

## **Starting a Shelter – issues to consider before you do**

There are many pitfalls in becoming involved in running an animal shelter. The HSUS/HSI urges well-meaning animal protection groups to consider carefully before they do so. Allow us to speak to this issue both in general and specific terms.

First, and in the broadest sense, we believe that it is the government's responsibility to provide animal control services in the community. This would include addressing in a humane manner the overpopulation of dogs and cats. It is the function of government to protect the health and well-being of its citizens. Proper animal control is directly related to this in that uncontrolled animals present health hazards such as rabies and other problems from animal bites. Stray animals transmit various zoonotic diseases. They play havoc with garbage and litter the community with their feces.

A humane animal control program involves much more than providing a shelter for homeless animals. It should include among other things licensing, rabies inoculation, and spay/neuter requirements for all owned dogs and cats, a leash law, pick-up of strays, sheltering, an adoption program, and provision for humane euthanasia of those animals too old, ill, or injured for adoption. This kind of comprehensive program, coupled with public education in pet owner responsibility, addresses the *causes* and not just the *effects* of animal problems.

In the United States, local governments sometimes contract with private humane societies to perform some or all of the animal control functions; BUT, here's the key: they pay for these services (not always as much as they should, but they do pay the society for what it does).

Running an animal shelter is a time- and money-consuming proposition, and without the other elements of a comprehensive control program in place, it is like running on a treadmill. You never get ahead. In other words, you're dealing with the effects of the problem (too many animals) without addressing causes (lack of spay/neuter, irresponsible owners, no leash laws, no legislation or enforcement of existing legislation, etc.).

Once you open an animal shelter, all your time, money, and energy will go into dealing with the animals in that shelter – and you'd better be sure that you can sustain your fund raising at a level which will allow you to provide for the animals humanely (proper medical care, proper housing, exercise, food, disease control, an active adoption program, humane euthanasia when necessary – the list goes on and on). Otherwise, you're not really doing the animals a kindness. It's certainly not a kindness to warehouse animals in a shelter for months and years on end, even with the best of care. Dogs and cats are social animals. They need and deserve loving homes. Not to be dead does not necessarily mean having a life. Nor would it be humane for a society to contribute to the overpopulation problem by allowing animals at the shelter to breed. Shelter animals need to be properly segregated and/or spayed and neutered so that they don't breed; and certainly they **MUST** never leave the shelter for a new home until they are spayed or neutered.

The Humane Society of the United States/Humane Society International (HSUS/HSI) would argue that much more can be accomplished for the animals of the community in the long run if a humane group focuses its energies on such things as humane education, providing low-cost spay/neuter clinics, and working for the establishment and enforcement of animal protection laws and the development of a comprehensive animal control program in the community.

One last point: very few people have proper training in how to run a humane animal shelter. In many countries such training may be hard to find. Until you have a source of trained workers, you should not even consider starting a sheltering program. Having said that, please also take a look at the following web site: [www.animalsheltering.org](http://www.animalsheltering.org) . This is the address for Animal Sheltering Online, the HSUS web site for animal care and control professionals and volunteers. Animal Sheltering Online offers everything from sample forms and guidelines to back issues of *Animal Sheltering* magazine, the premier resource for workers in the animal care and welfare field. Two other important resources are *Animalia*, HSI's electronic list serve, and the *HSI Electronic Library*, an ever-growing collection of articles, papers, humane education flyers, and other information in English, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese designed specifically as an aid to those working for animals worldwide. For further information on both these resources, go to: [www.hsihsus.org](http://www.hsihsus.org) .

In reference to training, we would also like to mention the HSUS' annual Animal Care Expo. This event combines a world-class educational conference with a full-scale international trade show. The goal of this annual event is to help people working in the fields of animal sheltering, care, control, and rescue do the best and most efficient jobs possible. Expo is a complete educational conference, offering dozens of specialized workshops in areas such as management, field services, shelter operations, and community outreach. Numerous daylong courses on topics as diverse as disaster planning/response and caring for exotics in shelters are also offered. There is also a special HSI-developed program for attendees from abroad.

To be placed on the mailing list for information about the next Animal Care Expo, send an e-mail including your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address to Dina McDaniel, Expo Registration Coordinator at [expo@hsus.org](mailto:expo@hsus.org). Or call Dina at 1-800-248-EXPO (in the United States) or 202-452-1100 (outside the United States). Please be advised that HSI has a scholarship program to assist foreign animal protectionists, who would not otherwise be able to attend. Contact HSI directly ([hsi@hsihsus.org](mailto:hsi@hsihsus.org)) if you would like to receive scholarship application information.

Thank you for caring enough to ask questions before taking on such a daunting task. Good luck and best wishes to you, on behalf of the Animals!