



Humane Oho: Spay/Neuter Clinic



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Humane Ohio: Transition to the Humane Alliance Model

A successful MASH-style spay/neuter clinic becomes a stationary high-volume clinic



Humane Ohio began life as a MASH-style spay/neuter clinic serving the greater Toledo area. Through its Operation FELIX program, Humane Ohio provided free spay/neuter services for cats belonging to low-income pet owners.

Concerned that they couldn't achieve the volume of surgeries needed to have a significant impact on animal overpopulation, Humane Ohio willingly underwent a major transformation. They chose to adopt the [Humane Alliance](#) model for high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinics.

They are now a stationary clinic, staffed by employees instead of volunteers, and provide spay/neuter surgeries for both dogs and cats. Humane Ohio serves targeted areas of northwest Ohio.

Stats

- From late January to the end of December 2006, the clinic performed 4214 surgeries on dogs and cats. That's more than double its annual volume as a MASH-style clinic.
- The clinic is on track to reach its goal of 7000 surgeries for 2007, three and a half times its volume as a MASH-style clinic.

How Cool is That?

The numbers quickly tell the story: by adopting a new model, the clinic doubled its volume of surgeries in less than a year, and is on its way to more than tripling the volume in 2007. However, deciding to reinvent an organization, and then carrying out all the work that's involved, takes courage and determination. This is especially true if some of your former supporters object to your plans.

We at ASPCA National Outreach[®] are impressed by:

- Humane Ohio's ability to focus on its mission, despite opposition
- Their willingness to reach out and ask for assistance from experts, despite being experts themselves

Adopt or Adapt

We think Humane Ohio has set an example that is useful to many organizations in transition. Though your organization may have different challenges, Humane Ohio's story shows you some strategies most notably, communication with stakeholders – that can also work in your situation.

Humane Ohio: Transition to the Humane Alliance Model: The Whole Story

Humane Ohio began life as a MASH-style spay/neuter clinic serving the greater Toledo area. Through its Operation FELIX program, Humane Ohio provided free spay/neuter services for cats belonging to low-income pet owners.

ASPCA® National Outreach has profiled both the startup of their MASH program and its success at obtaining public funding. In this profile, we describe the process that led Humane Ohio to become a stationary clinic using the Humane Alliance model.

Humane Alliance of Asheville, NC, runs a highly successful and efficient high-volume spay/neuter clinic. They also formed a team of spay/neuter experts, the National Spay/Neuter Response Team, to help other organizations replicate their clinic model. In this model, clinics provide high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter services for animals belonging to targeted low-income populations. The team from Humane Alliance worked closely with Humane Ohio to implement the new clinic model.



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Who They Are and What They Do

Humane Ohio of Greater Toledo, Toledo, OH
 Aimee St. Arnaud, Executive Director

Humane Ohio's Operation FELIX program was a free spay/neuter clinic for cats held one weekend day each month. The program was largely run by volunteers and depended on donated clinic space:

- Private-practice veterinarians and vet techs donated their services. At the program's peak, Humane Ohio could call on 34 vets from 20 area practices to work on clinic days.
- A pool of 250 volunteers supported the monthly clinics not only through their labor but through monetary and in-kind donations, recruitment of other volunteers, and by spreading the good word about the program.
- Stautzenberger College, which has a veterinary technician program, offered its facilities for the surgeries and also allowed Humane Ohio to store equipment onsite between clinics.

When running at capacity, the monthly clinics performed approximately 2000 free cat surgeries per year. But by 2005, Humane Ohio had realized that the MASH-style clinic was not a sustainable model. In addition to supporting only a limited volume of surgeries, the model was exhausting for key members of the organization. Too much depended on the dedication and stamina of specific people. If those people left the organization, the clinic might not be able to continue.

Humane Ohio began to search for a permanent home and a sustainable model for high-volume spay/neuter. In 2005, they found a building in Toledo, and began a year-long transition to become a Humane Alliance model clinic. (You can read more about the Humane Alliance model in the ASPCA® National Outreach profile of this organization.)

Step by Step

Humane Alliance typically works with startup clinics, not established, successful clinics such as Humane Ohio's Operation FELIX. As a result, Humane Ohio's process of adopting the Humane Alliance model has some steps that are unique to their situation. For example, locating and renovating their

facility was their first step. For an organization that already has clinic space, the sequence of major steps in such a transition would be different.

1. Locate and prepare the clinic facility.

Humane Ohio decided that locating a dedicated space was a top priority. After finding a suitable rental property, Humane Ohio renovated their building at a cost of only \$7000.

Doing the work themselves kept this cost low, but took more time than they had wished, since the work had to be fit in around other responsibilities.

2. Find a successful clinic model to emulate.

Humane Ohio began looking for ways to transform their clinic into an efficient high-volume spay/neuter clinic. Fortunately, at about this time, Humane Alliance of Asheville, NC, formed their National Spay/Neuter Response Team. This team's mission is to enable organizations to achieve high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter at low cost. The team, staffed by spay/neuter experts from Humane Alliance, works closely with each organization to set up a sustainable, efficient, high-quality clinic.

Humane Ohio had several reasons for choosing the Humane Alliance model for their clinic:

- The success of this model in the Asheville, NC, area
- The support and assistance available from the National Spay/Neuter Response Team
- The good fit between the Humane Alliance model and what Humane Ohio wanted to achieve in northwest Ohio

3. Work with the National Spay/Neuter Response Team to implement the Humane Alliance model.

Aimee St. Arnaud cites three aspects of working with Humane Alliance that were invaluable to Humane Ohio:

- Humane Ohio sent staff to Humane Alliance's clinic to be trained in high-volume operations. In addition, members of the National Spay/Neuter Response Team came to Toledo to train staff, and to evaluate Humane Ohio's operation.

The team looked at factors such as:

- Work flow
- Layout of the clinic space
- Forms and other paperwork
- Equipment
- Budget and tracking of costs
- Medical protocols

Their recommendations enabled Humane Ohio to fine-tune their processes and obtain the efficiencies needed to become a high-volume clinic.

- Humane Alliance ordered the necessary equipment from their own suppliers, saving Humane Ohio a substantial amount of money. Humane Alliance has special arrangements with its suppliers to provide discounted equipment for clinics that use its model.
- The National Spay/Neuter Response Team provided considerable technical, practical, and moral support during the transition. Aimee reports that it was great to bring questions to people who really understand high-volume spay/neuter and who understand the challenges for the people doing this work.

4. Communicate with Humane Ohio's stakeholders about the changes.

In addition to becoming a stationary clinic open five days a week, and using a new financial and operational model, the transition required some key changes to what had been signature features of the Operation FELIX clinic.

Humane Ohio needed to communicate with stakeholders about these changes:

- Humane Ohio hired veterinarians, vet techs, and administrative staff as employees. Volunteers have a less central role than previously.
- Humane Ohio charges fees for the surgeries, which were previously free. These fees are still substantially below private-practice rates.
- Instead of traveling door-to-door locally to pick up animals, Humane Ohio picks up animals only at its animal-welfare partners in a wider geographic area (five northwest Ohio counties and one Michigan county).

Aimee St. Arnaud reports that this communication was a difficult step in several respects:

- Humane Ohio needed to assure their volunteer veterinarians that the new clinic would not compete with these vets' private practices. They also wanted the vets to continue to support Humane Ohio and its mission. They held an open house for the veterinarians to see the new facility and learn more about its operations.
- Humane Ohio needed to assure the other volunteers that the organization appreciated the vital role the volunteers had taken in the MASH-style clinics. Because the new clinic is open during the work week, volunteers who had full-time jobs could no longer volunteer at the clinic, and were very disappointed by this.
- Humane Ohio wanted all of the medical and non-medical volunteers from the MASH-style program, as well as donors and other supporters, to continue to support Humane Ohio and its mission.
- Some supporters felt that money raised for Humane Ohio should be spent directly on the animals and not to pay salaries. Convincing these people that the new approach would actually enable Humane Ohio to help even more animals was sometimes very challenging.
- Humane Ohio also met with area animal-welfare groups to show them the new clinic and to offer them opportunity to participate in the transport program that is part of the Humane Alliance model.

5. Begin performing surgeries at the new clinic on a part-time schedule.

When renovations were complete at the new building, Humane Ohio hired a veterinarian and a vet tech on hourly contracts. They performed surgeries once a week, starting with 20 to 25 surgeries per day.

At the same time, the organization continued to work with Humane Alliance to refine the clinic's operation to achieve high volume.

6. Begin full-time operations as a high-volume clinic.

In January 2006, Humane Ohio officially opened its new clinic. By this time, it had hired five employees. Its vet team could perform 30 surgeries a day. In June of 2006, the clinic began offering spay/neuter for dogs and puppies as well as cats and kittens.

7. Begin a transport program with area animal-welfare agencies, municipalities, and other organizations.

In June 2006, Humane Ohio obtained its custom-outfitted cargo van for its transport program. This van's interior is designed to safely transport caged animals to the clinic and back the next day. Humane Alliance provided specifications for the custom interior.

While “walk-ins” to the clinic are presently the bulk of its clients, Humane Ohio now partners with 18 animal-welfare organizations in the transport program. These organizations promote Humane Ohio and the transport program to their clients. Clients can bring their pets to the partner organization for pickup by the Humane Ohio transport van. Clients pay the partner organization.

Humane Ohio has established fee schedules to meet the needs of different clients:

- The general public pays \$45 for cats/kittens and \$55 for dogs/puppies.
- Qualifying low-income pet owners pay \$25 for cats/kittens and \$40 for dogs/puppies. Pet owners who cannot afford these fees are directed to programs that can assist them.
- Feral caretakers pay \$25 for each cat/kitten who arrives in a trap. (Humane Ohio can provide the traps, if needed.) Ear tipping is required and is included in the fee.
- Humane Ohio works out special pricing packages with shelters, rescues, and municipalities who send adoptable animals for surgery. Animals owned by clients of partnering agencies are altered at the “general public” rates. However, these agencies often use grant money or other funds to offer Humane Ohio’s spay/neuter service to their clients at a lower cost.

In addition, Humane Ohio now uses its transport van to pick up animals at two family centers and at trailer parks in their target area.

Results

The Numbers

The payoff for the hard work and challenges of the transition was immediate:

- From late January to the end of December 2006, the clinic performed 4214 surgeries on dogs and cats. That’s more than double its annual volume as a MASH-style clinic.
- The clinic is on track to reach its goal of 7000 surgeries for 2007, three and a half times its volume as a MASH-style clinic. Humane Ohio is now looking at bringing on another part-time vet to increase that figure.
- Humane Ohio received a \$38,000 grant from the city of Toledo for cat surgeries for Toledo residents. Humane Ohio had invited city officials to tour their new facility and learn about the high-volume model, and the officials were impressed by what they saw. The grant was a big vote of confidence from the city.

Critical Factors

- The expertise and support provided by Humane Alliance’s National Spay/Neuter Response Team
- Communication with stakeholders, especially veterinarians, about the impact the new clinic would have on animals in the region
- Commitment to Humane Ohio’s larger vision of ending animal overpopulation in their region

Thinking Outside the Box

It’s hard enough for an organization to reinvent itself when things aren’t working. It can be even harder when the organization is successful, and many don’t see the need to change.

Humane Ohio kept its focus on its mission, and chose a path that enables the organization to help more animals now and to sustain itself in the years to come. The organization is now structured to expand without another reinvention.

Humane Ohio has also continued the many astute marketing, education, and community outreach practices that were so successful in the MASH-style program. You can read more about their ideas in our profile of Humane Ohio’s Operation FELIX.

Their Next Steps

- Bringing on another veterinarian for more surgeries
- Establishing relationships with trailer-park residents to educate the residents about feral cats and implement TNR programs in the parks

Some Words of Wisdom

What Worked

- Seeking assistance from the experts in the National Spay/Neuter Response Team
- A cautious, low-key marketing approach, targeted to low-income areas, to avoid positioning the clinic as a low-cost competitor of private-practice vets
- Expanding existing relationships with other animal-welfare organizations in their region. These organizations promote the clinic's services to their clients, which increases Humane Ohio's service area. In addition, some of these organizations can now afford to spay or neuter animals before adoption because they have access to Humane Ohio's low-cost services.

Be Prepared For

- Objections from people who are highly invested in the current way of doing things. In Humane Ohio's case, the monthly clinics had a strong social component, especially for the vets who enjoyed working with colleagues from other veterinary practices. They liked working together, and they missed this element in the new model.
- Finding new ways to attract and retain volunteers. Humane Ohio stills need and values volunteers. Their website has detailed information about the kinds of help volunteers can provide, inside and outside the clinic. Humane Ohio also tries to schedule special events and fundraising activities on weekends so that volunteers can play a major role.
- The ongoing need to fundraise and seek grants to support your mission. The Humane Alliance financial model, if carefully followed, enables an organization to cover its costs with what it charges for surgeries. However, if the organization wants to discount its services further, other sources of funds are necessary. For example, Humane Ohio uses the \$38,000 grant from the city of Toledo to offset the cost of cat surgeries for very low-income residents of the city. As a result, 1400 Toledo cats, who would otherwise have continued breeding, have instead been spayed or neutered by Humane Ohio.

Tell Us What You Think

With the information we've provided, can you initiate changes to increase capacity in your organization? [Click here](#) to send an email to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback and questions.

Humane Ohio: Thumbnail Sketch

Humane Ohio Greater Toledo
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Humane Ohio Greater Toledo provides community education and sterilization programs for cats and dogs through collaborative efforts with shelters and rescue groups in the Greater Toledo area. Through its transport program for low-cost spay/neuter services, Humane Ohio reaches six counties in northwest Ohio and Michigan.

Staff

Full-time, paid employees:

- 3 veterinary technicians
- 1.5 full-time equivalent veterinarians (filled by 3 part-time vets)
- 1 operations director
- 1 clinic director

The position of executive director is unpaid.

Operating Budget

For 2007, \$360,000

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit