

2013

No More Homeless Pets® National Conference
Playbook



No-Kill Community:

What Worked, What Didn't,
What's Next

**Washoe County,
Nevada**



**SAVE
THEM
ALL™**

Table of Contents

Introduction	1-2
Community buy-in.....	2-3
Adoptions	3-4
Partnerships	4-5
Prioritizing programs	5-6
Operational changes	6-7
Animal Help Desk	7-8
Fundraising.....	8-9
2013 Update.....	10



Bonney Brown

Community: Washoe County, Nevada

Key participants in helping the community to become no-kill:

- One major humane society: Nevada Humane Society
- One major municipal shelter: Washoe County Regional Animal Services Shelter

Introduction

Incorporated in 1932, Nevada Humane Society was originally established to aid the local stray animals.

In 2006, a controversial incident surrounding the death of an animal at the shelter caused a public outcry and resulted in the resignation of the former director. It also sparked an interest among board members to look into no-kill sheltering. The board hired Nathan Winograd, director of the No Kill Advocacy Center, to complete an operational assessment and assist in a national search for a new executive director.

Bonney Brown took over as the executive director in early 2007. Bonney jumped right into her new role and all efforts became focused on Nevada Humane Society's new mission to bring people and animals together to create a no-kill community. All efforts were directed toward programs and practices that would have an immediate lifesaving impact. Since resources were limited, programs that did not impact lifesaving efforts were eliminated so all resources could be redirected.

The turnaround was nothing short of amazing. That first year, the number of dogs and cats dying in Washoe County was reduced by 51 percent. And even more remarkable was the countywide save rate of 92 percent for dogs and 78 percent for cats.

The lifesaving statistics continued to rise the following years. The community of Washoe County has sustained a save rate of 94 percent for dogs and cats for four years now.

The lifesaving statistics are all the more amazing given that the area is particularly hard hit by the economic downturn. Reno has an unemployment rate around 13 percent, and Washoe County has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation (one in 186 housing units was foreclosed in August 2011). However, despite hardships, it's an animal-loving community.

Considering shelter admissions for Washoe County are high at 38 dogs and cats per 1,000 people in comparison to the 2009 national average of 14 dogs and cats per 1,000 people, Nevada Humane Society's lifesaving programs are working.

Nevada Humane Society's success is best seen in the continued upward trend in adoptions:

- 4,990 in 2006
- 8,030 in 2007
- 8,635 in 2008
- 9,184 in 2009
- 9,668 in 2010

There were fewer adoptions in 2011 (9,340) and 2012 (8,816), reflecting a decrease in intake (3 percent decrease in 2011 and 8 percent decrease in 2012), which shows that spay/neuter and pet retention programs are working.



Community buy-in

Many people want to help homeless pets; they just need to be asked. Reaching out to the community for support of the no-kill mission worked to get a large number of people interested and involved in Nevada Humane Society's work. It is important to let the public know what is specifically needed at any given time through regular and innovative messaging.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Volunteer program:** Nevada Humane Society's volunteer program has been successful for a number of reasons. There are a variety of opportunities available for volunteers so it's easier to get people involved. Additionally, since people are busy, but generally want to help, letting them know that even a few hours a month can make a difference for the animals has been helpful in recruiting volunteers. However, passions generally run high among animal advocates, so once acquired, the challenge is keeping the volunteers engaged, overcoming any interpersonal issues, and then retaining them. Nevada Humane Society continually addresses issues by meeting with small groups or individuals to address any concerns. Issues require ongoing management to maintain community involvement.
- **Commitment to lifesaving:** Nevada Humane Society's declaration of their commitment to lifesaving has been powerful. Most people want to help animals, but they are busy. An invitation to be a part of something big and lifesaving inspires and energizes the community to provide the support necessary to accomplish the goal. The no-kill goal must be clearly defined and the shelter's statistics made public on a regular basis so people are aware of the number of animals coming in, adopted or killed and able to compare those figures to the prior year.

- **Contacts with media:** While promotional campaigns can be successful, they can also be expensive if paying for advertising space. Nevada Humane Society maintains a media list of print, radio, television and online contacts; establishes relationships with their representatives; and sends out frequent news releases that are genuinely newsworthy. The shelter provides information about events, special-needs animals and organizational updates, and regularly receives news coverage. This gets their message out to the public at no cost to the organization. The shelter's timely responses to media inquiries have been vital to establishing a positive relationship with them.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Not everyone agrees with no-kill:** While the majority of people support Nevada Humane Society's no-kill philosophy and the work necessary to achieve it, there will always be naysayers. Not everyone can be won over and that fact must simply be accepted.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Reaching out to politicians:** Recently, Nevada Humane Society had the mayors of Reno and Sparks, Nevada, create a humorous public service announcement challenging the public to adopt from the shelter. Nevada Humane Society is focusing on engaging local politicians to support the shelter's lifesaving mission.
- **Additional creative appeals:** Nevada Humane Society will continue to look for creative ways to reach people. As always, the shelter is in need of foster homes. Earlier this year, a volunteer donated \$3,000 to pay for a television public service announcement to ask people to consider fostering. The promotion was a success and the shelter gained many new people willing to foster. Due to the sheer volume of animals and the fact that some foster homes adopt their foster pets, the agency is constantly looking for new ways to recruit new foster homes. It is important to constantly get the word out to people with a message that is humorous or touching.



Adoptions

Adoptions are a top priority at Nevada Humane Society and that is evidenced by the number of animals they place — from 4,990 in 2006 to 8,816 in 2012. Each pet finding a home is cause for a celebration that includes the ringing of a bell and applause, which make the adopters feel special and remind staff of the purpose of their work.

However, adoptions are only possible if animals are seen by the public. To make that happen, Nevada Humane Society is open seven days a week and hosts off-site adoption events every weekend.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Reducing adoption fees:** The adoption fee in 2006 was \$100 but was reduced to \$50 when the no-kill mission was implemented. Additionally, Nevada Humane Society has regular promotions that offer even lower adoption fees, including fee-waived or free adoptions.
- **Increasing shelter hours of operation:** The public cannot adopt animals if there is no opportunity. With the new mission, Nevada Humane Society also changed their hours of operation to include evenings, weekends and holidays, times when people aren't at work. They are now open 11 am to 6 pm daily and most holidays.

- **Innovative promotions:** Keeping the animals in front of the public is essential, and fun promotions draw people to the shelter and other off-site areas where adoptable animals are showcased. In early summer 2011, Nevada Humane Society hosted a Doggie Palooza, a big adoption party for dogs at the shelter. Earlier in the year, they also held a Cat Convention at a local casino that was set up to look like a cat show, with 100 adoptable cats and cat-related vendors. These were both first-time promotions for the shelter, as original and different ideas attract both new and repeat adopters. Repetitive promotions generally lose effectiveness, but a fresh take on an old event can be successful. For example, Nevada Humane Society produced a humorous public service announcement for Adopt-a-Shelter Cat Month based on a used car commercial and adopted out over 500 cats in June 2011.
- **Popular themed adoption events:** Piggybacking on pop culture has resonated with the public. Promotions based on current popular TV shows, movies, etc. have been a clever way to interest the general public in adopting from the shelter. The Real House Pets of Washoe County, Big Love: 2 for 1 Kitten Adoptions, and Petzilla, which helped find homes for the shelter's most difficult residents, are examples of recent Nevada Humane Society events that were based on TV programs.
- **Trick-or-treating at the shelter for Halloween:** Nevada Humane Society offers safe trick-or-treating on Halloween. People donate candy that is given out at treat stations located throughout the shelter. The shelter is decked out with Halloween decorations and stays open late, and the dogs, staff and volunteers wear costumes. This has been a huge success for the past six years with many families participating.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Stale promotions:** If a promotion is popular once, there is no guarantee that it will be repeatedly successful. The public and media want original ideas. A particularly clever promotion can sometimes be used a second or third time, but generally no more.
- **Pet Olympics promotion:** The plan was to have various animal contests, such as rat races, doggie water ballet, and kitten curtain climbing, for the Pet Olympics promotion. However, it is a challenge to get animals to do what you want in front of a crowd, and they were not cooperative during this event.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Biggest Little Cat House (and Dogs Too!) adoption promotion:** Reno is known as the Biggest Little City, so the shelter is capitalizing on that with a clever promotion that combines the concept of the Old West saloon with the popular Reno slogan for the month of October. A local costume company donated old-time attire for people to dress up like Miss Kitty and Doc Holliday for photographs. A company loaned Old West and saloon props so that the shelter decor reflected the theme. Adopters were able to choose their own price when adopting an adult cat or dog.



Partnerships

Approximately one year prior to Bonney's arrival at Nevada Humane Society, the area's three municipal animal services departments (Reno, Sparks and Washoe County) merged into one consolidated entity, Washoe County Regional Animal Services. Nevada Humane Society and Washoe County Regional

Animal Services moved into a shared building. The county provides the local animal control and law enforcement duties while Nevada Humane Society offers pet adoption, spay/neuter services and accepts animals from the public and unclaimed county impounds.

Washoe County Regional Animal Services and Nevada Humane Society have formed a progressive partnership with a combined purpose of saving animals' lives. Additionally, both entities work with other local animal welfare organizations. In 2012, NHS and their partner were awarded a Maddie's Community Lifesaving Award.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Adoption guarantee:** Initially, Nevada Humane Society received first pick of the animals who entered Washoe County Regional Animal Services and were unclaimed, while the remainder were offered to other rescue agencies. However, that has switched, so that the local rescues are given first pick. They take in total about 15 percent of animals transferred from Animal Services. Nevada Humane Society takes in the remaining 85 percent of transfers. This change in policy allows the smaller rescue groups to be more effective in their specialization areas.
- **Working with local rescues:** Local animal rescue groups that have been approved are allowed to pull animals from both Nevada Humane Society and Washoe County Regional Animal Services. They are allowed to take any animal, as long as no citizen has placed a hold on a county impound and there is no adoption pending. The only other potential reason an animal would be unavailable to rescue would be if the animal was deemed aggressive. All animals are sterilized, vaccinated and microchipped prior to adoption from Nevada Humane Society and the other shelters in the community.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Shared computer database:** Since Nevada Humane Society and Washoe County Regional Animal Services work so closely, at one point they shared one database. Although it was possible to password protect portions of the database for confidentiality, ultimately the database was separated so privacy could be ensured.
- **Rescue access code change:** Local animal welfare groups supported a code change that would have guaranteed rescue groups the legal right to pull animals from the county shelter. Despite substantial public support, the county commission did not vote to pass the code change.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Promoting greater understanding:** The SPCA of Northern Nevada, Pet Network, and Nevada Humane Society are working to create stronger relationships with local politicians to foster greater understanding about why the rescue access code changes are needed.



Prioritizing programs

When Bonney first arrived at Nevada Humane Society, the shelter's programs were assessed for their lifesaving impact. Programs found wanting were let go and the resources reallocated to programs that helped save animals' lives.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Discontinuing unnecessary programs:** While some programs were nice to have, they did not contribute immediately to providing a safety net for homeless animals. Thus, programs like humane education and wildlife rehabilitation were discontinued. There are volunteers who do some educational work at public schools, but this work is generally associated with raising awareness and funds for the shelter. Any youth groups that tour the shelter are led by a volunteer, minimizing use of shelter resources.
- **Staffing changes:** All staff positions were evaluated and the organization was restructured to reflect the focus on saving animals' lives. Job titles and descriptions were altered to reflect the shelter's mission. For instance, kennel attendants became animal caregivers and office assistants became adoption counselors.
- **Eliminating retail sales area:** A small retail pet supply area was maintained at the shelter that was not breaking even financially. The space was reallocated to showcase rabbits and other small animals for adoption. These animals had previously been in a small room near the back of the facility.

WHAT DIDN'T:

N/A

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Assistance for people surrendering pets due to temporary inability to provide critically needed vet care:** In 2006, Nevada Humane Society had a wellness and holistic vet care program at their clinic. It was discontinued in 2007 to avoid competing with the local veterinary community. Since the serious economic downturn in the community, there is a need to provide support for people who love and are committed to their pets, but due to loss of a job or other temporary hardship do not have the resources to provide veterinary care. While Nevada Humane Society's first duty is to their shelter animals, they would like to seek grant funding to support this need.



Operational changes

Streamlining processes can make a huge difference in saving lives. While many changes were made immediately after Bonney took over to increase Nevada Humane Society's lifesaving capabilities, the shelter continues to evaluate procedures and policies to determine what works and what does not. Changes are routinely made to make the shelter experience better for animals and people.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Increasing hours of operation:** Having the shelter open evenings, weekends and holidays, when the public is available, has resulted in increased adoptions. Shifting the schedule to keep the shelter open later in the day was accomplished with little additional cost. The shelter is now open 11 am to 6 pm daily and most holidays. They also have established hours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at their PetSmart and other off-site adoption locations.
- **Streamlining adoption process:** Nevada Humane Society simplified their adoption documents and forms. Necessary information is still obtained to make a qualified determination on adopter suitability. However, the process application and interview process are now more user-friendly and aim to avoid alienating potential adopters.

- **Quickly preparing animals to be adopted:** In order to maximize the lifesaving capacity of available space, Nevada Humane Society works to prepare animals for adoption as quickly as possible. Animals who are transferred from Animal Services are brought over at 7:00 a.m. and processed quickly to the clinic, where most are spayed or neutered and microchipped the same day. The shelter vaccinates incoming cats and dogs from the public within minutes of their arrival (Animal Services vaccinates animals upon arrival also) to reduce the chance of the spread of disease. Many cats are ready for adoption by 4:00 p.m. the same day they arrive from Animal Services, while most dogs are available the next morning. All kennel spaces are used.
- **Canine evaluation:** In 2009, Nevada Humane Society implemented the behavior evaluation method developed by Kelley Bollen of Cornell University's Maddie's Fund Shelter Medicine Program. Research has shown this model to be predictive of canine behavior, and the model helps ensure dogs are going to suitable homes. The shelter has also refined their dog-walking system by applying color codes associated with the ease of walking individual dogs. Dogs who are stronger or harder to control are walked by volunteers who have advanced training.
- **Progressive staff:** In Nevada Humane Society's transition to no-kill, it was important to have a staff that was supportive of the new focus on saving lives. Staff who were not able to make the transition either quit or were let go. While this was difficult, it was a necessary step to ensure the success of the organization's mission. Additionally, it was important that employees genuinely like people as well as animals, so the staff can be most effective in providing a positive experience to potential adopters and helping them find the right pets.

WHAT DIDN'T:

N/A

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Process refinements:** Nevada Humane Society continues to refine their processes over time. Plus, they always try to keep up with the latest animal health issues and best practices. They continuously implement small refinements to improve operations so that the organization maximizes its effectiveness and efficiency. Brief staff meetings are scheduled three times a week so that everyone is aware of any changes. These meetings only take 10 or 15 minutes, but they help keep everyone on the same page.



Animal Help Desk

Nevada Humane Society is contractually obligated to accept animal surrenders from all Washoe County residents. However, one way to save more lives is to reduce the number of animals being relinquished. To address this issue, the shelter implemented an Animal Help Desk in 2007.

The need was so great that the Animal Help Desk received 300 inquiries in the first week of operation. The volume of requests for help has continued to exceed 20,000 requests each year. In addition to working to help keep pets in their homes, the staff also follows up on pet adoptions that are at risk of failure, usually due to behavior challenges. Of these problem cases, the staff has had a 75 percent success rate in turning the situation around.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Encouraging relinquishment appointments:** Recently the shelter began encouraging people who wish to surrender a pet to make an appointment. The appointments are not only easier on the people and pets, as there is no waiting, but they also have the effect of encouraging people to seek other alternatives, using the help desk to resolve problems, or re-homing the pet themselves. Nearly 25 percent of the people who schedule appointments find other alternatives prior to the meeting date.
- **Providing recommendations/assistance:** Management feels that since most people are not animal welfare experts, they are not aware of available resources to overcome animal behavioral issues or solve other problems. By simply providing information about training, veterinary care or behavior modification, the Animal Help Desk has been able to help people solve many difficulties. In some cases, needed assistance can be provided, such as free pet food or spay/neuter services. If no solutions can help people keep their pet, recommendations are provided on how people can re-home an animal themselves, thus avoiding the surrender of the pet to the shelter. In many cases, they find that people just need moral support and a little advice to do the right thing.
- **Volunteer feral cat trappers:** Nevada Humane Society employs a part-time cat trapper to assist people who wish to do trap/neuter/return (TNR) but are physically unable. The cat trapper was in such demand that more help was needed. A volunteer team of trappers are now used to assist people and businesses that want to do the right thing by implementing a TNR program. One of the employees developed a TNR reward system to recognize these volunteers. They receive a TNR trapping brigade t-shirt, and for every 25 cats they capture, they receive a star, giving them the look of a sergeant or general in the military. It's a fun program, and it has been well received. Nevada Humane Society or Community Cats (another local nonprofit organization) provide low-cost or free spay/neuter services for feral cats.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Volunteer staffing of Animal Help Desk:** Nevada Humane Society does not use volunteers to respond to Animal Help Desk requests, though this approach has been successful in other communities. Since anything beyond providing basic low-cost spay/neuter information can be very emotional, most volunteers are not interested in working on the help desk long-term. Therefore, the shelter uses staff, one full-time and one half-time person, for this program.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **New resources:** Shelter staff is always on the lookout for new resources to provide to the public. Like their other programs, they continually seek to improve the Animal Help Desk.



Fundraising

Money makes the world go 'round and keeps a nonprofit organization's doors open to fulfill its mission. In this economy, public funds are scarce and foundation grants are difficult to come by, making local fundraising efforts more important than ever for local humane groups.

Nevada Humane Society relies on the support of the community as they are not funded by government agencies or national animal welfare organizations. And since their standard adoption fee is only \$50,

while the average cost to care for each animal at the shelter is \$240, money must be raised to make up the difference. However, a donate button on the website only goes so far.

Nevada Humane Society actively encourages the community to be an integral part of their mission of making the region safe for homeless pets, and the organization provides multiple outlets for individuals, groups and businesses to give.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Direct contact:** Contacting the general public and local businesses directly and asking for donations has been successful. This can be done online through email appeals or the old-fashioned way via snail mail, both of which are used by Nevada Humane Society.
- **Building relationships with donors:** Nevada Humane Society uses the Benevon fundraising model to develop a stable donor base and obtain ongoing funds from individuals, from small to large donors. It starts with thanking people for their support by making personal telephone calls to all donors who donate over a predetermined amount. Every month, Nevada Humane Society hosts a Pets Alive Tour, which is an informational session and a behind-the-scenes tour of the shelter. Current donors and potential new supporters are invited. The tour includes a half-hour meet-and-greet and then a structured but fun one-hour program that includes a brief talk, tour, and fun and touching video. Once a year, the organization hosts a Pets Alive Partners reception, where attendees are invited to pledge donations over a period of five years and, therefore, become part of the organization's Giving Society. Once again, this is a structured program that summarizes the organization's successes and tugs at the attendees' hearts through testimonials and animal stories. The focus of the fundraising model is to build positive relationships with donors, creating lifelong relationships and sustained giving. In the past three years, the shelter has cultivated a growing number of supporters and new members to their Giving Society.
- **Public fundraising opportunities:** As an organization that relies on community support, Nevada Humane Society offers opportunities for individuals or groups to help the organization achieve its mission through hosted fundraising events. These events not only bring in much-needed money, but also reach out to people who may not otherwise be aware of Nevada Humane Society's work and the needs of the animals. Other ways the public can help include organizing pet food or pet supply drives, food sales (like bake sales or lemonade stands), car washes, or yard sales, or simply setting up an informational table at a public event or local business. Third-party fundraiser events, such as an Eagle Scout fill-the-truck solicitation, luncheon at a local country club, or motorcycle club poker run have brought in significant contributions for Nevada Humane Society. The shelter staff offers guidance and promotion for these events.
- **Business fundraising opportunities:** Nevada Humane Society partners with local businesses for successful fundraising events. For example, the organization partners with a local casino that hosts a charity poker tournament four times a year and a hotel resort that hosts a summer party with proceeds donated to help the animals. Not only are these types of events a lot of fun, but the businesses do the majority of the work. It's a win-win situation as local businesses get great PR for helping the animals, while the shelter benefits financially without having to invest a lot of manpower or resources. The shelter does assist with the events publicity.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Outside newsletter mailing company:** When Bonney arrived at Nevada Humane Society, they were using an outside direct mail service to send out appeals and newsletters. The content was canned so the stories did not feature their shelter's animals. That same content was being used by all the other organizations that subscribed to the service. Plus, it was expensive. Nevada Humane Society asked for custom content featuring their own shelter's animals, and though the company attempted to accommodate their request, it was not very effective. It was only when Nevada Humane Society created their own materials, with their own writing and photography, that the results dramatically improved. The stories are upbeat. Even when the animal may have had a sad beginning, the shelter focuses on the positive outcome and attributes the happy result to the support of the donors.

WHAT'S NEXT:

N/A

2013 Update

The Nevada Humane Society continues its lifesaving efforts. In 2013, NHS found even more creative ways to reach people in its community and get them involved in helping to save animals' lives. The humane society continued to hold adoption promotions, which resulted in more animals finding loving, forever homes. Though its innovative executive director, Bonney Brown, has left NHS to start another lifesaving organization called Humane Network, NHS continues the successful programs she helped put in place.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: NHS continues to focus on engaging local politicians to support the shelter's life-saving mission and to reach out to the community through creative promotions and public service announcements. NHS knows how important it is to constantly get the word out to people with messages that are humorous or touching. These promotions have been especially helpful in recruiting more foster volunteers.

ADOPTIONS: NHS continues to hold creative adoption promotions, including the Biggest Little Cat House (and Dogs Too!) promotion. Also, thanks to the generosity of the Petco Foundation, NHS acquired a new mobile adoptions vehicle in 2013.

PARTNERSHIPS: NHS has teamed up with the SPCA of Northern Nevada and Pet Network in an effort to create stronger relationships with local politicians to foster greater understanding about why the rescue access code changes are needed.

PRIORITIZING PROGRAMS: NHS continues to work at providing assistance for people surrendering pets due to a temporary inability to provide critically needed veterinary care. In 2006, Nevada Humane Society had a wellness and holistic vet care program at its clinic. It was discontinued in 2007 to avoid competing with the local veterinary community. The economic downturn created a serious need to provide support to people who love and are committed to their pets, but due to loss of a job or other temporary hardship, do not have the resources to provide veterinary care. While Nevada Humane Society's first duty is to their shelter animals, they continue to seek grant funding to support this need.

OPERATIONAL CHANGES: NHS has continued to refine its processes over time. Plus, it always tries to keep up with the latest animal health issues and best practices. NHS continues to implement small refinements to improve operations so that the organization maximizes its effectiveness and efficiency. Brief staff meetings are scheduled three times a week so that everyone is aware of any changes. These meetings only take 10 or 15 minutes, but they help keep everyone on the same page.

ANIMAL HELP DESK: Shelter staff is always on the lookout for new resources to provide to the public. NHS continues to look for ways to improve and build upon its Animal Help Desk as well as its other lifesaving programs.