

Hernando County Animal Services

July 27-28, 2021

Thank you for inviting the University of Florida Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program (UF MSMP) to visit Hernando County Animal Services (HCAS) last week. All the staff were welcoming and very patient in answering our questions. We commend the staff for their clear commitment and concern for the animals in their care, their openness in sharing their daily routines and ideas with us, and their eagerness to learn about new practices and skills.

We have identified many strengths and practices that shelter staff are doing well. The organization has indoor/outdoor runs for the dogs, large outdoor play yards, and a private, outdoor get-acquainted room. Two group-housing rooms showcase available cats in a bright, windowed space near the front entrance, enticing visitors while providing environmental enrichment for these residents. Operation Kindness, a charitable organization whose mission is "to enrich the lives of HCAS animals through community support and education" has painted murals throughout the shelter, brightening the space and creating an uplifting atmosphere. Partnerships with 2 local organizations assist HCAS with spay-neuter and fostering, which has been particularly helpful during the time HCAS been without a shelter veterinarian. HCAS leadership participates in a regional coalition with other local municipal shelters, which has resulted in a successful mega-adoption event as well as offers of assistance with operations and cruelty cases.

HCAS has an additional community partner with Pet Supplies Plus, which has a beautiful cat community room at the front of the building, with a floor to ceiling window overlooking the sidewalk, a large donation bin with appealing, professional graphics, and staff that were quick to inform us of their recent success with HCAS cat adoptions and the upcoming dog adoption event. Additionally, HCAS volunteer applications were tacked to the community bulletin board at the back of the store.

Our visit coincided with a time of transition, with several positions awaiting new personnel to aid the already small, hardworking staff. With the addition of a new veterinarian and a new operations supervisor in the coming weeks, these changes will hopefully be seen as a time of growth and opportunity. The following bulleted report contains prioritized recommendations for key areas of focus for the organization and strategies to improve the for physical and emotional well-being of the pets and people of HCAS.

We are inspired by the dedication of the shelter staff that care for the animals, their eagerness to incorporate practices to increase animal health and placement in homes, and their desire to be a model shelter. We look forward to continuing our collaborative partnership in support of your lifesaving mission.

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MEDICAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Shelter Medicine is a new area of veterinary specialization that combines elements of individual animal care and population level care, infectious disease control, sterilization, and animal welfare, all under the direction of a shelter veterinarian. The shelter veterinarian should have sufficient protected time available for daily observation of every animal in the shelter (Daily Population Rounds/Daily Medical Rounds), animal examinations, surgery, and medical procedures. The veterinarian should have additional protected time for protocol development, staff training, systematic reviews, and professional development. Ideally, your shelter veterinarian (and perhaps even your per diem veterinarian) will become members of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV), if they are not already, and should become familiar with the following:

Association of Shelter Veterinarians *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* (ASV GL)
<https://www.shelternet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>

Shelter Care Checklists: Putting ASV Guidelines Into Action
https://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/aspcasv-checklist-2014_0.pdf

Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs <https://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.249.2.165>

HCAS is fortunate to have an incoming veterinarian who is interested in taking online classes in shelter medicine, as she is coming from a background of emergency medicine and employment with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). We welcome her to join our regularly scheduled bimonthly Florida Shelter Veterinarians Rounds meetings which are held via Zoom on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 4 pm. These are informal meetings which serve to not only educate, but also to foster collegiality. Among topics recently discussed were the adoption of FeLV+ and FIV+ cats, diagnosis and treatment for canine heartworm disease, transfer programs, and other timely topics. Please provide her name and email address to sarahkkirk@ufl.edu so that she might be added to our roster to receive information.

Your clinic space should be reconfigured to provide efficiency and encourage best practices. At the time of our visit, the surgery suite contained only 1 surgery table and a large desk/countertop was against one wall. The large, adjoining room held a variety of freestanding cages that housed kittens and 2 small crates containing dogs. When we were present, one of the dogs was barking frequently, stressing the cats in the room. Paperwork was not present on several of the cages, leaving us to wonder why these animals were housed in this area.

A bottom cage with 3 kittens had a note advising that they were positive for panleukopenia and should therefore be cleaned last. Per the ASV GL:

“Allowing animals with severe infectious disease to remain in the general population is unacceptable. Even animals with mild clinical signs of contagious disease should not be housed in the general population as doing so creates a substantial risk of widespread disease transmission.”

Your Animal Services Manager recognizes the need for isolation rooms/wards at HCAS and was surprised and distressed to learn that the panleukopenia kittens had not been isolated. Without a dedicated cat isolation ward, these kittens could have been moved into one of the locker rooms until such time as it was determined that they were no longer shedding the virus. Even though the other kittens in the medical treatment room had been vaccinated, given that it is not possible to identify exactly when maternal antibodies will wane and the vaccine provides protection, all of these kittens should be considered exposed and quarantined for 10 days following last exposure (this was discussed with leadership during our visit.) Considering the high-risk environment of a shelter vs. a private home, vaccination guidelines for shelter-housed animals differ from privately owned pets and links are included in the Recommendations below.

We were told that all dogs receive doxycycline prophylactically starting on day 7 in the shelter and we noted 13 dogs scheduled for this treatment. According to the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters (ASV GL),

“Bacteria are capable of developing resistance to certain drugs. In some cases, they can pass this resistance to other bacteria, including those that cause infections in both animals and people. To prevent antimicrobial resistance from developing, it is vital to limit antimicrobial use to those situations where these drugs are clearly indicated.... Inappropriate use of antibiotics is not a substitute for good preventive medical care.”

In addition to the concern about the development of antibiotic resistance, this practice also may cause unnecessary gastrointestinal upset, and is a waste of resources in terms of staff time and money.

Unfortunately, we were unable to chat with the lone veterinary assistant to ask if she conducted medical rounds on the days that she was present. Daily medical rounds should be performed by someone on the medical team (and may be done as part of Daily Population Rounds) to ensure that every animal in the shelter is visually assessed every day, so that any medical issues may be caught and addressed early. With only 1 veterinary assistant and 1 veterinarian currently assigned as your medical team, it would be beneficial to identify and train at least 1 other individual who can perform this function, so that these rounds may be conducted daily.

While we were told that medical concerns noted by support staff are emailed to the veterinarian, you might find it helpful to post white boards with attached markers in each housing area. In this way the staff and volunteers can more readily convey concerns (rather than having to find a computer) and see that a particular concern has already been documented and addressed. Columns for the

medical/behavioral concern board could include date, animal ID, cage #, concern, person reporting concern, and person responding to the concern.

Although not seen during our visit, we want to caution against co-mingling litters of kittens/puppies. Such co-mingling is a major contributing factor to the spread of infectious disease. The only exception would be a singleton kitten or puppy, which could be co-housed with another pet of the same species and of similar age/size.

Group housing can be stressful for cats, particularly if one is remixing the population. Adding new cats to an existing group changes the hierarchy, causing stress and reactivation of the latent herpes virus infections, an agent of URI. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians recommend an all in/all out strategy for group rooms. This means that no new cats are added to the room until all of them have moved out.

We recommend that dogs transferred from other shelters be quarantined for 14 days and cats for 10 days, rather than placing in general population, unless the shelter veterinarian has had the opportunity to review all medical records and has full knowledge of the operations of the source shelter. This year has been an especially difficult year with increased cases of canine distemper virus and canine influenza H3N2 diagnosed in Palm Beach County. This quarantine can happen in a foster home. The UF MSMP team would be happy to introduce you to Dari Oglesby at Nate's Honor Rescue, who regularly transfers in animals from high-risk shelters and has a robust foster program to assist with the quarantine.

Cats/kittens are currently tested for FeLV/FIV/HW. FeLV+ cats should be singly housed unless co-housed with another FeLV+ cat. Likewise, FeLV+ cats should be adopted as the sole cat in the household or to those households that only had other FeLV+ cats. Transmission of FIV appears to be uncommon in co-housed cats that do not fight. Retroviruses are readily spread through bodily fluids such as blood and saliva, therefore dental and surgical instruments should not be shared (even among littermates); these instruments as well as endotracheal tubes should be thoroughly disinfected between patients. FeLV and FIV are readily inactivated with routine disinfectants and are not spread via aerosol or indirect contact. Here is a link to the *2020 AAFP (American Association of Feline Practitioners) Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines* that we ask you to share with your veterinarian(s). This document contains a great deal of information and our UF MSMP team is available to address any questions or concerns as you consider moving forward.

2020 AAFP (American Association of Feline Practitioners) Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1098612X19895940>

Recommendations:

- Ensure that all intake and medical protocols are written by/reviewed by a veterinarian.
- Vaccinate all dogs and cats at intake and revaccinate (FVRCP or DA₂PPv) 2 weeks later.

- These core vaccines may be administered by trained lay staff. Only rabies vaccination requires administration by a veterinarian.
- All puppies and kittens should be revaccinated every 2 weeks until they are 5-6 months of age (adult incisors fully erupted).
- 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 for 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.
- Pregnant and nursing animals should be vaccinated to reduce risk for acquiring disease in the shelter. If the mom gets infected while in the shelter, then her offspring will get infected too.
 - The best option for pregnant animals is to vaccinate with a modified live virus (MLV) vaccine and schedule spay surgery as soon as possible to prevent birth.
 - The safest option for nursing animals is to vaccinate and transfer mom and litter to foster care.
- Ensure that animals are receiving the full dose of the vaccine (we saw a half-full vaccine vial during our visit.)
- These recommendations are supported by the following industry guidelines for vaccination of dogs and cats in shelters:
 - 2010 ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters
<http://www.shelternvet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>
 - 2017 AAHA Canine Vaccination Guidelines
https://www.aaha.org/guidelines/canine_vaccination_guidelines.aspx
 - 2015 World Small Animal Veterinary Association Vaccination Guidelines
http://www.wsava.org/WSAVA/media/PDF_old/WSAVA-Vaccination-Guidelines-2015-Full-Version.pdf
- Consider treating all kittens, puppies, and nursing moms with a pyrantel/ponazuril mixture at intake and again 2 weeks later (see document sent with this report).
 - This is efficacious against roundworms, hookworms, and coccidia.
- Treat all adult cats and dogs with pyrantel at intake and again 2 weeks later.
- Perform daily medical rounds (these may be conducted as a part of Daily Population Rounds).
 - These may be enhanced by entering data into an iPad or laptop in real time.
- Improve communication of medical concerns.
 - If white boards are used, be sure that they are conveniently located for shelter staff and volunteers. These boards can be checked each morning during daily medical rounds.
- House dogs and cats separately in all areas of the shelter, including the medical holding area.
 - Cats may be housed in the current medical holding room.
 - Consider using 4-6 indoor/outdoor runs immediately outside the medical area for medical/surgical holding of dogs.

- Consider removing one or two of the three desks in the current intake area to create room for a rollaway bank of cages, to hold small medical/surgical dogs.
- Consider moving intake to another area of the shelter, perhaps the garage, if a room can be created with climate control to confine animals securely and safely during the intake process.
- Quarantine transfers from other shelters; dogs 14 days, cats 10 days.
- Do not co-mingle litters of kittens/puppies.
 - Co-mingling litters enhances the opportunity for spread of infectious diseases such as parvovirus and panleukopenia.
 - An exception would be the addition to a similarly aged/sized singleton to an existing litter.
- Discontinue testing cats for heartworm (purchase the IDEXX combo tests instead of the triple tests).
- Discontinue the use of prophylactic antibiotics.
- Utilize Pet Point for:
 - reporting of animals with health concerns to the veterinarian for examination and treatment
 - creating a daily treatment and recheck list
 - creating a list of animals needing revaccination, repeat deworming, monthly weights, and monthly topical parasiticides
 - maintaining an electronic copy of all protocols, to allow ready access and facilitate updating
 - entering of all medical notes, diagnostics, and treatments in real time
 - having all information readily available to all staff members will improve communication and make it more likely that animals will be discharged from the shelter with appropriate medications and recommendations for follow-up.
 - Several cats pulled by consultant for rescue transfer did not have either deworming or flea prevention noted in medical records although it is protocol that they would have received them. Animal ID 10328136 and 10328032 (FVRCP vaccine only noted). 10328200 (FVRCP and Revolution noted).
- Feed dogs twice daily and offer cats a small amount of canned food daily (with dry food available ad lib.) Puppies and kittens should be fed more frequently.
- Identify separate isolation spaces for dogs and for cats.
 - Separate spaces should be used for canine parvovirus and canine infectious respiratory disease (CIRD).
 - Separate spaces should be used for feline panleukopenia and ringworm.
 - Feline upper respiratory disease (URI) is considered more of a husbandry issue and less an infectious disease concern.
 - Avoid overcrowding of group housing rooms (the ASV GL recommend 18 sq. ft of indoor floor space/cat.)
 - Provide portalized cages for all individually housed cats. 11 portals are needed in rooms CA and CB to provide appropriate housing. If cats are going to continue to be housed in the medical room for more than 1 day that housing should be addressed as well.
 - Prefabricated portals can be purchased through ShorLine at <https://products.shor-line.com/kat-portal/>

- Here is a link to a short video on how to easily install portals
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6i4LLqe3KE>
- Once cages are portalized one side should be used for the litter box and the other side for food, water, and bedding
- Provide a hiding place (feral cat den) and appropriate enrichment.
- Individually housed cats with URI may be isolated in their own cage. Place appropriate signage to clean last and hang a towel over the front of the cage.
- Check our UF MSMP website for infectious disease resources
<https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/shelter-services/disease-management/>
- Include your veterinarian in all euthanasia decisions involving medical/ behavioral health.
 - (S)he should also provide guidance for selection of pre-euthanasia and euthanasia drugs and their proper documentation.



Figure 1: Shows an example from another shelter of stainless-steel cages with portals so cats are provided with double compartment housing. Ideally, the round opening on the cat den would be covered, so that the cat is able to hide from view.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COST SAVINGS ON MEDICAL SUPPLIES:

In a cursory look at current pricing for some pharmaceutical items and supplies, the assessment team identified potential areas of opportunities to save money. In 2020, the shelter handled 2,247 animals (1,105 cats and 1,142 dogs) so even a small cost savings per unit adds up to a significant amount of money.

Recommendations:

- Sign up with Vetcove (a free service) to compare pricing of commonly used medical supplies from your existing vendors (MWI, Zoetis and Patterson) to ensure lowest price being received (vetcove.com).

- HCAS is currently ordering retrovirus tests as well as heartworm tests through IDEXX and are receiving shelter discounts. Consultants do not recommend price shopping for these items as IDEXX tests are considered accurate and reliable.

ANIMAL HANDLING

It should be the goal of every organization to utilize low-stress handling/gentle restraint whenever possible. Restraint with unnecessary force typically creates more stress and fear, resulting in more aggressive behavior and increasing the likelihood of human and/or animal injury. Staff should avoid creating loud noises when talking, closing kennels, or playing music. Here is a link to a recent ASPCApro gentle cat handling technique webinar: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=325246071731586>

Recommendations:

- Create/build out an intake room in the garage area that is climate controlled.
- The intake room should be equipped with a computer for data entry, a walk on dog scale that is big enough to accommodate large dogs, a cat scale, a refrigerator for vaccines, an exam table and all other intake medical supplies (dewormers, flea prevention, syringes, needles, sharps container, etc).
- The intake room should be clean, quiet, and free of distractions such as free roaming cats and dogs, loud music and a variety of people passing through. Calming music is acceptable.
- Provide low stress animal handling training to teach staff how to recognize normal vs stressed behavior in dogs and cats.
- Purchase neighborhood cat dens to use for safely handling fractious cats during cleaning and/or transport. When carrying cats in a feral den or carrier, make sure cat remains horizontal and is not tipped on its end or swung around haphazardly.



Figure 2: An example of a 'neighborhood cat den' with a plexiglass front door that should face the back or side of the cage and a circle opening on the side for the cat to access food/water and litter box while awaiting surgery or release.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

The *Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs* defines high quality-high volume spay-neuter (HQHVSN) services as efficient surgical initiatives that meet or exceed veterinary medical standards of care in providing accessible, targeted sterilization of large numbers of cats and dogs to reduce their overpopulation and subsequent euthanasia. The ASV supports continued development of HQHVSN services to provide the necessary capacity to serve existing cat and dog populations. Application of these veterinary medical guidelines for

spay-neuter programs will enhance the quality of patient care, reduce risks, and improve patient outcomes in all settings where surgical sterilization is performed.

The current layout of the medical area does not lend itself to surgical efficiency. Rather than a dedicated surgery space, the surgical suite also houses the veterinarian's desk and there is only 1 table, upon which patients are prepped and operated. We recommend that the desk be moved outside of the surgery room and a second surgery table be placed therein. An area just outside of the surgery room (in the current holding area) should be utilized to prep patients. Dr. Meaghan Mielo of Citrus County Animal Services and Dr. Christine Glenn of Pasco County Animal Services have both generously offered to mentor your new shelter veterinarian. In this way, she can witness the efficiency of a small surgical space and how having 2 surgical tables allows the surgeon to quickly finish one surgery then immediately start on the next. Efficiency will also be improved with at least one additional support staff. In this way, the support staff can safely anesthetize each patient, allowing the surgeon to continue operating without interruption.

Recommendations:

- Provide a minimum of 2 support staff for each surgeon to increase efficiency.
- Prep animals in the room immediately outside of the surgery suite.
- Recover animals outside of the surgery suite and monitor closely for 3 hours post-op (this is the period of greatest mortality).
- Reimagine your surgical holding areas to minimize stress and maximize efficiency (see Recommendations under Medical Health and Physical Well-being).
- Improve identification on patient enclosures. Once PetPoint is implemented a cage card can be printed on demand as needed.
- Continue to utilize HCAS' spay-neuter partners until the new shelter veterinarian has had a chance to renew her surgical skills.

SANITATION

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians 2010 Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters states that proper cleaning and disinfection not only reduces disease transmission to both animals and people, but it also provides a more comfortable environment for the animals. Additionally, a clean, odor-free shelter creates a more positive image to the public. HCAS is currently using bleach as a disinfectant, which is efficacious against parvovirus, calicivirus, and panleukopenia when used at the correct concentration and contact time. A major disadvantage to the use of bleach is the fact that once it is in contact with organic material it is inactivated; additionally, it has limited penetration of porous surfaces.

Feces should be picked up and disposed of in the trash, rather than hosing them down the drain. High-pressure hosing may lead to aerosolization of fecal material, allowing spread of infectious disease. It was not possible to determine the bleach concentration that was applied to the indoor/outdoor dog areas with the current system. Too great a concentration can irritate mucous membranes and too low a

concentration is not reliably disinfecting against pathogens of concern. **This should be remedied as soon as possible.** Signage in the dish cleaning area and cat areas did recommend the correct concentration of bleach.

Individual and stable group-housed cats should have their enclosures spot-cleaned, rather than deep-cleaned daily (deep cleaning is not only unnecessary but greatly enhances their stress level). Best practices today include spot cleaning of soiled areas while cats stay in their enclosure. For individually housed cats, cages or condos with portals that open and close provide the ideal housing as the cat can stay on one side while the opposite side is cleaned. ASPCApro has great recommendations for sanitation of communal cat rooms that they have broken down into daily, weekly, and monthly sanitation. Here is a link: <https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/sanitation-communal-cat-rooms>.

It was good to see that during sanitation, dogs in double-sided runs were coaxed to one side, the guillotine door lowered, and the opposite side cleaned and disinfected. After the first side was dried, the door was opened, and the process repeated on side 2. Dogs in single-sided enclosures should be removed (ideally walked or placed in an outdoor pen) during sanitation.

Recommendations:

- Pick up all organic material, placing feces and food in the trash.
- Clean the surfaces with a detergent. No disinfectants work well on dirty surfaces. We recommend Dawn dish detergent as a good cleaner and degreaser. This can be applied to runs with a garden hose sprayer attached to the end of the hose and to cages with a spray bottle.
 - Rinse with water to remove the cleaner.
 - Apply the disinfectant to the clean surface.
 - Let the disinfectant sit for 10 minutes (or manufacturer's recommended contact time).
 - Rinse with water.
 - Dry the surface with a squeegee or clean towel.
- Instruct staff to follow this order of cleaning for dogs:
 - Rooms with puppies
 - Rooms with nursing mothers
 - Adoptions
 - Holding areas
 - Sick dogs (isolation)
- Instruct staff to follow this order of cleaning for cats:
 - Rooms with kittens
 - Rooms with nursing mothers
 - Adoptions
 - Holding rooms
 - Sick cats (isolation)

- Change gloves or wash hands between handling animals in different rooms. Be sure that hand soap and paper towels are available at all sinks and that hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) is available throughout the shelter.
- All disinfectants should be used at the proper concentration and contact time as directed by your veterinarian.
 - Rescue®, an accelerated hydrogen peroxide product, has better activity in the face of organic material than does bleach.
- Implement the spot cleaning method for individually housed cats that are remaining in the cage.
 - This is made easier when the cages are portalized, so the cat has one side for the litterbox and the other side for food, water, and bedding.
 - Do not remove bedding, bowls, or toys unless they are soiled. Familiar smells decrease anxiety and stress in cats – stripping all the items from the cage removes these sources of comfort.
 - Unless visibly dirty, there is no need to use a disinfectant in each occupied cage daily if the same animal remains in the enclosure.
 - If a cage cannot be spot cleaned, place each cat or litter of kittens in their own assigned crate or carrier while the cage is cleaned. Cats should not share crates or carriers as this promotes spread of disease. Disinfection of crates or carriers between cats is required. Cleaning is more efficient and takes less time when each cat has its own dedicated carrier.
 - Completely disinfect vacated cages before placing a new cat in the cage.
- Clean litter boxes separately from food/water bowls and toys.
 - Litter boxes can be contaminated with intestinal pathogens such as panleukopenia virus and coccidia. They should never be mixed with bowls and toys for cleaning.
 - Bowls and toys should be cleaned and disinfected first.
 - Discard all plastic dishes and replace with stainless steel. Many plastic bowls with excessive chew marks were seen in use, these cannot be disinfected properly.
 - The sink should be disinfected with bleach after cleaning litter boxes
- Leashes are an often-overlooked source of disease transmission. Each dog should have a dedicated leash which can be disinfected at the end of the day.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

It is crucial for HCAS to control intake and outcome through appropriate population management in order to stay within capacity for care. Every shelter pet must have appropriate space in double sided runs for dogs and double-sided compartment housing or appropriate free roam room for cats.



Figure 3: When there is effective Population Management, this formula remains balanced. Population Management begins once the pet enters the shelter and is intertwined with the length of stay and the number of animals leaving

to the best possible outcome. The number of pets entering the shelter and their length of stay (LOS) to a live outcome must remain balanced with the goal of the shortest length of stay for a shelter operation to work within their capacity to care for those pets.

HCAS can help the most pets with no other alternatives when the intake and outcome is balanced with a short length of stay. Length of stay in a shelter is the biggest risk factor for overcrowding, infectious disease spread as is seen with the current ringworm outbreak, elevated Fear Anxiety and Stress (FAS) in pets and therefore high levels of Compassion Fatigue for people. When capacity for care is exceeded, staff lose the ability to care properly for pets and cannot provide a Fear Free environment.

When a pet enters a shelter, HCAS has the obligation to ensure they have the shortest length of stay to a permanent placement. Intake protocols and decisions can make this process easier or more difficult. For example, large dogs are exponentially harder to adopt as compared to small dogs so typically have a longer length of stay. Even with a robust enrichment program, many large dogs develop behaviors unappealing to adopters which risks increasing their length of stay even further. That is why the search for an alternative to shelter intake with Safety Net or a direct home to home placement is crucial to prevent the shelter intake of a pet that is at high risk of a long length of stay. Every decision within the shelter operation is interdependent.

The action plan to live outcome must begin the moment the pet enters the shelter. This pathway plan ensures the shortest length of stay. For example, a 'fast track' owner surrender pet that is already sterilized and highly adoptable should be made available for adoption the same day with a presence on social media. The Fosters on Deck should be alerted to about a litter of underage kittens the day they arrive and so on.

To ensure this flow of pets through the shelter system, Daily Population Rounds, is required. This plan for effective Population Management can initially sound overwhelming. But once this high-level system is organized, it proves to be the only method to achieve the shortest length of stay, minimize Fear, Anxiety, and Stress (FAS) in pets, decrease the number of pets who must be cared for at one time in the shelter and help HCAS reach its full lifesaving potential.

Daily Population Rounds

Daily Population Rounds are a means of assessing animals in the shelter and ensuring that there is a plan of action for each. Ideally, rounds would be conducted by the Population Management Team consisting of the Shelter Veterinarian and the Operations Supervisor. Population rounds should be conducted 7 days a week with trained staff to stand in when the regular participants are not available. While this initially sounds overwhelming and time consuming, once this system is in place, population rounds should take no more than 20 minutes. The key is to identify high level needs that are addressed later.

To be effective, population rounds requires:

- A system to communicate decisions and follow up on action steps

- Prompt actions on decisions
- Clear lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability

Recommendations:

- During population rounds the staff physically walks through the shelter and asks for each animal:
 - Who are you?
 - How are you?
 - Are you where you should be?
 - Do you need something today?
 - Do you need something scheduled for later, such as spay/neuter?
- Use shelter software to generate reports for pets who need medical care, foster, and/or surgery, and to identify pets in the shelter longer than 14 days who may need enhanced marketing.

CAT AND DOG ENRICHMENT

Proper housing and enrichment reduces stress, limits the spread of infectious disease, and improves the overall welfare of the cats and dogs in shelter care. Mental stimulation is crucial for *all* shelter pets and for cats, which means in-cage enrichment and interactive toys and includes cats in all spaces, not just in the free roam adoption room. Inexpensive ping pong balls can be purchased in bulk and disinfected and are an excellent addition to the wish list. If toys cannot be disinfected, they can leave with the adopter or in the case of a cardboard scratching post on the cage, discarded. Imperial Cat offers a shelter donation program that HCAS can sign up for and scratchers can be shipped directly by supporters around the country (<https://imperialcat.com/giveback.php>). In addition to mental stimulation, part of standard enrichment is the option of soft bedding and hiding spot (a box or paper grocery bag will suffice for friendly cats). Kuranda beds for cats can be purchased to provide an elevated space and a towel draped across the front for privacy. Fractious cats should be provided a 'Neighborhood Cat Den' which can be purchased online directly from Tomahawk or even added to your Amazon Wish List (see page 8).

The benefits of play groups for dogs is now well-established and linked to lower lengths of stay, higher adoption rates and even lower levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. Leadership should research the Dogs Playing for Life (dogsplayingforlife.com) and the Shelter Playgroup Alliance (shelterdogplay.org) training programs. Volunteers can be extremely helpful in implementing this program.

For dogs who do not enjoy playgroups, staff and volunteers can schedule them for regular walks and individual play. This is all possible when the shelter is operating within Capacity for Care.

When the shelter is operating within Capacity for Care and there is 1 dog per run, provide in cage enrichment such as drive-by treats, peanut butter stuffed Kongs, pupsicles, and other toys. A treat cup program should also be implemented. A container can be attached to each run and the staff,

volunteer or visiting public can reward dogs for good behavior and to teach cage reactive dogs to associate people with a treat instead of a stressful event.

Staff or volunteers should create a schedule if one is not already in place to ensure everyone is receiving daily enrichment and to track the types provided.



Figure 4: Shows examples of a treat cup container from 2 other shelters. Depending on the cage design, the container can easily clamp, clip, suction or zip tie to the run door

MANAGEMENT, STAFFING AND HOURS

As noted in the ASV guidelines, clear lines of authority, responsibility, and supervision should be provided in writing to all employees, along with written protocols for the tasks they will be performing. Each staff member must be trained and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to perform each task, with adequate ongoing supervision to ensure proper animal care.

HCAS like many other shelters across the country is experiencing vacancies, turnover, and staff out on medical leave. With such a small staff to begin with, even having one or two positions vacant can make a major impact on the ability to maintain capacity for care for both the animals and the staff. During the time of the consult, 2 kennel positions were vacant leaving only 1 fulltime, 1 part time, 1 contract temp worker and a hybrid position to care for 100 animals in the shelter 7 days per week. Two other customer service staff members were out on medical requiring the Safety Master position to cover in customer service. While some key positions such as the shelter coordinator and veterinarian have been filled, there is a gap in coverage until they start and are trained up to fill the role of those formerly in their positions. While many of these issues are out of anyone's control, county leadership needs to acknowledge the huge strain put on remaining staff to provide adequate care. This is why proactive programs to control the intake of animals is crucial and the shelter needs to focus on productively keeping animals out of the shelter and only taking in those who have no other options.

In the animal welfare sector, staff is often asked to 'also do whatever is asked of them' which is totally acceptable; however, there are instances when a few staff members are handling the bulk of the work while others have significantly less responsibilities. This is evident in the shelter coordinator position who has been responsible for all of HCAS' programs including foster care, rescue transport, returning community cats, offsite adoptions, volunteers, social media, and many other tasks. While it is normal for a shelter coordinator to oversee these programs, the duties themselves are normally tasked to a variety of people.

Recommendations:

- Review job descriptions of each staff member to ensure that the workload is clearly defined, evenly distributed, and focused on core responsibilities.
 - The front desk staff could potentially take on uploading photos and descriptions of adoptable pets to PetPoint and Facebook.
 - One customer service position could potentially be tasked with handling rescue transfers.
 - The vet tech position could be tasked with the foster program to include follow up vaccinations and deworming of fosters until they are ready for surgery. In addition, the vet tech position could create the surgery list of those needing spay/neuter and coordinate with surgery providers.
 - A lead volunteer might be tasked with training new volunteers and heading up a volunteer Facebook page to answer questions, gather photos and videos for social media.
 - One of the volunteer trainers might be able to head up playgroups for dogs or pack walks with volunteers to get dogs out and about.
- Analyze current staffing and volunteer work hours to ensure that the basic needs of animals are met each day.
 - Kennel 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.*
- Provide each employee with a written job description, including responsibilities and reporting structure.
- Evaluate the Safety Master position to determine if it is beneficial to the shelter.
 - In recent years there has been a shift in animal welfare moving away from punitive measures and instead providing education and assistance to help pet owners be compliant, while providing better care for their animals.
 - HCAS should consider reclassifying this position to another customer service role to provide proactive programming and customer service to assist county residents.
- Create and review with staff standard operating procedures (SOPs).
 - Have staff sign off that they understand the procedures and hold them accountable when protocols are not followed
- Train staff and supervise closely until proficiency is demonstrated.

- Update training as needed.
- Although supervision may lessen over time, random observation should continue, to ensure that tasks are being performed correctly.
- Recruit volunteers to help in positions throughout the shelter including adoption assistance, enrichment, cleaning, driving cats to Pet Supplies Plus, photographing animals for social media, writing animal bios, playgroups, etc., until new positions can be created and hired.
- Consider shifting hours of operation to be open later in the evening during the week, so that working people and families have the opportunity to adopt and/or search for their lost pet. This can be done by splitting work shifts.
 - HCAS is not currently in compliance with Ponce's Law passed in 2018 which requires that shelters remain open one weekday night after 5:00pm and one weekend day.
 - Access for owners to retrieve dogs and cats at least 1 weekend day per week and after 5:00 p.m. 1 weekday per week, provided that complying with the requirements of this subparagraph does not require an increase in total operating hours.
 - Section 0823.151
http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0800-0899/0823/Sections/0823.151.html

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND ONGOING STAFF TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- Join Florida Leaders in Lifesaving (FLiL), a program of the Jacksonville Humane Society
https://www.flil.nonprofix.com/?fbclid=IwAR0oO0x9laS3IF3nSPTucVTHdVrasB_3cyICCCQspzRqrdZLmRZo2t1JX-BU
 - Consultant has provided leadership with an invitation to join FLiL as well as information on their upcoming conference in St. Petersburg in September.
 - This is a great opportunity to network with other directors around the state who can potentially assist in a variety of ways.
- Have all staff complete Fear Free training which is offered online and at no cost (this should be recommended to volunteers as well and is also free to them) <https://fearfreeshelthers.com/>
- Increase staff training and education through webinars and online conferences.
 - Sign up for ASPCApro, Maddie's Fund and Million Cat Challenge webcasts which can be viewed online either live or recorded at staff's convenience.
- Sign up as a Best Friends Network Partner and join their closed Facebook group.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BestFriendsNetworkPartners/>
- Have key staff such as those involved with adoptions, foster, rescue, and intake/safety net join the American Pets Alive! Shelter and Rescue Support page.
 - This is a great safe space to ask questions of others in the field about specific programs they are trying, protocols so you don't have to reinvent the wheel and how to continue saving lives while navigating through the pandemic.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AmPASHelterRescueSupport/>
- Follow or join the Human Animal Support Services (HASS) sponsored by Maddie's Fund.
 - The goal of HASS is to keep people and pets together.

- Since the start of the pandemic, they have brought animal welfare organizations, funders, and community members together to engage in partnerships that support the bond of people and animals. They host weekly zoom meetings for shelter leaders and staff which are recorded so you can watch later. <https://www.humananimalsupportservices.org/>
- They also offer a Facebook group which is a great place to keep up with the latest in innovative sheltering tips and a safe space to ask questions from other shelters and organizations, similar to yours. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/hassproject>
- This recommendation applies to the county's enforcement counterpart but is something to keep in mind if enforcement and sheltering are merged in the future.

ENFORCEMENT

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office currently oversees the animal control division for the county and brings all impounded animals to the shelter. HCAS has a good working relationship with the enforcement leadership team; however, consideration should be made to bring enforcement under shelter leadership in order to streamline the department. There are many benefits to having both enforcement and sheltering under the same leadership including having them play a more active role in the intake process of animals they bring to the shelter (photographing animal, entering animal into software program, providing intake preventative care, setting up kennel). Consultant has made an email introduction to HCAS leadership with Joe Hellebrand of the Brevard County Sheriff's Office to discuss their transition from having enforcement run by another department to having it moved under the shelter and how it has improved their overall services.

Overall, there is an industry-wide shift towards community-minded enforcement in municipal shelters. This is because we now know the majority of wellness or neglect complaints stem from lack of access and not malintent. Examining the category of calls of animals brought to the shelter by enforcement will help HCAS leadership formulate the best plan for community outreach such as microchip and rabies clinics. Addressing access to care issues will allow the enforcement team to concentrate on true cruelty and neglect cases.

In the meantime, HCAS should continue discussions with enforcement leadership to make sure they align with the organization's lifesaving goals.

Recommendations:

- Encourage enforcement team to join the National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA) to provide online training for the animal control officers and to keep up with industry standards.
- Recommend enforcement team follow the latest NACA position statements on operating during the pandemic <https://www.nacanet.org/naca-statements-on-covid-19/> especially their position on the intake of free roaming cats.
- Recommend enforcement team review Best Friends Animal Society's recently published *Humane Animal Control* manual that should be used as a vital reference to

supplement this assessment report. <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/humane-animal-control-manual>

- Recommend enforcement team review the following webinar on Proactive Community Animal Control by Todd Stosuy: <https://vimeo.com/84792681>

WEBSITE AND MARKETING

Social media and marketing is critical to every organization to get your message out. 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. The community doesn't know you need help unless you ask them (and asking for help should not be looked upon as negative). During the Pandemic we have seen community members across the country rise to the occasion once shelters started telling them what they needed.

Recommendations:

- Update website to add helpful information on living with community cats, what to do if you find kittens, or what to do if you need to surrender your pet (Safety Net) and other valuable resources.
- Create Facebook posts with photos and videos of the pets you are trying to adopt or foster.
- Celebrate adoptions, reclaims and rescue transfers by posting photos of animals going home (your followers want to celebrate your successes with you).
- Don't be afraid to ask the public to foster or adopt sick animals.
 - Upper respiratory infections in cats in shelters can develop when there is inappropriate housing and long lengths of stay both of which lead to stress and illness. Asking the public if they have a spare bathroom or room on their couch for a cat or dog to hang out while he gets over a cold works wonders (consultant can share examples or connect you with other shelters who are doing the same).
- Ask your staff and volunteers to create short TikTok videos of the animals as they see them being cute and post (this is a growing trend with shelters).
- Shelters have become very creative as they have had to navigate through the pandemic, there are many online animal welfare groups sharing marketing ideas that are working well for them. Consultants are happy to connect you with other shelters who are doing this well.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RECORDKEEPING

Recordkeeping and statistics are vital to every sheltering organization. Analyzing data allows the organization to more accurately create a budget, identify areas of need, create model programs, and justify staffing and resource requests. It is a way to measure your success, determine program efficacy and identify where change is needed. Grant funders look at data to determine the legitimacy of the organization and to maximize the impact of their donor dollars.

The use of technology provides opportunities not possible through any other means of communication and HCAS should capitalize on every avenue. Technology provides the most powerful platform to

manage the daily operation and analyze trends to create appropriate budget allocations and modify programming in line with intended goals.

HCAS is currently utilizing an outdated software system that is not specific to animal sheltering and that is not user friendly. HCAS has an account with Pet Point which is one of the top shelter specific software programs in the industry but has never fully implemented it. Consultants were pleased to learn that the new Shelter Coordinator who is starting August 9th is proficient in PetPoint and will be able to train staff on its use.

Currently photos of animals admitted to the shelter are posted on Facebook; however, there is no system in place for the public to know which animals are available for adoption. A photograph should be taken on intake of every animal and posted online (with the exception of court cases and bite quarantines). This can be easily accomplished through PetTango, a feature of PetPoint.

Recommendations:

- Implement PetPoint software immediately
 - It would be helpful to have an advertised 'Clear the Shelter' event so that fewer animal records would need to be entered into PetPoint
- Set aside time for the new Shelter Coordinator to create reports, enter pet records and train staff.
 - Create reports to streamline daily tasks such as revaccinations, medical treatments needed, sterilizations needed and population management.
- Track offsite adoptions, such as Pet Supplies Plus, as a subcategory of adoptions so that you can easily determine how many pets are being adopted offsite versus in the shelter.
- Post photos of lost and available pets online immediately through PetTango.
 - This is an automatic feature of PetPoint which will dramatically increase adoptions and reclaims.
 - Photos should clearly show the animals face and body so that owners can easily identify their pet if lost.
 - Flattering photos should be updated and reposted within a reasonable amount of time. This is a great volunteer opportunity which HCAS is already working towards.
- All pets should have an estimated age entered at time of intake. PetPoint will then continually update the pet's age in real time.
- Update cage card format to include a photo of the animal, the animal identification number, microchip number, intake date, species, age, sex, physical description (breed, color, size) and source of the animal, at a minimum.
 - This can all be done very easily in PetPoint.
- Increase communication among the staff/volunteers via PetPoint and internal memos.
 - Shelter software should be the main means of communication, providing staff with the "real-time" status of all animals in HCAS's care including animal location, availability, health status, etc.

- Record all medical and surgical procedures in PetPoint in real time including weights, vaccinations, deworming, microchip information etc.
 - Using paper forms requires a duplication of effort and information is not readily accessible to all.
 - Templates can be set up in PetPoint for standard entries such as vaccine and deworming specifics (it is not sufficient to simply have an abbreviation of VSD handwritten on a cage card to note that an animal has been vaccinated or dewormed).
- Allot time for lead staff training in PetPoint and ensure key staff have a log in so they aren't reliant on others to enter information on their behalf (this may not apply to temp staff).

INTAKE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Follow NACA Guidelines during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on essential intake only <https://www.nacenet.org/naca-statements-on-covid-19/>.
 - With limited staffing and limited shelter space, only those animals who truly need to be in the shelter should be admitted (dangerous dogs, bite cases, sick or injured, animals left behind after a death or eviction, etc).
 - Consultants understand that enforcement is handled by a different agency; however, HCAS is encouraged to set up a meeting with their leadership team to discuss the importance of only bringing in those who truly need assistance and to work proactively to prevent homelessness by keeping pets with their families
- Discontinue intake of healthy outdoor cats and instead work with local TNR advocates and spay/neuter clinics to find effective sustainable resolution for these cats.
 - Trap and removal is not effective in solving constituents' complaints, yet TNVR (Trap/Neuter/Vaccinate/Return) is shown to drastically reduce complaint calls and solve the nuisance issues which caused the complaint in the first place. (Managing free-roaming cats in U.S. cities: An object lesson in public policy and citizen action <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07352166.2020.1742577?journalCode=ujua20>)
- While we value and appreciate the current SNR (Shelter/Neuter/Return) program, the shelter is understaffed and does not need to be the middleman for these cats.
 - Encourage the public to take community cats directly to Pet Luv or Snipit Low-Cost Clinic for surgeries and have them pick up and return cat to his outdoor home after surgery.
 - For every person who says yes, that is one less cat that HCAS staff has to house, feed, clean and transport.
- Create HCAS community cat brochure with pertinent information for citizens on what to do if you see outdoor cats.
 - Consultants shared sample brochures from other municipal shelters.
- Until HCAS brochure can be created, download handouts to help citizens with viable solutions for living with outdoor cats.
 - Resources can be found at <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/how-to-live-with-cats-in-your-neighborhood/>)

- Discontinue intake of healthy underage kittens and instead encourage the public to stop kit-napping kittens.
 - Neonatal kittens should not be removed from the environment unless the resident absolutely knows the mother cat has died.
 - Include information on website to educate the public on what to do if they find kittens. Here are some great sources of information:
 - 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/casa>
 - Identifying Kittens That Need Help (<https://ocgainesville.org/kitten-shelter-diversion>)

LIFE-SAVING STRATEGIES

ADOPTIONS

While HCAS is commended for the work they are doing, there is still room for growth in the shelter's life-saving capacity. Consultants understand that there will always be euthanasia consisting of large-breed, aggressive dogs that are unsafe for the community as well as medical cases beyond hope and are not advocating for overcrowding or long lengths of stay in the shelter.

To increase lifesaving capacity, the shelter 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 length of stay by removing any barriers to adoption.

Recommendations:

- Ensure all pets have flattering photos and a description highlighting their positive attributes on the website (think of it as a match making site for pets).
- Post short videos and cute photos on the HCAS' Facebook page to attract adopters. Consultant read many comments from the public on the HCAS Facebook page asking where they could see which animals were available for adoption.
- Streamline adoption application to remove invasive questions and implement a conversational open adoption program (discontinue calling landlords and instead discuss pet deposits and restrictions with potential adopter).
- Use Adopters Welcome guidelines from the Humane Society of the United States to implement true conversational open adoption program.
<https://www.animalsheltering.org/sites/default/files/content/adopters-welcome-guide-update%2003-02-17.pdf>

- Adoption staff should be encouraged to let go of fears and myths that cause them to discourage adopters from going home with a pet and instead have real conversations to help make the right match. This is a great webinar for the adoptions team to watch: <https://youtu.be/TAYAoqjDH4o>
- Implement a fee-waived adoption special for all cats and dogs immediately to get current capacity at a manageable level for staff to care for.
 - Consultants were happy to learn this was being promoted at the time of the assessment; however, there was much public frustration with not knowing which animals were available for adoption.
- Reduce adoption fees to effectively compete with other sources of pet acquisition, especially for dogs who tend to have long LOS in the shelter.
- Create frequent adoption specials and campaigns with reduced or waived fees and advertise their occurrence through multiple media outlets, including social media.
- Discontinue requiring dog meet and greets in the shelter.
 - Provide handouts to every adopter instead, with tips for helping the pet adjust to their new home and describing the care they need.
 - HCAS already has these handouts printed and available, but it is unclear if they are actually sent home with adopters or only made available when asked.
- Ask every person at the time of adoption if they would like to leave a donation to help another animal.
 - If HCAS is unable to receive donations directly, donations can be made to Operation Kindness.
- Send follow up email or phone call 2-3 days post adoption to inquire how the new pet is adjusting and if the adopter has any questions or concerns.
 - This is a great task for volunteers and will not only increase the organization's reputation as being helpful and caring but will reduce adoption returns by heading off potential issues.
- Adopt out all healthy cats regardless of retrovirus outcome.
 - Many municipal shelters are now adopting out both FIV+ and FeLV+ cats and consultants are happy to connect you with them to discuss their great success with these adoptions.

RETURN TO OWNER

Every effort should be made to return lost pets to their owners as quickly as possible. HCAS has a higher-than-average return to owner rate for dogs at 36% (national average is 22%), but a less than 3% return to owner rate for cats (which is in line with the national average for cats). Consultant was not able to calculate the actual return to owner rate for stray dogs versus dogs held in the safekeeping program; however, once PetPoint is implemented these subcategories should be tracked.

Recommendations:

- Ensure animal control officer is scanning pets in the field for microchips with universal scanners and proactively asking citizens in the area if they recognize the animal, in order to return it in the field rather than bringing it in to the shelter.
 - Offer 'Free Ride Home' program for any pets that are able to be reunited in the field before being brought to the shelter, in lieu of citations.

- Ensure all lost/stray pets are posted online immediately upon intake so owner can reclaim.
 - Include the location where pet is being held (this is currently being done through Facebook but should be automatically uploaded to the website through PetPoint once implemented).
- Establish microchip and rabies vaccination clinics utilizing per diem veterinarians or local clinics to increase pet compliance and expediting their return home.
- Recruit volunteers with online Lost and Found Facebook groups to cross-post the animals from your website to their page.
- Recruit volunteers in specific neighborhoods to post animals found in their area to their specific neighborhood on the NextDoor app.
- When a lost pet is reunited with their owner at the shelter, all financial barriers to reunification should be removed.
 - Find a means of helping an owner who is unable to pay for up-to-date rabies vaccination, county license, microchip and spay/neuter. This could potentially be funded through outside grants or in partnership with Operation Kindness.

RESCUE/TRANSFER PROGRAM

Transfer programs with reputable partners are a great live outcome opportunity that allow an animal to be viewed by a new audience. The majority of animals leaving HCAS do so through rescue transfers. Transfers should be considered for all available animals regardless of how long they have been at the shelter.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that quality photos and short videos are posted online for each animal as well as pertinent information that will help a rescue determine if this is an animal they can help.
 - This is a great opportunity for all staff and volunteers who interact with the animals.
- Enhance transfer program with other rescue partners.
 - Make contact and let them know that you are in need and eager to work with them.
 - Update website with new contact for the rescue/transport coordinator so that rescue partners have a way of reaching out.
- Invite rescues and transfer partners to your shelter for an open house or give them a video tour so they feel invested in helping HCAS animals.
- Encourage rescue partners to transfer any and all pets they think they can place quickly on a first come/first serve basis at no charge.

GOOD SAMARITAN & FOSTER CARE AMBASSADORS

A Good Samaritan is defined as someone who has picked up an animal in the field and brought it to a shelter for care. Rather than admitting this animal to the shelter (often these are underage kittens), HCAS should provide the Good Samaritan with the necessary supplies and support, and the animal with appropriate preventive care (in terms of vaccines, parasiticides, and sterilization), with the Good Samaritan fostering the animal until it is adopted. Good Samaritan foster care combined with a

traditional foster care program eases the burden of care on shelter staff and volunteers, not to mention exposure of the most vulnerable population to infectious disease. This program should include avenues to find permanent placements after their fosterlings are sterilized, to avoid shelter intake. Examples include networking opportunities like offsite adoptions (for example at Pet Supplies Plus), via Facebook and adoption events. This successful program is now standard practice in many progressive shelters.

All shelter resources including funding and staff/volunteer time must be used wisely. One way to increase efficiency is to streamline communication with foster care ambassadors by using a closed Facebook group or Maddie's Pet Assistant app. Once set up, foster care ambassadors can be alerted about shelter pets in need in real time, get standard medical advice as well as appointment reminders for vaccines and spay-neuter.

Recommendations:

- Boost existing foster program for all eligible animals entering HCAS by making a plea to the entire community rather than focusing on existing foster volunteers.
- Trust that most people are good and eliminate barriers to acceptance into the foster program.
- Encourage foster volunteers to find permanent placement.
- Waive adoption fees for fosters.
- If unable to find permanent placement, coordinate with adoption event or offsite partner (for cats) to avoid shelter intake.
- Recruit fosters on deck to have families standing by to provide immediate foster care to those who need it.
- Consider placing animals in the Safe Keeping program directly into foster.
 - These pets are used to being in a home and housing them in the shelter is both stressful and exposes them to infectious disease.
- Discontinue requiring fosters to complete a background check.
 - This will remove a huge barrier to recruiting new foster homes and will expedite moving animals out of the shelter and into homes (which is especially critical during the current staffing shortage).
 - While it is acknowledged that volunteers are required by the county to complete a background check, fosters are not actual volunteers who will be working in the shelter. Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services is another municipal shelter who requires background checks for volunteers due to the City's requirement but does not classify fosters as volunteers. Consultants are happy to connect you with the Chief of Animal Services to discuss further.

COMMUNITY CAT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM/SNR

Shelter Neuter Return (SNR) is defined as the sterilization, ear-tip and rabies vaccination of a cat, 'found' outside, friendly or feral, brought to the shelter by a Good Samaritan, of good body weight with a healthy coat that is returned to their home location the day after surgery. This is distinguished from TNVR, which is a program for cats that are not at risk of entering the shelter. The recommendation is

that if an outdoor cat enters the shelter day 1, he will have surgery day 2 and be returned to his outdoor home on day 3.

SNR is considered standard Best Practice today and the enormous amount of associated data is conclusive. In a 2018 Million Cat Challenge survey of 131 shelters that decreased euthanasia *more* than 50% between 2012 and 2017, Managed Intake and SNR ranked as the overwhelming reasons. Also, in a 2014 study, Dr. Julie Levy, part of the University of Florida assessment team, reported that shelters that did not implement SNR had a per capita intake 3.5-fold higher and per capita euthanasia was 17.5-fold higher. From a cost standpoint, decreasing intake can provide opportunities to reallocate resources.

HCAS is commended for having a community cat program in place. In 2020, the majority of stray cats entering the shelter would have been eligible for the SNR program and could have been returned to their outdoor home after sterilization. This would have reduced overcrowding, exposure to infectious disease, the cost of caring for sick cats, euthanasia, taking up adoption homes from cats who truly needed it, and allowed staff to utilize their time in other lifesaving ways.

Leadership is under the impression that all healthy outdoor cats are being returned through this program; however, in 2020 the shelter took in 952 stray cats and only 290 were outcomed as SNR. Many of these might have been kittens; however, with the current software in place consultants were unable to determine how many were kittens versus adults. Once PetPoint software is implemented, HCAS will have the ability to track kittens versus adult cats and can better determine if all eligible cats are being returned. One healthy cat that was transferred to the consultant's rescue (ID 10328136) would have been a great candidate; however, since the finder said that the cat was eating his cats' food and beating them up, he was instead kept at the shelter. This is a cat that should have been sterilized and returned, and the finder should have been educated on outdoor feeding (also neutering solves the fighting issue). When food is left outside unattended it will attract others to eat including wildlife. A better option would be for the finder to either feed his cats inside or only leave the food out for a short time and pick it up to deter others from being attracted to the food. Another healthy stray held at the shelter instead of being returned home is ID 10328200. The intake notes state that the cat is very friendly and had been hanging around the finder's house. Friendly cats should also be fixed and returned to their outdoor home. This cat most likely had one or more families caring for her, but because the finder wasn't aware of who she belonged to, she brought her to the shelter and ultimately took her away from those who cared for her. Keep in mind that nationally less than 5% of cats are reclaimed by their owners from shelters, so the SNR program should be considered a Return to Outdoor Home for all healthy outdoor cats. While we understand the finder's good intentions, friendly cats are friendly for a reason, and we need to share the message to stop stealing people's outdoor pets.

Recommendations:

- If unable to convince Good Samaritan to take cat directly to spay/neuter clinic, make all healthy cats 'found' outside with good body weight and large enough for spay-neuter are eligible for the SNR program – even the friendly ones.
- Return all eligible cats to the area/street where they were picked up the day after surgery.
 - Timely releases are crucial so that cats do not become stressed in the shelter which can lead to illness
- Follow up with Humane Society partner to ensure they are assisting with the return of these cats as agreed.
- Reserve relocation to barn/working cat programs for outdoor cats that do not have a viable return address (i.e., if a fractious community cat was left in a carrier at the shelter's door).
- Create an informational video about the community cat program and post on your website and other social media outlets to educate the public about the SNR program (sample from Pasco County <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFZu0ECsDrE&feature=youtupe>)
- Create informational page on your website to guide citizens on what to do about community cats. Below are some samples from other shelter websites:
 - <http://www.acctphilly.org/programs/community-cats/>
 - <https://elpasoanimalservices.org/resources/community-cats/>
 - <https://www.sfspca.org/resources/community-cares-program>

SUMMARY

While some might see the changes occurring at HCAS as challenges, the UF MSMP assessment team views this transition as an exciting time for the organization. With the support of the Deputy County Administrator, it is hoped that current vacancies will soon be filled, additional staff will be hired (particularly in the medical department), and funds budgeted for the creation of dog and cat isolation space and a new area for intake.

We understand that the soon-to-arrive shelter veterinarian is enthusiastic about her new position, and she will have great support from Drs. Mielo (Citrus County Animal Services) and Glenn (Pasco County Animal Services). Additionally, we were told that funds have been made available for her to undertake additional education in shelter medicine topics.

Staff in all departments demonstrated a clear commitment to the animals and expressed the desire to help even more pets find their next, forever home as quickly as possible. Enhancing the flow of animals through the shelter, along with community outreach programs such as TNVR, the Safekeeping Project, other community outreach programs, along with collaboration with other animal welfare agencies will enhance the HCAS position in the community.

Even the best shelters are stressful places and can be made less-so through appropriate animal handling and housing. We encourage all staff and volunteers to take advantage of the free online course, Fear

Free Shelters <https://fearfreeshelters.com/> to understand how dogs and cats communicate their emotions, how they learn, and how to approach and handle animals to mitigate fear, anxiety, and stress.

The University of Florida Maddie's Shelter Medicine assessment team is available to continue providing guidance and assistance for leadership in every department. We look forward to working together.