has 469 followers which is a good start; however, there is great potential to increase visibility.
  - Watch KC Pet Project's TikTok Tutorial webinar where Katie Grissum shares how she grew the shelter's TikTok following to over 1.2 million in a short period garnering support & donations from across the country. <https://youtu.be/eqloTGj4pk8>
  - Recruit creative social media millennials from local high schools or colleges to complete class projects using HCAS pets as their subject
- Update or remove pages with broken links (Daily Reports)
- Update statistics page once paper records have been entered into database and all intakes and outcomes reconciled (last updated December 2023)

In progress -task assigned to, Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator.

### Management Response

Management agrees that maintaining and keeping a current social media footprint is critical in ensuring adoption opportunities are promoted. Efforts are being made to improve community outreach. Animal Services now has an Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator position that oversees these critical functions. Cooperative and partnership links, Lost and Found FAQ's, partnerships with local rescues, fosters, volunteers, and community engagement are key elements in accomplishing this challenge. We concur and will include the links to these excellent resources on our social media pages. The utilization of the new software AnimalsFirst, will also be able to update our statistical information in real-time and provide current data to the end-user. The County is partnering with the Clerk's office to revamp the county website. Animal Services will be one of the first ones that will be enhanced within the project.

## Capacity for Care

Capacity for Care refers to the ability of an organization to provide appropriate double-compartment (or larger) housing, ample enrichment, care, etc. Staff and volunteers work extremely hard to provide the best care possible, but when a shelter is over that capacity it reduces the ability of the staff to provide appropriate space and enrichment and there remains a high risk of an infectious disease outbreak.

To remain under or within Capacity for Care, there must be:

- Accurate, real-time data management in the computer software system  
Implemented
- Proactive Safety Net  
Implemented
- Community-based foster care, Good Samaritan foster care, foster on deck, etc.  
Implemented/reinforced

Implemented/reinforced

- Minimal barriers to live outcome  
Implemented/ reinforced

Implemented/ reinforced

- Active advocacy starting on intake and while in foster care.

Implemented/ reinforced

- Intentional enrichment within and out of the kennel for canines and in-cage for felines.

Implemented, new cages ordered, Feliway and white noise machines added.

Again, operating over the Capacity for Care correlates with inability of the staff to provide appropriate housing and care, increased risk of infectious disease transmission and outbreaks, higher levels of stress for pets and therefore negative behaviors, Compassion Fatigue for people and wasted resources. All lifesaving strategies presented will lead to operating within Capacity for Care.

### **Housing Capacity**

All pets in confinement must be provided with enough space to turn around, lay down and make normal postural movements without the risk of laying in their own urine and feces. For many dogs during the onsite visit, that was not the case for the simple reason that divider doors were kept closed. Double-sided compartments are the industry standard for both canines and felines since they provide an area for a pet to sleep and eat and an alternate area to relieve themselves if needed. A double compartment is meant for one pet, a bonded pair or a litter. This is for the comfort of the pets, the ease of cleaning/spot cleaning, and decreases liability for staff and volunteers. The divider door should remain open except during cleaning and possibly during feeding if familiar dogs are sharing a kennel.

The recommendation is to stay within 80% of the maximum physical pet spaces through proactive and lifesaving programs to have space for pets with no other options, emergencies, enforcement cases, etc. The idea of 'open admission' should be replaced with 'Triaged Coordinated Intake' as accepting all pets into the shelter overwhelms the system, leads to overcrowding and the associated negative consequences.

Recognized efforts for population control have been implemented. Reinforcement efforts include: Foster programs, enhanced marketing, more stringent pathway assessment, re-address with HCSO avoiding intake unless crucial, shelter expansion and animal retention efforts.



Housing Area - Dogs	#	Description
Kennel A	28	Double-sided, indoor/outdoor kennels
Kennel B	30	Double-sided, indoor/outdoor kennels
<b># Housing units</b>	<b>58</b>	
<b>80% Capacity</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>Recommend staying within 80% capacity (46 dogs) to allow for unexpected essential intake</b>
<b>Housing Area - Cats</b>		
Housing Area - Cats	#	Description
Adoption lobby	24	Existing kennels are too small to meet housing needs (3 SF in the main compartment), are made from material that cannot be disinfected, and are falling apart.
Cats A	12	Double-compartment, stainless steel kennels
Cats B	4	4 portalized kennels, 11 single stainless-steel kennels, 8 portals needed for installation, will increase capacity to 8 total (due to an odd number of cages in bank, many will be 3 kennels across and others will remain in pairs)
<b># Housing units</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>Does not necessarily meet the minimum requirements for adequate housing due to design or square footage</b>
<b>80% Capacity</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Recommend staying within 80% (32) capacity to allow for unexpected essential intake</b>

**Note: Housing areas with a specific use such as clinic surgery holding are not included in shelter housing capacity. This chart is meant as a guide based on housing units meeting ASV guidelines, actual animal inventory numbers may fluctuate depending on a variety of factors including litter size.**

Marketing efforts, vastly improved sharing and automation of available animal posts to popular sights are now available due to the implementation of AnimalsFirst software. Emphasis on pathway planning and stronger pathway-based decision making to be implemented.

### Staffing Capacity

In addition to knowing housing capacity, organizations must remain within capacity based on staffing levels as well. Per the ASV Guidelines, trained personnel must be scheduled to meet daily animal care needs and efficiently and effectively accomplish each critical task. Animal care staffing (to provide basic morning sanitation, spot cleaning throughout the day and twice daily feeding only) can be roughly calculated by using the formula: *number of animals in the shelter per day x 15 minutes per animal=number of minutes per day, to be completed within a 3-hour timeframe*. This does not include time spent administering preventive care to new animal intakes, performing general sanitation including laundry, food preparation, dishes, mopping common areas, caring for livestock, assisting public visitors with reclaims and adoptions, playgroups and enrichment, and carrying out euthanasia.

HCAS currently has 5 animal care/kennel positions plus 1 supervisor on staff who are tasked to provide daily care 7 days per week. In addition, HCAS utilizes 1-2 trustees to assist with cleaning Monday-Friday. During the onsite visit, there were an average of 73 dogs and 88 cats in the shelter along with 7 pigs and 2 goats which requires 14 animal care staff (based on the formula above). On most days, there were only 3 kennel staff in addition to the trustees. When analyzing staffing needs, HCAS should consider the following:

- Staffing is a huge issue faced in shelters across the country. These positions are physically and emotionally demanding with low compensation. For these reasons, it is critical now more than ever for shelters to remain within their capacity for care.
- Staff callouts in organizations across the country are a frequent occurrence and often leave stretched teams even more short-staffed causing supervisors and those with specialized roles to fill these gaps instead of performing their specific job duties as was witnessed at HCAS during consult visit.
- Staffing needs may fluctuate depending on the level of care needed for animals (more staff would be needed for example in the event of an outbreak where animals require daily medications and specialized care or a large hoarding case of unsocialized animals).

Staffing is insufficient for HCAS per guidelines. Management had requested three (3) new positions for fiscal year 2025. The positions have currently been cut due to Board of County Commissioners direction. Current staffing levels present a challenge to maintain operational standards. HCAS staffing is approximately 25% lower than neighboring counties. HCAS also takes advantage of the Florida Department of Corrections trustee labor and volunteers to bridge some of that gap.

## Hours and Staffing

### Strategic goal

Baseline staffing should be in place to ensure that all alternatives to intake are discussed with owners and Good Samaritans and shelter pets are cared for appropriately for a minimum of 12 hours per day. Staff, trustees and future volunteers need the tools to provide appropriate care. Hours need to be convenient for the public to access including evenings and weekends.

### Positives

- Staff is extremely compassionate, hard-working and dedicated to helping pets
- Leadership recently extended evening hours effective September 4<sup>th</sup> to be open from Noon to 6pm Tuesday-Friday and Saturday 10am-3pm
- Trustee labor is budget neutral

### Action Steps:

- Consider opening Sundays and Mondays for adoptions and other live outcome opportunities. Staff is already scheduled onsite to provide care to the animals and many are or can be cross-trained to handle adoptions so this should not be a heavy lift. Reserve the weekends for live outcome only as there are fewer staff to handle new intakes.

Noted; however substantial staffing increases would be required.

- Create a plan to ensure shelter pets are not left alone for more than 12 hours. Animals are currently left alone without care for more than 15 hours daily and longer on the weekends.

Noted; however substantial staffing increases would be required.

- As discussed in the previous section regarding staffing capacity, analyze staffing and volunteer work hours to ensure that the basic needs of animals are met each day.

In progress, additional staffing has been requested.

- Recruit additional volunteers and/or temporary workers to assist with daily cleaning, dog walking, dog and cat enrichment, adoption ambassadors, greeting visitors and other activities. The volunteer program is actively growing and with the addition of the Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator. Enrichment is being included and implemented to use with the volunteers.
- Analyze the job descriptions and duties of staff members in every department to ensure that the workload is balanced and that staff skills are being utilized in appropriate roles. Pending, we are seeking a new kennel lead with the requisite experience. He/she will lead this effort.
- As time allows and/or during the onboarding process, have staff complete Fear Free training which is offered online, on demand and at no cost (this should be recommended to volunteers as well and is also free to them). In addition to taking the course, ensure that staff and volunteers are incorporating fear free methods to the best of their abilities while completing daily tasks. <https://fearfreeshelters.com/>

This will be implemented as required training within the first few months of employment.

- Due to the nature of the animal welfare industry, many staff are understandably suffering from Compassion Fatigue. Explore options offered by county to see if counselors can be brought to the shelter or made available to staff. Other excellent resources available to help staff are the UF Shelter Medicine Program's Compassion Fatigue course offered by Jessica Dolce <https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/education/continuing-education/compassion-fatigue-strategies/> along with other options available at <https://www.jessicadolce.com/> however these resources require staff to be given appropriate time within their workday to participate.

HCAS budgets annually for staff to attend compassion fatigue training through the University of Florida. Administration arranged additional compassion fatigue training which began September 23, 2024 and is currently underway.

### Management Response

Management agrees with the suggestion to extend hours for improved convenience and potentially increasing adoption opportunities. Effective September 4<sup>th</sup>, visitation hours have been modified to be open from Noon to 6pm Tuesday-Friday and Saturday 10am-3pm.

Cross-training staff, engaging with additional volunteers, and having supervised inmate labor have been beneficial to the operation. As of September 23, 2024, staff has begun the first compassion training session with Charlotte Edwards, Business Coach and Corporate Trainer, with Training Solutions by Charlotte Edwards. It is the intent of the leadership team, to provide staff with necessary training opportunities to ensure the employees receive all available resources to minimize the daily stresses and mental fatigues that are commonly associated with shelter operations.

Management has recommended adding three (3) positions into the Fiscal Year 2025 budget year to try to improve staffing deficiencies noted as based on industry standards per shelter population demands.

# Population Management & Pathway Planning

## Strategic goal

Effective population management and pathway planning should result in the shortest length of stay through lifesaving means.

## Action Steps

- Leadership should assign a Population Management team of a few key staff. This team should do rounds daily and include medical surveillance. Staff may rotate as long as they are trained on the process. *The idea is for the team to do a walk-through daily (cage check) to ensure there is a dynamic plan of action for each pet updated as appropriate that will result in the shortest length of stay.* That means they are taking and/or planning an action step during rounds by visually checking each pet. Key questions to be asked for each pet:
  - Who are you? Are you in the right place?
  - How are you physically?
  - Are you showing any signs of illness?
  - Are you receiving the care that has been prescribed?
  - How are you mentally?
  - Do you need anything scheduled such as a vet check, spay/neuter, a foster plea or something else?
  - How long have you been here? Do we need to do any extra advocacy for you?

This process will ensure that all pets receive the care they need and intervention when appropriate that results in the shortest length of stay. Not all issues will be resolved during rounds, which is meant for high-level planning purposes. Follow-up to ensure those tasks are completed the following day or designated time is required.

Once the habit of daily Population Management rounds is established, the process should not exceed 30-45 minutes.

- The goal of the daily population management rounds team is to ensure there is an active plan of action for each pet. At key intervals, for example, every 2 weeks, if a pet is still in the shelter there should be advanced advocacy for their placement (marketing videos, search for foster care).
- Minimize Length of Stay (LOS) (some recommendations are intentionally repeated throughout report)
  - Fast-track all highly adoptable animals with exceptional personality/appearance regardless of intake date or medical hold status. Pets that are underage or not medically ready for adoption can be placed in a Foster to Adopt home where they would get more attention.



- Fast track pets at intake to their ultimate destination and reduce overall movement of pets within the shelter system
- Encourage the public to foster healthy dogs without behavior issues (not just the medically needy), especially those who have been in the shelter for more than 2 weeks
- Create and promote a field trip program with the general public
- Encourage the public to foster or adopt sick animals
- Reduce adoption fees and offer fun promotions regularly
  - HCAS has offered free adoptions since April 2024; however, it is not advertised on social media or promoted on website and no one is aware until they happen to adopt
  - Increase visibility on social media outlets for adoptable pets
- It is important that the location of pets in shelter software is accurate and confirmed on a daily basis. Once modern software is used, supervisors should print the kennel inventory daily and hand it out to staff assigned to each area. Staff should then confirm the presence of each pet, update locations in software if needed and give the paper back to the supervisor to reconcile any missing pets.
- Have staff review the capacity score chart to better understand C4C: <https://www.californiaforallanimals.com/resources/capacity-score-chart/>
- Have key staff watch webinar Counting All Paws: Mastering Daily Population Rounds by Dr. Erin Katribe: <https://network.bestfriends.org/education/counting-all-paws-mastering-daily-population-rounds>
- Create a decision tree for appropriate euthanasia. While euthanasia is not a common outcome for pets at HCAS, it will always be necessary for unsafe large-breed aggressive dogs and medical cases beyond hope. Some examples to help with the development of these protocols include:
  - At Risk Dog Flow Process by Kristen Hassen <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FZzEBTHKtsLwbEPaVhSXVFbbY4UPPyE-Pu2J-E3BgcM/edit>
  - Dr. Ian Dunbar's dog bite scale <https://apdt.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ian-dunbar-dog-bite-scale.pdf>
- During week of September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dr. Amelia Sikora and Paul Nadeau performed daily population rounds with key staff and printed rounds updates with action items needed for all managers to follow up. Leadership will need to ensure this practice continues moving forward.

In progress and an evolving process to ensure that HCAS has a sustainable decision-making process while still maintaining flexibility as it cannot be a one size fits all approach.

### Management Response

Management acknowledges and agrees with the action recommendations provided above. It is our intent to utilize the newly purchased software, AnimalsFirst, to provide real-time live updates to our current population management. This includes essential data such as individual action plans per each housed animal in our care. In addition to daily rounds, staff will utilize this new system to provide better tracking as the team goes through population inspections.

Dr. Sikora and Paul Nadeau did provide key training and excellent operational practices the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup> that we intend to facilitate and continue following.

# Admissions and Animal Intake Protocols

## Strategic Goal

Provide basic preventive care for each pet at the point of intake and create an action plan that leads to the shortest length of stay.

## Action Steps

- Update medical intake protocols to align with industry standards. Dr. Amelia Sikora has been contracted to work the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup> to assist with these updates as well as a variety of other population rounds and medical care needs.

Updated and implemented based on Dr. Sikora's protocols.

- Train all animal care and medical staff to perform a cursory physical exam when providing preventive care so they can recognize normal from abnormal and flag for a vet check. Veterinarian (when position filled) will then be reserved exclusively for the vet checks, diagnostics and surgery. [Pending, we will have this done by Dr. Centonze](#)
- Once software is in place, record all medical and preventive care provided for each pet in database including weight, vaccines, dewormer, flea prevention in real time. [Will commence with AnimalsFirst.](#)
- Vaccinations and other preventive care must be performed on intake when the animal first arrives at the shelter and before they are placed into a kennel. Per the ASV Guidelines, a timely vaccination program is fundamental to preventing severe disease outbreaks in animal shelters. [Will continue with this policy, the software will assist with important alerts and booster reminders.](#)
- All puppies and kittens should be revaccinated every 2 weeks until they are 5-6 months of age (adult incisors fully erupted). Many pets at time of consult had missing vaccines and other preventive care not properly recorded in the computer. This is most likely due to a lack of computers in the shelter along with staff not being provided adequate time to finish their duties before being called to other tasks. [Will continue with this policy, the software will assist with important alerts and booster reminders.](#)
- Generate daily list from computer software (once modern program is in place) advising staff which pets are due for follow-up boosters and dewormer. [The software will assist with important alerts and booster reminders.](#)
- All dogs and cats must be vaccinated, including pregnant and nursing animals, animals with mild disease, injured animals, and cruelty cases. No animal should be excluded because the risk of exposure to lethal pathogens such as distemper virus, parvovirus, and panleukopenia virus is too high. Animals that are too sick or severely injured to vaccinate should not stay in the shelter, but rather be transferred to a veterinary hospital for appropriate care. [Will continue with this policy, the software will assist with important alerts and booster reminders.](#)

- HCAS is legally responsible for stray pets that enter the shelter, pets surrendered by their owners and those involved in court cases due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Every pet with the exception of neonates, feral cats and dangerous dogs must have a neckband with their ID number that correlates to the software record to prevent any confusion regarding their identity. TabBands are an excellent choice and can be stapled end over end to ensure the neckband stays in placed.

Currently pursuing materials required after consultation with expert shelter consultant.

- Discontinue the practice of accepting visually healthy outdoor cats and instead create a pathway for the public to take cats directly to clinics offering TNR services. The county should fund some public TNR as a proactive measure that will ultimately resolve constituent complaints while productively decreasing shelter intake.

HCAS will establish a process with surrounding partners to be able to assist the citizens in taking the neighborhood cats directly to those partners, thus leaving space open at the shelter.

- Create a formal kitten diversion program to assist finders of kittens instead of shelter intake. Neonatal kittens should not be removed from the environment unless the resident absolutely knows the mother cat has died or the kittens are sick or injured. **Implemented.**
- Include information on the website to educate the public about what to do if they find kittens. (Intentionally repeated) Resources include:
  - Don't Kit-nap Kittens <https://www.azhumane.org/events/dont-kit-nap-kittens/>
  - Found a Kitten Outside? Here's how to determine what to do <http://www.kittenlady.org/FPACa>
  - Identifying Kittens That Need Help <https://ocgainesville.org/kitten-shelter-diversion>

The County is partnering with the Clerk's office to revamp the county website. Animal Services will be one of the first ones that will be enhanced within the project.

- Have key staff download and review the Managed Intake or Admissions Training Playbook: <https://network.bestfriends.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Managed%20Intake-Admissions%20Training%20Playbook%208.17.2022.pdf>
- Have key staff download and review Cat Intake and Pathway Planning document created by HASS <https://resources.humananimalsupportservices.org/hubfs/Cat%20Intake%20and%20Pathway%20Planning.docx.pdf?hsLang=en>
- Review references regarding managed coordinated intake:
  - National Animal Control Association position statements highlighting the importance of managed coordinated intake and the benefits of community cat programs that provide more effective services for constituents: <https://www.nacanet.org/category/position-statements/>
  - Position statement by the National Animal Control Association: <https://www.nacanet.org/naca-guideline-on-appointment-based-pet-intake-into-shelters/>
  - Recommendation by Best Friends Animal Society: <https://network.bestfriends.org/education/manuals-handbooks-playbooks/managed-intake-or-admissions-training-playbook>

- Recently published article by Dr. Kate Hurley; [The Evolving Role of Triage and Appointment-Based Admission to Improve Service, Care and Outcomes in Animal Shelters](https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2022.809340) Front. Vet. Sci., 04 March 2022 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2022.809340>

This is an ever-evolving strategy, all aspects will be reviewed and incorporated along with existing practices. Staff will complete the review of the Managed Intake /Admissions Training Playbook and the Cat Intake/Pathway Planning documents. Upon completion management will have a discussion session to ensure that all staff understands content.

### Management Response

Management acknowledges and agrees with these recommendations. The AnimalsFirst software has been acquired and is set to launch October 01, 2024. This new software will aid in tracking medical intake, vaccinations, and record management for the shelter. Dr. Sikora provided excellent training and protocols for the medical staff to continue following.

# Canine Housing, Sanitation and Enrichment

### Strategic Goal

Any time the shelter is over capacity as it is now, increased efforts should be made to move animals quickly to temporary foster homes, transfer partners or through adoption.

### Positives

- A & B kennels are double-sided with indoor/outdoor access
- Kuranda beds, blankets and toys provided in most dog kennels
- Volunteer dog walking program in place

### Action Steps

- The functional design purpose of the divider door is to provide separation between bed/food/water and a place to eliminate. These doors should be kept open except during sanitation with one dog, litter or bonded pair having access to both sides of the kennel.

Addressed through pathway planning, better software and marketing strategies.

- Discontinue housing dogs (or any species) in the garage. The existing single-sided holding runs in the garage are not an appropriate size and the space is not climate-controlled leading to inhumane conditions which at the time of the consult exceeded 95 degrees with little airflow. During consult visit, staff moved animals out of the garage and has discontinued using this space for housing animals.

HCAS has discontinued use of the garage.

- Check fans throughout kennels to ensure they are turned on and operational (fans in front of A kennel were not turned on or working during visit)

Fans are changed out regularly as they are a wear item. Extra stock is on hand to have quick replacements. Facilities department is researching what would be the best fans to use.



- Consider using flat buckle or martingale collars for all dogs while in shelter (follow up discussion to be presented by consultant during the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup>).

HCAS has since purchased martingale collars and modified the dog intake SOP to include fitting dogs for martingales.

- Provide puzzle feeders or lick mats for single-housed dogs as a means of enrichment (do not use when dogs are doubled up as this may lead to fighting).

Pending review of best product then orders will be placed.

- Provide appropriate toys to all puppies and dogs. Puppies for example need chew toys. Chewing allows puppies to ease teething pain, and it alleviates boredom.

Toy use is supported and will continue within the Enrichment program

Provide Kongs to single-housed dogs (these can be frozen or stuffed). Sign up with Kong shelter donation program if not already enrolled <https://www.kongcompany.com/shelter-registration>

- Toy use is supported and will continue within the Enrichment program
  - Contact Benebone to inquire about their donation program and add Benebone products to Amazon Wish List for public supporters to donate <https://www.benebone.com/contact/>
  - Implement a treat cup program so staff, volunteers and visitors can give a dog a treat when they walk by. This is a great way to interact and provides a positive experience for dogs when people pass by their kennel. Staff reported concerns of hanging treat cups on the kennels, so an alternative would be to hand out small treat pails to visitors so they can interact positively with dogs as they walk through the kennel making it a happy experience for both people and pets. Tin treat pails can be purchased at Dollar Tree inexpensively.



Figure 2: Sample treat cup options

- Ensure safety toolkits are easily accessible throughout shelter to staff and volunteers. Safety tools such as a break stick, Pet Corrector (canned air which makes a hissing sound) and some type of barrier that can be used to separate dogs safely should be on hand (such as a pig sorting panel) to break up dog fights in both kennels and play yards. Staff should also have leashes handy to remove a dog from the area when needed. Action item completed during the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

- Create dog field trip program to allow the general public to take a dog out for an adventure or sleepover. Consultant to share protocols and handouts from City of Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (ACPS) and Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department Animal Services (CMPD) who both have robust programs that have lead to increased adoptions and decreased overall LOS for dogs.

### Management Response

Many great options were presented by the professional consultant. These items will be forthcoming, assigned to Jane Gonzalez, Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator.

# Feline Housing, Sanitation and Enrichment

### Positives

- Several cat cages already portalized
- Many cats are provided with soft bedding, toys and hide spots in kennel

### Action Steps

- Replace kennels in adoption lobby which are too small, are falling apart and are made of a material that cannot be adequately disinfected. Since the consult visit, [7 new cat suites have been ordered providing housing for 14 cats.](#)

#### Stainless Steel Cat Suite

Developed to reduce feline stress, this unit has quiet-closing latches, a polyethylene resting shelf in the main unit as well as a clear door and spacious litter area connected with a pull through pass through.

Looking for the space of a Laminate Condo Suite in durable Stainless Steel? This suite is for you. The Double Unit Stainless Steel Cat Suite provides 18.7 square feet of living space, meeting the new industry standards for feline housing! (9.35 square feet for our Single Unit)

#### Benefits:

Field-tested by felines and their caretakers! We developed this product with leading university thought leaders, reflecting the latest trends in animal housing. Stainless Steel construction provides the best surface for disinfection and an incredibly long service life. We've made this our quietest cage, designed to relieve the stress of the occupant, thus leading to a healthier and safer habitat.

#### Features:

- Patented Hinge Design: US Patent #7,805,808
- Stainless Steel door design features tight spacing near the latch, which discourages paw entrapment.
- Lockable door latch to prevent escapes.
- Quiet Closing Latch eliminates noise and creates a stress-free environment for patients.
- You can remove integrated compartment divider for cleaning.
- Grip allows you to open or close portals from the outside without opening cage doors or disturbing occupants.
- Interior polymer resting shelf and other components are made of chemical resistant Polyethylene (PE).
- **Specs:** 48"W x 30"H x 28¼"D (Single 48"W) or 36"W x 30"H x 28¼"D (Single 36"W)
- **Single Units:** End and top panels are not included, but may be purchased separately.
- **Double Unit:** End and top panels are included with purchase.

<a href="#">902.4830.22</a>	Single Unit, Main space 48"W	200 lbs.
<a href="#">902.3630.20</a>	Single Unit, Main space 36"W	190 lbs.
<a href="#">902.0103.24</a>	Double Unit with Mobile Platform	440 lbs.



- Purchase and install 8 portals in Cat Room B. Due to the odd number of cages in the built-in wall banks, some kennels will consist of 3 24x24” kennels and others will have 2 kennels connected with a portal. Portals are sold by Midmark and can be purchased through your current distributor (Patterson, MWI, Covetrus, Midwest, etc). The template (item #300.2229.00) retails at \$173.00 each but only 1 is needed. The standard portal (item #902.0000.30) retails for \$147.00 each. These portals are different from the current homemade construction in place and can be opened and closed during the sanitation process.

Items have been ordered



Figure 3: Standard cat portal item #902.0000.30

- Purchase additional clamp-on coop cups for food/water in cages to maximize floor space and minimize having water bowls tipped. Placement on the cage door will also allow staff the ability to easily notice when refills are needed and can refill using a watering can without opening the cage door. Some coop cups were installed, but many cages had valuable floor space taken up by multiple dishes. These items can be added to the Amazon Wish List or purchased directly <https://www.amazon.com/Mimorou-Pieces-Removable-Stainless-Hanging/dp/BOBCK7WMZV/>



- Provide hiding spaces and options for cats. For shy cats who are scared or nursing moms who may be stressed, placing a pillowcase over one side of the kennel can help lower stress.
  - Ask volunteers to assist in making a variety of cat accessory projects <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/diy-housing-accessories/projects-for-feline-housing/>

This has been done at a high percentage we will order the remainder needed.

- Provide cats with full size litter boxes that are appropriate for their size. There will be room in the kennel when each cat is able to have a portalized double or triple compartment cage (litter box

on one side, food/water and soft bedding on the other). Ask the public to donate cardboard trays to be used as disposable litter boxes (consultants provided some during onsite visit)

- All cats should be consistently provided with in-cage enrichment such as toys and scratchers.
  - Ask supporters to donate cat toys such as ping pong balls which are both affordable and can be disinfected in between cats
  - Other types of cat toys which cannot be disinfected can also be provided to the cats and simply sent home with them at time of adoption
  - Ask supporters to purchase cat scratchers to provide entertainment for cats in cages
  - Imperial Cat has a donation program where the public can purchase a box of 'scratch n bits' which are leftover cardboard pieces from their larger scratchers and have them shipped directly to the shelter. <https://imperialcat.com/adoptacat.php>
- Purchase break-away collars for easy identification of co-housed cats/kittens (completed during the week of September 3rd)
- Purchase 5 neighborhood cat dens so the staff is not forced to 'handle' fractious cats which is dangerous for all involved. The den should be positioned sideways in the cage rather than facing forward (see photo below). In addition to safety, the main purpose of the den is to provide a space to hide where the cat does not feel exposed. Neighborhood cat dens can also be used to safely transport a cat from a humane trap to a cage or to transport to surgery for TNR. When purchasing, choose the option with the handle that lays flat instead of the hard plastic handle as this 'den' doubles as an elevated perch as well. Dens can be purchased at: [https://www.livetrapp.com/index.php?dispatch=products.view&product\\_id=30203](https://www.livetrapp.com/index.php?dispatch=products.view&product_id=30203)



**Figure 4:** This picture depicts the appropriate set up for a cat in a double-sided kennel with a towel lined den, food and water on one side and the litter box in the other compartment.

## Rabbit Housing, Husbandry and Enrichment

### Opportunities

- Consider discontinuing intake of rabbits and instead divert to other organizations better equipped to house and care for them

All efforts will be made to divert rabbits to other organizations.

- Discontinue housing rabbits in areas that are not climate-controlled. Rabbits are very sensitive to heat and were found in distress housed in the garage during consult visit before being moved into the air-conditioned medical area.

#### Discontinued.

- Contact PetSmart partners to see if any local stores are willing to adopt out rabbits and other pocket pets on behalf of the shelter

#### Pending

- Consider using a bank of stainless steel portalized kennels for rabbit housing so that rabbits have double sided compartments (litter box on one side and food/water/bedding on the other).

#### Will be utilized as needed for rabbits that can't be outsourced.

- Provide litter boxes for rabbits, fill half with non-scented recycled paper pellet litter (such as Yesterday's News or other generic brand) and fill the other half with timothy hay for them to eat. More information can be found at <https://rabbit.org/care/litter-training/#litter>

#### Will be utilized as needed for rabbits that can't be outsourced.

- Ensure rabbits have access to fresh water daily and a balanced diet including fresh veggies

#### Will be implemented as needed for rabbits that can't be outsourced.

- Reach out to local rabbit rescues to recruit volunteers to help with the daily care and exercise needs of the rabbits

#### Will be utilized as needed for rabbits that can't be outsourced.

- Consider partnering with local libraries to host a rabbit for their children's reading program (libraries act as a foster to the rabbit and provide care and enrichment until it is adopted).
- Consider partnering with elementary school teachers to foster rabbits as classroom pet or 4H learning projects

Assigned to the Enrichment/Outreach Coordinator.

### Management Response

HCAS rarely houses rabbits for more than a few days making program planning difficult. The rabbit population upon the audit was very unusually high due to a very large seizure, we outsourced about ½ almost immediately however, we struggled beyond that. This was a rare occurrence.

# Livestock Housing, Sanitation and Enrichment

### Action Steps

- Discontinue housing farm animals in current pens until drainage issues are addressed. HCAS stable is in terrible condition, management has budgeted to have it rebuilt for three years straight. Prior years saw the funds moved from this project to other maintenance priorities. It is in FY 25 budget and will be a Capital Improvement priority for October, the beginning of the new fiscal year.
  - Ensure livestock are receiving a species-specific diet including fruits & vegetables for the pigs.
- Implemented

- Seek partners such as stables, farms or sanctuaries who are better staffed and equipped to house livestock while they are awaiting an outcome (even during court holds) [HCAS partners with Jenks Rescue which takes approximately 90% of our livestock.](#)
- Repair damaged fencing throughout to prevent escapes. [After consult visit, HCAS partnered with facilities staff from the Hernando County Fire Department to repair fencing.](#)
- Move pigs from mud pens into larger paddock [\(completed during consult visit\)](#)
- Modify chicken coop to provide ample perches and places for roosting after dark [FY 2025 project planned to rebuild and improve.](#)

### Management Response

[HCAS agrees with the above recommendations to repair/rebuild livestock stable areas as the current structure have reached its useful life. As mentioned above, this project has been part of the HCAS 5-year Capital Improvement Plan and was originally scheduled for replacement last year. At that time, it was determined that the facility's failing insulation was deemed a priority, and the funds were rededicated to replacing the insulation. FY 25 has the stable replacement budgeted and approved.](#)

## Medical Care, Disease Control and Surgical Programs

### Strategic Goal

Ensure all processes are in place to minimize the spread of common infectious diseases. Besides alternatives to intake, the best way to do that is to vaccinate all pets on intake, sanitize effectively and place pets as quickly as possible. Medical issues must be addressed without delay.

### Positives

- Full-time shelter veterinarian position in place (currently vacant)
- 2 vet assistants on staff eager to learn
- Recently contracted with Dr. Amelia Sikora to review and update medical SOPs

### Action Steps

- Ensure that all intake and medical protocols are written by/reviewed by a veterinarian
- Sign up with Vetcove (a free service) to compare pricing of commonly used medical supplies from your existing vendors and to ensure lowest price being received (vetcove.com) [HCAS has been utilizing Vetcove for several years.](#)
- Follow up with IDEXX and other distributors to ensure shelter pricing is in place. [Shelter pricing is in place; however, we will assign for follow up to ensure no changes occurred.](#)
- Once shelter veterinarian is hired, recommend medical team set up a Zoom meeting with Dr. Cynda Crawford DVM, PhD of the Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program/College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Florida to discuss a variety of shelter medicine topics. [Will be completed when a veterinarian joins our team.](#)



## Management Response

Dr. Sikora reviewed and updated medical and cleaning SOPs during the week of September 3rd and trained staff on updated procedures. Additionally, Dr. Sikora reorganized the medical suite for optimal use and separated housing of dogs and cats, added Feliway, white noise machine and hidey spaces for cats in the medical area to reduce stress. Dr. Sikora further created medical monitoring sheets, reviewed current inventory and created medical supply ordering list based on updated SOPs, created protocol for surgery selection since spay/neuter capacity is limited, and lastly discussed pathway planning and shelter flow while providing other useful information and training.



# Return to Owner (Dogs)

## Strategic goal

Current research has shown that most dogs at large are in their own neighborhoods so goals should include equipping neighbors with avenues to help find the owner along with minimizing barriers to reclaim.

## Positives

- RTO for dogs in 2023 was 34%, which is higher than the national average of 22%
- Pictures of new intakes are posted on Facebook (although not in real-time)

## Action Steps

- Consider recent research showing at large dogs were in their own neighborhoods and revert to emergency only response if there is a true public and animal safety issue. Keeping dogs in their neighborhoods provides the best opportunities for them to make it home. Information on the website should be easily accessible when someone finds a dog explaining all the steps to take including walking the dog around the neighborhood, checking for a microchip and posting on NextDoor. (see the First 48 program at Cabot Arkansas which has been adopted by many municipal shelters across the country since the pandemic: <https://cabotanimalsupportservices.com/program/helping-pets-get-home/>)
- Mirror the RTO program with the St Lucie Police Department in Florida who has a 75-80% RTO rate. Consultants can connect leadership with the St. Lucie field services team to learn more about their program which involves providing low-cost microchips and a lifetime pet license.

- Consider waiving fees for a first-time reclaim when an owner agrees to spay/neuter, rabies vaccinate and microchip and subsidize if the owner is unable.
- Note: The RTO program for cats includes leaving them in their home location or returning them to their home location after spay/neuter and rabies vaccination
- Consider asking field services officers to post yard signs in areas where lost dogs are picked up to increase reunification (as long as this does not conflict with the county’s sign ordinance)



**Figure 5: Sample sign used by the municipal shelter in Nashville, TN**

- Print Guide for Lost & Found Pets poster (which show most dogs are found less than 1 mile from their home) and other info graphics from HASS toolkit and hang prominently in the Admissions lobby and post on the website and Facebook page. The printed poster can be framed for a more professional look. <https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/blog/5-kits-infographics-tools-lost-pets-home/>

Will schedule meeting with Sheriff’s Office staff to discuss these strategies and share the U.F. recommendations.



**Figure 6: Sample infographics available from HASS toolkits**

# Finder Foster, Foster on Deck & Transfer Partner Program

## Strategic goal

Foster care should be the pathway for adoptions. Advertising the foster program widely and encouraging current fosters and volunteers to get others involved will help increase this vital lifesaving pathway and should be the goal for each pet. Good Samaritans can exponentially increase the foster care pool. The newly added adoption/placement staff can oversee this program.

## Action Steps

- HCAS needs to make helping through foster care an easy and simple pathway. As per Maddie's Fund, foster care is the most important avenue to adoptions. The animal welfare industry has transitioned to a more community foster-centric model, growing this program is essential as confining pets in a shelter should be the last resort. HCAS should establish this goal and continue to take steps in this direction.
- All pets should be considered for a foster track as a pathway to their adoption with both the foster family and the shelter advocating for them. Fosters must have a plan of action, receive follow-up preventive care (boosters and dewormer) every 2-3 weeks, and be scheduled for sterilization when appropriate. The current system is not well-tracked and many animals are falling through the cracks.
- Categories of foster care that should not require orientations and excessive barriers include:
  - Good Samaritan/Foster Finder who foster strays in order to prevent a shelter intake
  - Fosters-on-Deck are an important part of the program so pets do not stay in the shelter long and move quickly into foster care.
  - Foster to Adopt if for some reason the pet cannot be sterilized yet or the person wants to do a trial with the pet to make sure they are a good fit
- Allow all pets in the shelter to be available for rescue/transfer on a first come first served basis
- Proactively communicate with partner organizations via text/email about a variety of pets needing transfer and do not limit requests to only pets with issues or those who are on a deadline. Follow up with transfer partners to ensure they are also operating within their capacity.
- Provide link to Kitten Lady's free Orphan Kitten Guide along with kitten supplies <http://www.kittenlady.org/booklet>
- Create kitten kits so Good Samaritans can be provided with supplies and more likely to assist (<https://bestfriends.org/stories/features/kitten-kits-prepare-public-save-lives>)
- The MMPC team is happy to connect HCAS with municipal shelters around the state small teams manage a robust foster program
- Grow the Adoption Ambassador program by ensuring all foster volunteers are educated, encouraged, equipped and provided with an easy process with opportunities to place their fosterlings so they do not re-enter the shelter (except for spay/neuter) and can go straight into an adoptive home.

- As program grows, foster leadership is encouraged to research FosterSpace at [doobert.com](https://doobert.com). This platform allows for a dashboard-type system to streamline communication with all parties and can be linked with modern shelter software <https://doobert.com/fosterspace/>

### Management Response

HCAS has a large foster program; tracking, implementation, have been lacking in large part due to an inadequate records management system. Our new software will enhance our abilities and all the aforementioned foster options will be evaluated and implemented when in the best interest of the animal and shelter.

## Adoptions

### Strategic goal

To increase lifesaving capacity and position the organization to help more pets in the community, HCAS must prioritize proactive strategies to shorten the length of stay for each animal without compromising their health. The longer an animal stays in the shelter, the more likely they will be exposed to an infectious disease or develop a behavioral concern that adversely affects their opportunity to be adopted. The goal is to reduce the length of stay by removing any barriers to rapid release on an adoption pathway to help more animals in need.

### Positives

- Fee-waived adoptions offered since April 2024
- Robust adoption partnership for cats with Pet Supplies Plus

### Opportunities

- Add welcoming signage directing the public to the shelter indicating that pets are available for adoption. Consider using adoption flags or banners (if allowed) to garner attention from the road.

### Completed.

- Offer specials and promotions regularly to generate excitement within the community. Take advantage of fun holidays (<https://nationaltoday.com/>) to promote adopter interest. Follow social media campaigns from other successful shelters for ideas.

### Common program will be continued and enhanced.

- High adoption fees are correlated with higher lengths of stay. Fee waived or as close to free for dogs and cats is considered the best way to increase adoptions and will decrease the length of stay (LOS) in the shelter. Offering BOGO specials for cats and kittens will also encourage the adoption of pairs (which is awesome for most cats). While HCAS is commended for eliminating adoption fees earlier this year, this message has not been promoted within the community and the public is unaware.

Specials are done very frequently, this will be continued and enhanced through better marketing, AnimalsFirst software already obtained.

- There are many barriers to adoption at HCAS which means there is great potential to increase the number of adoptions while decreasing the length of stay. All staff and volunteers should read

*Adopters Welcome* by the Humane Society of the United States which can be found here: [https://humanepro.org/sites/default/files/documents/Adopters\\_Welcome\\_Manual\\_5-15-2020.pdf](https://humanepro.org/sites/default/files/documents/Adopters_Welcome_Manual_5-15-2020.pdf)

- Update the current adoption application removing unnecessary and invasive questions and replace with an Adoption Information form collecting basic contact information. Engage potential adopters in conversation to make the best match while setting them and their new pet up for success.
  - Discontinue requiring all family members to meet the pet
  - Discontinue requiring family pets to meet the new pet at the shelter (this does not lead to a successful introduction or acclimation to other pets at home and often provides a false sense of security). Instead, discuss with adopter easy suggestions for proper introduction and tips to help through the acclimation processes. Include information on the 3-3-3 rule (consultant to provide sample literature)
  - Discontinue requiring proof from landlords and verifying proof of home ownership and replace with a conversation to ensure adopters are set up for success. While leadership stated this was not a current practice, the website and application both state that it is.
  - Discontinue requiring proof of vaccines for family pets and instead have a conversation about the importance of vaccinations as well as providing information regarding affordable services offered in the community such as through PetLuv or other clinic partners.
  - When reviewing current adoption application, question what is the benefit of asking a particular question, what is staff doing with that information, and does it lead to the intended goal of providing a good match between people and pets.

All listed barriers will be reviewed and all forms and practices will be modified to remove barriers.

- Limit the number of cats at Pet Supplies Plus to no more than 6 (per the ASV Guidelines) at one time. Have volunteers replenish cats at store as they are adopted. During visit there were too many cats for the size of the room and not enough litter boxes or feeding stations. Overcrowding can lead to stress and illness outbreaks.

Implemented, reduced number of cats. Shelter Coordinator assigned to monitor and obtain volunteers for transport.

## Volunteer Program

### Strategic goal

A volunteer program engages the community and enhances care of shelter pets at no cost.

### Positives

- Designated full-time coordinator
- Dedicated core group of volunteers with two acting as co-lead trainers to other volunteers
- A creative volunteer is responsible for the engaging content on HCAS's Instagram account
- There are many willing community members with an interest in volunteering at the shelter

- Recently contracted with Paul Nadeau to assist the shelter with volunteer training, implementation of dog and cat enrichment programs and safety measures during the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup>

### Opportunities

- Create a user-friendly, easy and simple onboarding process for volunteers so that people interested in helping can do so with minimal barriers
  - Provide helpful information on the spot that volunteers need to know to start helping today while staying safe such as the basic dos and don'ts, map of the facility, etc.
  - Consider posting a video orientation on the website for volunteers to review once requirements have been achieved instead of attending an in-person training which is only offered twice a month with cat-specific orientations offered on alternating weeks
  - Discontinue requiring dog walkers to go through extensive time-consuming training and instead set up a shadow training program after volunteers have a tour and watch a video about the program
- Volunteer assistance should be developed in the following areas where staff is struggling and are considered high priority:
  - Playgroups for dogs so can be done daily. Some shelters have play groups run exclusively by volunteers or in combination with 1-2 trained staff
  - Dog walkers/Dog Day Out Adoption Ambassadors
  - Kennel enrichment for both dogs and cats at HCAS
  - Adoption helpers
  - Photographers (especially for cats since the dog volunteers are doing a great job capturing pictures)
- Consultant to connect leadership team with Hillsborough and Marion County to learn about their robust volunteer programs
- Encourage volunteers to complete Fear Free training which is offered online and at no cost (they can do this from their home as time allows) <https://fearfreeselters.com/>

### Management Response

During the week of September 3<sup>rd</sup>, consultant Paul Nadeau worked with staff and volunteers to accomplish the following:

- Used Best Friends' Foundations of Volunteer Engagement online course as the basis for training on volunteer issues and emphasized removing barriers to onboarding volunteers, the relationship between volunteers and staff, creating job descriptions for volunteers, and communicating with volunteers.
- Conducted 2 volunteer training sessions; one on dog behavior and enrichment and one on cat behavior and enrichment. The trainings were well attended and volunteers were enthusiastic and appreciative. Volunteer coordinator now has the resources to conduct these trainings on her own moving forward.
- Created a dog enrichment kitchen with chest freezer, fully stocked enrichment supplies and shelving, prep table, and dog enrichment schedule board.
- Created 3 cat enrichment stations for the 3 cat rooms. Each room now has Feliway, a calming sound machine, and is well stocked with cat enrichment supplies.



- Experimented with livestock enrichment, but didn't find anything that the pigs and goats particularly liked. Consultant will continue to research and update staff
- Purchased martingale collars and modified the dog intake SOP to include fitting dogs for martingales. Bought break-away collars for easy identification of co-housed cats/kittens.
- Created 5 safety kits containing; towel, shaker can, bite stick, air horn, and citronella spray. Provided SOP and instructions for safely breaking up a dog fight.
- Trained staff and created and hung diagrams on appropriate dog and cat housing set-up.

EOC will utilize the knowledge learned during her week with Paul to continue enhancements to enrichment and our volunteer program.

Lastly, HCAS is proud to announce the new program that the Board of County Commission has authorized, the “Adopt-A-Kennel” program. This program will allow sponsorships for dog and cat kennels to increase community outreach and adoption opportunities. We have one pilot participant and will launch by 10/1/2024. Below is an example of the sign that will be placed on the kennel.



## Facility Design & Maintenance

### Action Steps

- Consider removing glass partition at the front desk to create a more welcoming atmosphere and to increase communication with visitors without having to raise voices to be heard through the glass

New front lobby partitions are ordered and professionally designed. Glass however will be utilized for employee safety. Rendering is provided below in the management response.

- Remove clutter and debris throughout entire shelter

In progress but public access areas completed.

- Leadership has plans to repurpose a storage room in the lobby to be used by volunteers, consider making this a dual-purpose space where sensitive conversations can be held with shelter visitors to prevent lobby disruptions (which were witnessed on multiple occasions during visit).

Completed, a proper space has been established

- Ensure dryer vents are cleaned daily and routinely vacuum out exhaust hoses to prevent fire hazards.

#### Implemented

- Address drainage issue in livestock area, repair fencing and provide appropriate housing options for poultry if HCAS plans to continue housing livestock. A better option is to partner with stables, farms or sanctuaries that are better staffed and equipped to house livestock while they are awaiting an outcome

Budgeted fiscal year 2025. HCAS with the assistance of Hernando County Fire made some temporary stable improvements while full replacement is budgeted for next fiscal year.



- Identify separate isolation spaces for dogs and for cats. Consider retrofitting garage area to provide climate-controlled isolation spaces.

#### Budgeted fiscal year 2025

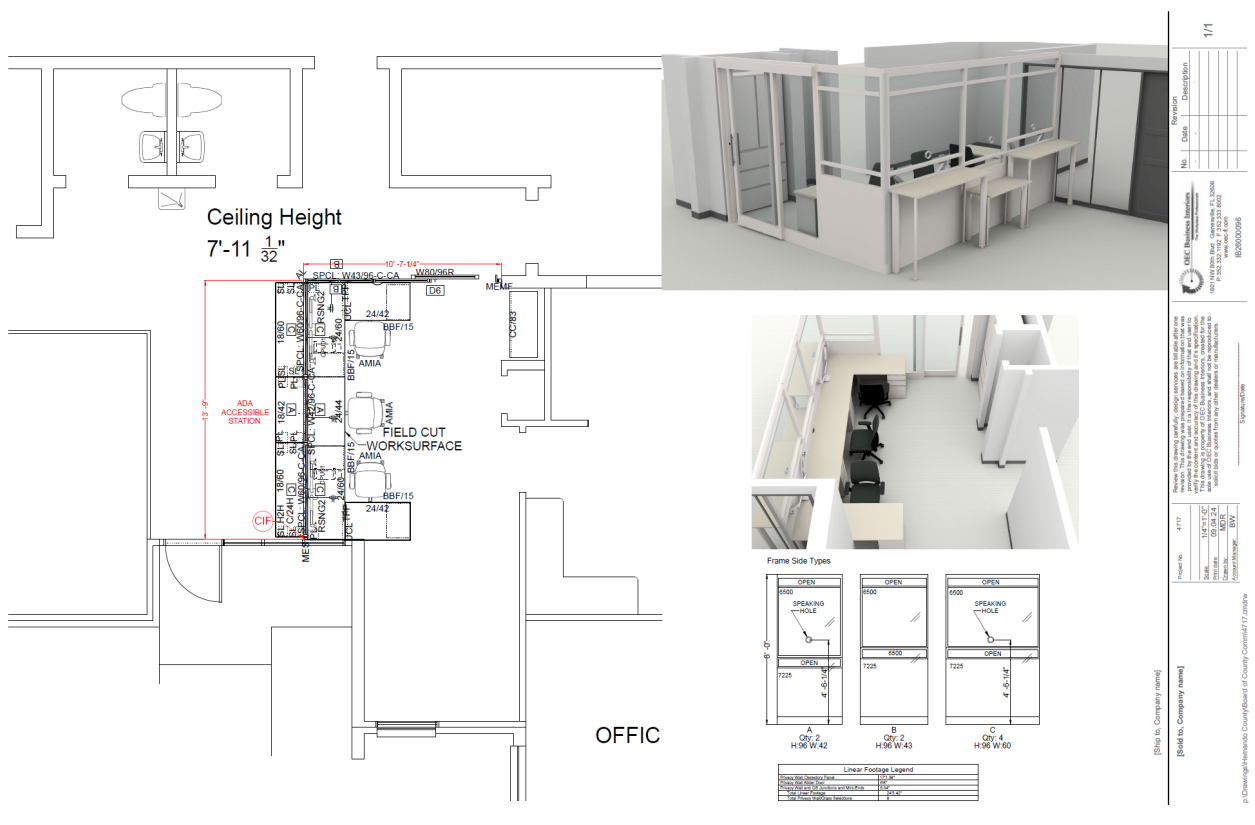
- Separate spaces should be used for canine parvovirus and canine infectious respiratory disease (CIRD). [Isolation ward under design](#)
- Separate spaces should be used for feline panleukopenia and ringworm. [Isolation ward under design](#)

#### Management Response

HCAS has just recently finished an epoxy of over 50 kennels in the facility. We have also ordered new front lobby partitions and cubicle layout. We believe these upgrades will reduce some of the front clutter and provide a better layout for customer/employee relations. New layout rendering is provided below.

In addition, new signage and wayfinding has been added from U.S. 41 thru Oliver Street and up to the facility. These new signs include replacing the entrance signage, adding inspirational signage, and new hours of operation signage.





Example Plan to replace front lobby wall that is stained and torn.

# Moving Forward

The University of Florida Shelter Medicine Program and Maddie’s Million Pet Challenge team appreciate the willingness of HCAS leadership and staff to learn and implement recommendations to help more people and pets. The intent and purpose of this report is to identify key systems and strategies to help staff streamline the operation. At the core of this mission is transitioning from a shelter-centric animal sheltering system to a community-centric system. There are many encouraging opportunities that will allow HCAS to increase the number of people and pets helped within the existing framework.

The MMPC team applauds HCAS for the tremendous progress and dedication to animal welfare and is grateful to the leadership and staff for the commitment to continue to improve and looks forward to working together into the future. **#ThankstoMaddie**

# General Resource List

## National Animal Welfare Organizations

- Association of Shelter Veterinarians ([sheltervet.org](http://sheltervet.org))
- Best Friends ([bestfriends.org](http://bestfriends.org))
- Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity ([careawo.org](http://careawo.org))
- Fear Free Shelters ([fearfreeshelters.com](http://fearfreeshelters.com))
- Human Animal Support Services - HASS ([humaneanimalsupportservices.org](http://humaneanimalsupportservices.org))
- Humane Society of the United States ([hsus.org](http://hsus.org) and [animalsheltering.org](http://animalsheltering.org))
- Jessica Dolce Compassion Fatigue ([jessicadolce.com](http://jessicadolce.com))
- Maddie's Fund ([maddiesfund.org](http://maddiesfund.org))
- Maddie's Million Pet Challenge team ([maddiesmillionpetchallenge.org](http://maddiesmillionpetchallenge.org))
- National Animal Control Association ([naca.net](http://naca.net))

## National Statistics

- Best Friend Dashboards (<https://bestfriends.org/no-kill-2025/animal-shelter-statistics>)
- Shelter Animals Count (<https://www.shelteranimalscount.org/>)
- American Pet Products Association Survey 2021-2022: <https://humanepro.org/page/pets-by-the-numbers> FFA Cessed 3/29/22

## Guidelines

- *Adopter's Welcome*, by the Humane Society of the United States  
<https://humanepro.org/page/adopters-welcome-manual>
- 2020 American Association of Feline Practitioners guidelines (Informational webinar by Dr. Julie Levy, Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program, University of Florida, <https://youtu.be/KdsMiZjwdpo>)
- Human Animal Support Services (HASS) Playbook  
<https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/hass-playbook/>
- Shelter Care Checklists: Putting ASV Guidelines Into Action  
[https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/2022-asv-gl-checklist\\_0.pdf](https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/2022-asv-gl-checklist_0.pdf)
- The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs  
<https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/249/2/javma.249.2.165.xml>
- The Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters  
<https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/asvguidelinessecondedition-2022.pdf>

## Surrender Prevention and Safety Net

- Those surrendering needed temporary help (<https://www.aspca.org/about-us/press-releases/more-1-million-households-forced-give-their-beloved-pet-each-year-aspca>)
- Home to Home (<https://home-home.org/>)
- Rehome by Adopt-A-Pet (<https://rehome.adoptapet.com/>)

- Rehoming Comparison Tool (<https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/wordpress/files/2021/03/Rehoming-Tool-Comparison-1-27-21.pdf>)
- PetPoint.com, Points of Care for tracking Safety Net data (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBvr9XF42FA>)

### Foster Care

- HASS Intake to Placement Tool Kit (<https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/toolkit/intake-to-placement/>)
- Doobert/FosterSpace (<https://www.doobert.com/>)

### Community Cat Programming

- Informational webinar by the Million Cat Challenge team: <https://youtu.be/9FVHcYTXrgI> by Dr.'s Kate Hurley and Julie Levy entitled [Rethinking the Animal Shelter's Role in Free Roaming Cat Management](#)
- Best Friends Animal Society (<https://resources.bestfriends.org/advocacy/community-cats>)
- The National Animal Control Association (<https://www.nacanet.org/animal-control-intake-of-free-roaming-cats/>)
- The Humane Society of the United States (<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/community-cat-program>)
- Humane Animal Support Services (<https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/?s=community+cats>)

### Managed Admission; Appointment Based System

- Best Friends Managed Intake or Admissions Training Playbook (<https://network.bestfriends.org/education/manuals-handbooks-playbooks/managed-intake-or-admissions-training-playbook>)

### Portal instructions

- Puppies [https://shor-line.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Puppy\\_Portal-1.pdf](https://shor-line.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Puppy_Portal-1.pdf)
- Cats <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/?r=cat-portals-order-information-and-instruction-for-installation>

### Canines (How to help large dogs in shelters)

- Big Dog Master Class <https://maddiesmillionpetchallenge.org/big-dog-master-class/#1648138892891-049ac83b-f195>

### Dog Play Groups

- Dogs Playing for Life ([dogsplayingforlife.com](https://dogsplayingforlife.com))
- Shelter Playgroup Alliance for small playgroups ([sheltdogsplay.org](https://sheltdogsplay.org))

## Adoptions

- Adoptapet ([adoptapet.com](http://adoptapet.com))
- Adoptimize ([adoptimize.com](http://adoptimize.com))
- The 2021-022 American Pet Products Association Survey showed that only 40% of dogs and 43% of cats are adopted from an animal shelter or rescue group
- <https://humanepro.org/page/pets-by-the-numbers>
- Why people went to breeders after shelter/rescue  
<https://modernmagazine.com/articles/best-friends-animal-society-survey-exposes-why-people-opt-adopt-or-not/108382>.
- Conversations from the Field: Journey to Open Adoptions by Chrissy Sedgley  
<https://youtu.be/TAYAojqDH4o>
- Is Your Adoption Process Really Working by Sue Cosby  
[https://aspc.zoom.us/recording/play/NAvZ9ClE0sAAhmE-V\\_TcWq1TSn5kAa6n4HgPJMixYyMKBSINpAuxfWSIWPxfnm6?continueMode=true](https://aspc.zoom.us/recording/play/NAvZ9ClE0sAAhmE-V_TcWq1TSn5kAa6n4HgPJMixYyMKBSINpAuxfWSIWPxfnm6?continueMode=true)
- Petfinder.com

## Shelter Donation Programs

- Kuranda dog and cat beds ([Kuranda.com](http://Kuranda.com))
- Kong (<https://www.kongcompany.com/kong-cares-application/>)
- Cat Scratchers (<https://imperialcat.com/giveback.php>)

## Recommended Reading

- [The Best Practice Playbook for Animal Shelters](#)
- [Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff](#)
- [BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Shelter Medicine: Principles of Health and Welfare in a Multi-animal Environment](#)
- [Every Nose Counts: Using Metrics in Animal Shelters](#)
- [Field Manual for Small Animal Medicine](#)
- [High-Quality, High-Volume Spay and Neuter and Other Shelter Surgeries](#)
- [Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters](#)
- Infectious Disease Control <https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/shelter-services/disease-management/>
- [Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff](#)
- Replacing Myth with Math, Peter Marsh  
([http://www.shelteroverpopulation.org/Books/Replacing\\_Myth\\_with\\_Math.pdf](http://www.shelteroverpopulation.org/Books/Replacing_Myth_with_Math.pdf))
- Reference for Large Scale Social Change [Switch by Dan and Chip Heath](#)

## Return to Owner (RTO) Research

- Dallas, Texas: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.669428/full>



### Rescue/Transfers Research

- Pasco County, FL <https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/blog/county-shelter-transfer-partners/>

### Staffing

- Field Services <https://www.nacanet.org/determining-field-staffing-needs/>
- Kennel cleaning and feeding <https://www.nacanet.org/determining-kennel-staffing-needs/>

### Networking and Information

- [ASPCApro Newsletter and Blog](#)
- [Association of Shelter Veterinarians Private Facebook Group](#)
- [Greater Good](#)
- Human Animal Support Services - HASS (<https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/>) sign up for weekly Zoom calls and working groups
- [HSUS Animal Sheltering Blog](#)
- [Maddie's Fund Chew on This Blog](#)
- Maddie's Pet Forum (<https://forum.maddiesfund.org/home>)
- [Shelter Medicine Veterinarians Private Facebook Group](#)
- [UF Shelter Medicine Newsletter](#)

### Education and Certification

- Compassion in Balance Program (<https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/education/continuing-education/compassion-in-balance-cib-program/>)
- Fear Free Shelter Certification (<https://fearfreeshelters.com/>)
- National Animal Control Association (<https://www.nacanet.org/>)
- Maddie's University (<https://university.maddiesfund.org/>)