



Richmond SPCA: Pet Friendly Housing



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Richmond SPCA: Pet-Friendly Housing

Keeping a list of rental properties that accept pets



In 2001, the Richmond SPCA was seeking ways to keep animals out of shelters. Recognizing that people frequently gave up their animals because they couldn't find rental housing that would accept their pets, the organization decided to create a guide to pet-friendly housing. The guide, updated regularly, is available on the organization's website.

Stats

The Pet-Friendly Housing Guide web page is consulted approximately 500 times each month. In 2006, the page received 9,197 hits. There are no stats for the number of pet owners who ultimately found housing through the guide as they fortunately had no reason to make direct contact with the organization.

How Cool is That?

This is a terrific example of the way the Richmond SPCA analyzed the factors leading to pet relinquishment and took steps to address them.

Adopt or Adapt

The Pet-Friendly Housing guide costs nothing to produce if volunteers collect the information and the guide is posted on an already existing organizational website. Creating a guide would be an excellent way to begin the process of helping the public take more responsibility for the animals in their lives.

Pet Friendly Housing: The Whole Story

In 2001, the Richmond SPCA began developing a comprehensive program to end euthanasia of healthy homeless cats and dogs in their own shelter and throughout the City of Richmond. Key to their success was finding ways to reduce relinquishment by providing the community with resources designed to keep pets in their homes.

Recognizing that people frequently called to surrender pets because they had to move into rental housing and couldn't find a place that would accept their animals, the Richmond SPCA staff decided to put together a Pet-Friendly Housing Guide. The Guide, updated annually, is easily accessible on the Richmond SPCA [website](#) and organized by areas of the city. Many alternatives are listed. Entries include contact information as well as details about the number and kinds of pets allowed. A typical entry looks like this:

Charter Creek Apartments
9449 Pleasant Point Way
Ashland, Va. 23005
Phone: 550-5100
Maximum # of pets: 2
Maximum weight limit: 35 lbs.
Restricted breeds: Pit Bulls
Fee required.

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How the Program Works

Individuals who contact the Richmond SPCA to surrender a pet because of a move are directed to the site.

The Pet-friendly Housing Guide is part of Project Safety Net, a network of programs, adopted from programs at Monadnock Humane Society (West Swanzey, NH) and Maricopa Animal Care & Control (Phoenix, AZ), designed to keep animals out of shelters.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

- People
According to Richmond SPCA CEO Robin Starr, all you really need is a detail oriented person (staff or volunteer) willing to collect the information and prepare it for print or posting on your organization's website.
- Up front costs and start-up funding
This is a very low-cost program unless the guide is printed. If a regularly maintained organizational website is not available, printing is an option; however Starr strongly recommends posting the information on the website since new housing options come in regularly. Individuals using the Guide can print sections for easy reference.

Timeline

According to Starr, it took about 4 months to collect the information for the first guide.

Step by Step

Here are the steps the Richmond SPCA followed to develop the Pet-friendly Housing guide.

1. They gathered the information

Although this project was very well received by the landlords, obtaining the information for the first time was very time-consuming. Richmond SPCA staff sent a letter to every property management company they could find. They then made follow-up calls to those who didn't respond. In hind-sight, Starr suggests obtaining a local Apartment Guide and gathering as much information as possible before sending out the letters. Now that the Guide is established, landlords call asking to be included.

2. They put in place a system for keeping the information up to date.

Volunteers, working through the Admissions Department, update the information annually. New entries are added throughout the year as they come in. The updated information is sent to the Richmond SPCA Development staff member who manages the website.

Results

Although the Richmond SPCA gets calls from people telling them they were able to find housing because of the Guide, there are no formal stats for this program. Many of those who use the service fortunately never have to contact the Richmond SPCA directly. Starr stops short of claiming that the guide has encouraged more landlords to permit pets, however she has observed that more landlords include the fact that they are pet-friendly in their ads.

Critical Factors

- Making sure the information is accurate and easily accessible.

Thinking Outside the Box

Rather than criticizing pet owners for surrendering animals when they move, development of the Pet-Friendly Housing Guide addresses the very real challenge pet owners can face when circumstances force them to move into rental housing. Most people would probably not have the time to gather this information for themselves and might therefore give up pets they really want to keep. The existence of the guide reinforces the idea that a pet is a lifelong commitment. In addition, the process of gathering pet policies from landlords raises awareness of the need for pet-friendly rental housing.

How They Feel About What They Did

While Starr doesn't rank the Pet-Friendly Housing Guide as a major factor in bringing the organization to No Kill, she feels it is an essential part of a multi-faceted program designed to identify and address the full range of issues forcing communities to euthanize adoptable animals.

Next Steps

While Starr recommends starting with the large apartment complexes, she would like to see the guide expanded to include private owners of rental houses and small apartments.

Richmond SPCA: Thumbnail Sketch

Richmond SPCA
Robin Starr: CEO
2519 Hermitage Road
Richmond, VA 23220
www.richmondspca.org



The Richmond SPCA is a No Kill humane society dedicated to the principle that every life is precious. Since 1999, the organization has worked to make Richmond one of the safest cities in the United States for homeless animals. In addition to adopting a new and progressive operating model that includes aggressive rehabilitation, adoption, spay/neuter, pet retention, and humane education programs, the Richmond SPCA developed a formal cooperative arrangement with the City of Richmond to create an environment in which all animals ending up in shelters would have a much stronger chance for survival. As a result, nearly 5,000 fewer homeless animals lost their lives citywide (Richmond SPCA and Richmond Animal Care & Control combined) in 2006 than in 1999 (a 77% reduction) and the live release rate in Richmond climbed from 46% to 76%.

The Richmond SPCA provides training and consultation as a partner in ASPCA® Mission: Orange™, a national initiative to train and support other cities across the country interested in becoming humane communities.

Stats

From Oct. 1, 2005 to Sept. 30, 2006, the Richmond SPCA:

- Saved the lives of 4,325 animals through adoption, re-homing and behavioral assistance programs.
- Rehabilitated approximately 2,300 sick and injured pets
- Achieved a citywide save rate of 76%, giving Richmond one of the lowest euthanasia rates in the country
- Spayed or neutered 11,017 animals in their on-site clinic
- Delivered 8,512 hours of humane education to area school children and 3,060 hours of adult education

Staff

43 full time. 43 part time

175 active volunteers

Operating Budget

\$3.3million

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit