



Richmond SPCA: Rehoming Services



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Richmond SPCA: Re-homing Services



In 2001, as part of the campaign to end the killing of healthy homeless animals in Richmond, the Richmond SPCA began identifying and addressing the primary factors contributing to shelter intake.

Since owner turn-ins accounted for a high percentage of cats and dogs ending up in the shelter, the organization decided to help pet owners find good new homes for the animals they could no longer keep. The Richmond SPCA's Re-Homing Packet provides owners with everything they need to re-home their own pets.

Stats

In 2006, 916 pets were placed by their owners using the re-homing service. Between 2002 and 2006, the program kept 3,724 animals out of the shelter.

How Cool is That?

We're impressed with the way this program puts the responsibility for re-homing pets where it belongs, with the owners who can no longer keep them. At the same time, we're impressed with the way the Re-Homing Packet guides owners through a very responsible placement process and provides extensive, user-friendly resources to encourage them to do the job right.

Adopt or Adapt

A Re-Homing Services program costs very little to put in place and is an excellent first step in reducing shelter intake.

Richmond SPCA: The Whole Story

Helping pet owners find good new homes for their animals

In 2001, the Richmond SPCA began seeking ways to eliminate euthanasia of healthy homeless animals in their own shelter and throughout the city. To accomplish their goal, it was essential to engage the public, encouraging people to take greater responsibility for the animals in their own lives and providing them with the resources to do so.



Taking inspiration from pet retention programs at the Monadnock Humane Society in New Hampshire and Maricopa County Animal Care & Control in Arizona, the Richmond SPCA developed Project Safety Net, a sweeping program agenda designed to address frequent causes of relinquishment. Re-homing Services are an important Safety Net component.

What's Behind the Program

According to CEO Robin Starr, Richmond SPCA leaders were struck by the fact that people giving up pets for one reason or another seemed to find it appropriate to turn them in to the shelter without investigating other alternatives. The organization wanted to enforce the idea that pet owners are responsible for their animals, including those they can no longer keep. While the Richmond SPCA was ready to serve as a resource to help with re-homing, they wanted to make it clear that a shelter should be viewed only as a last resort.

Now, when an owner calls wanting to bring in a pet, the admissions counselor schedules an appointment to bring the animal in but also asks what efforts have been made to re-home the animal and sends a Re-homing Packet. The packet includes an introductory sheet that advises "It is much better for your pet to find a loving home without him or her ever having to enter an animal shelter".

In an effort to keep the animal in its home, the owner is informed about Richmond SPCA spay/neuter and behavior programs as well as the Pet-Friendly Housing Guide. For those situations when re-homing is the only option, resources are provided to help the owner handle the adoption without going through the shelter. There are instructions for putting together engaging marketing materials and getting the word out. Owners are encouraged to submit a photo and write-up for display on the engaging Richmond SPCA website and on a bulletin board at the shelter. Questionnaires like the ones used by adoption counselors at the shelter are included to help owners identify the pet's needs and seek out homes where those needs will be met. Also included are instructions for screening applicants and following up to make sure the placement is a good one.

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Ingredients and Prep Work

People

The Re-Homing Services are administered by the admissions staff. A member of the development staff manages the website.

Up-front Costs and Start-up Funding

There are no expenses associated with this program except the printing of the forms in the packet. Having a website where pets can be posted increases visibility dramatically (the Richmond SPCA's Re-homing page averages 51,873 hits annually or roughly 4,500 a month). You could start the program, however, with a bulletin board in the shelter.

Timeline

It requires very little time to get these services in place.

Step by Step

Here are the steps the Richmond SPCA used to institute Re-homing Services.

1. They developed the Re-homing Packet.

The Richmond SPCA's materials can easily be adapted to your organization.

2. They trained the admissions staff.

According to Starr, training the admissions staff is key. At the Richmond SPCA, the Re-homing Services program is part of the larger Surrender Counseling Program. Admissions staff are trained to have non-judgmental conversations with individuals who are planning to bring in animals so they can recommend appropriate alternatives to relinquishment.

3. They put in place a system for tracking the animals served through Re-Homing Services.

Richmond SPCA staff keep track of the animals on the appointment list. If an appointment is canceled or the owner just fails to show up, they find out why. This enables them to track the success of their counseling and re-homing services.

Results

According to Starr, 916 companion animals were placed through the Re-homing Services in 2006. Since the program began in 2002, 3,724 animals have been placed without having to enter the shelter. (These figures do not include animals whose owners posted them on the website directly without going through the admissions desk).

In addition, Starr sites the educational impact of the program – re-enforcing the idea that the Richmond SPCA is a resource and a partner, not a dumping ground, shifting the responsibility back to the owner, and making it clear that owners do have options.

Critical Factors

- Qualified staff. According to Starr, admissions counselors have to be comfortable giving control back to the owners and they have to have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in a pleasant and non-judgmental manner.
- Requiring that animals be altered and up-to date on rabies vaccinations before they can be posted on the website or bulletin board. This re-enforces two key messages, the need for spay/neuter and the need to provide pets with basic veterinary care.
- Calling people back to see what happened to their pets and keeping records.

Thinking Outside the Box

According to Starr, animal welfare staff often complain about the way people use shelters as dumping grounds for their pet problems, but they don't do anything to stop it. This program recognizes that, for generations, humane societies have been enablers. It is therefore necessary for us to re-educate the public to take responsibility for the animals in their lives and to give them the tools to do the work we have been doing for them.

How They Feel About What They Did

Starr considers Re-homing Services one of the most important elements in Project Safety Net. “By providing people with ideas and resources, we educate the public that the shelter is no place for their pets and that they can and should re-home the animals themselves”.

Some Words of Wisdom

Be Prepared For

- For most people, learning that they can and should re-home their own animals is an “AHA!” moment. According to Starr, few people are hostile when asked to take on the re-homing responsibility. Most just hadn’t thought about it and have no idea how to go about it. They just always looked to the shelter as “the answer for all things animal-related”.
- Some people really don’t have the time or the energy to re-home their pets. For them, the shelter is the only answer.

Next Steps

Streaming video? According to Starr, the Richmond SPCA is always exploring new technology that might help them get animals placed in good homes.

Richmond SPCA: Thumbnail Sketch

Richmond SPCA
Robin Starr: CEO
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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 pet retention, rehabilitation, adoption, spay/neuter, and humane education programs, the Richmond SPCA developed cooperative arrangements with the City of Richmond and other area sheltering organizations to create an environment in which all animals ending up in shelters would have a much stronger chance for survival. As a result, no healthy homeless cat or dog died in Richmond in 2006.

The Richmond SPCA is currently partnering with the ASPCA on 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. (as of July of 2007, 13,832 pets' lives had been saved since the organization became No Kill in 2002)
- 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

Operating Budget

\$3.3million

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit