

2015

Best Friends National Conference

Playbook



No-Kill Community:

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

Portland, Oregon



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This playbook is one in a series meant to be used as guides as you explore how you can save more lives in your community. Getting to no-kill isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition. Each community is unique, with its own challenges and resources, so the playbooks highlight a variety of communities and detail the various ways that leaders in those communities progressed to no-kill or have their communities firmly on that path. Of course, there are some common denominators: Collaboration, commitment, hard work and data-driven approaches to problem-solving are some of the factors that have taken these communities to lifesaving levels once believed to be unreachable. We hope that you will find the information in the playbooks helpful and inspirational as your community works to **Save Them All**®.

Key participants in helping the community to become no-kill: Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland (ASAP) partner organizations

ASAP partners:

- Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs
- Cat Adoption Team
- Clackamas County Dog Services
- Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon
- Humane Society for Southwest Washington
- Multnomah County Animal Services
- Oregon Humane Society
- Portland Veterinary Medical Association
- Southwest Washington Veterinary Medical Association
- Washington County Animal Services (Bonnie L. Hays Small Animal Shelter)

Some keys to ASAP's success:

- Establishing a culture of respect, accountability and trust in order to form a strong alliance
- Gathering and sharing statistics among all ASAP member organizations to determine areas of greatest need
- Creating a Lifesaving Committee to ensure that ASAP member shelters effectively and efficiently assist each other
- Implementing a communitywide spay/neuter program for low-income families
- Collaborating on transferring animals to make sure they receive the best care and the best opportunity to find permanent homes
- Supporting volunteers, especially foster volunteers, in a variety of ways



Introduction

Back in 2006, a lot of shelters and organizations in the Portland-Vancouver metro area were working hard to save the community's homeless animals. Still, the community's live release rate that year was less than 62 percent. The heads of these shelters and organizations soon realized they could save more animals by working together rather than working on their own. So in 2006, they sat down together and created a coalition called the Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland (ASAP). ASAP is a group that includes public and private animal shelters, spay/neuter organizations and veterinary associations committed to working together to address pet overpopulation, reduce shelter intake and end the euthanasia of healthy, social and treatable dogs and cats.

During the early meetings, one of the primary objectives of ASAP leaders was to establish a culture of respect, accountability and trust among the organizations and to figure out who the most at-risk animals were and how to save them. Egos were checked at the door. The leaders agreed to mutual expectations and commitments, placing the greater good of the alliance and the community's animals above individual organizations' politics and philosophies.

ASAP leaders have continued to meet monthly and they have each other's cell phone numbers, so they reach out to each other whenever there's something they need help with. "We meet monthly to talk about how we can help each other, which has built trust and respect," says Kristi Brooks, director of operations for the Cat Adoption Team (CAT), an ASAP member organization.

In 2007, ASAP leaders held several strategic sessions in which they developed a three-tiered approach to saving lives:

- Decreasing shelter intake: To be accomplished through spay/neuter, trap/neuter/return, return to owner (pet identification, licensing), a lost and found system, and behavior resources.
- Management of dogs and cats while in the shelters: To be accomplished through a transfer system, standardized shelter care guidelines and medical protocols, resource sharing, foster care and behavior training.
- Increasing shelter adoptions: To be accomplished through adoption events, media, public relations and marketing.

Brenda King, operations director of the Oregon Humane Society, says some agreements were easy to implement immediately, while others had to be carefully analyzed and planned. "We realized we had a common goal and that no single organization was going to be as effective working alone," Brenda says.

One of the pillars of ASAP's success is honest, consistent and shared statistics among all

ASAP member organizations. The coalition made it a priority to collect and review shelter statistics on a regular basis, enabling ASAP leaders to identify the greatest opportunities to save the largest number of animals and to strategically plan their programs.

With support from Maddie’s Fund in 2008, ASAP began collecting and reporting shelter data, according to the standards of the Asilomar Accords, to determine live release rates for shelters. ASAP also established a Pet Evaluation Matrix, a component of the Asilomar Accords, with input from the animal welfare community, the veterinary community and the general public. A Pet Evaluation Matrix consists of a list of specific, commonly seen medical and behavioral conditions that may occur in individual sheltered animals. Each shelter animal’s medical and behavioral status is evaluated and the animal is put into one of four categories: Healthy, Treatable-Rehabilitatable, Treatable-Manageable, or Unhealthy and Untreatable.

ASAP also created a Lifesaving Committee made up of operations managers from each of the shelters. This committee ensures that ASAP member shelters effectively and efficiently assist each other. For instance, a system was implemented to monitor shelter capacity and issue an email alert to all operations managers when a shelter is full and needs to transfer an animal to a shelter where space is available. Dogs and cats are now considered “ASAP animals” and are the responsibility of the coalition as a whole, not just the individual shelters. To ensure that ASAP shelters are consistent in how they evaluate and assess the condition of dogs and cats, the Lifesaving Committee trains frontline shelter staff to accurately use the Asilomar guidelines and Pet Evaluation Matrix. Common medical protocols established by ASAP partners provide for consistency in animal care.

ASAP partners contribute equitably rather than equally for the sake of the community’s animals. ASAP’s six shelters collaborate on staff training, software and sharing of behavioral and medical resources whenever possible. For example, when an incoming donation of medical supplies or equipment is not immediately needed by the receiving shelter, an offer will be sent out to the entire group so that other member shelters can take advantage of it. On occasion, shelters also share pet food, crates, medical supplies and personnel.

One need only look at the numbers to see that amazing things happen when committed people come together in pursuit of a common goal. Since 2010, no healthy animal has been killed in an ASAP shelter and since July 2012 no healthy or treatable-rehabilitatable pets have been euthanized. In 2013, ASAP’s six shelters received a \$1 million award from Maddie’s Fund for their successful lifesaving efforts. In 2014, the collective live release rate for ASAP organizations was 93.1 percent, up from 91 percent the previous year, making Portland one of the safest communities for animals in the country.

Debbie Wood, manager of Washington County Animal Services in Hillsdale, Oregon, an ASAP member organization, says the ASAP coalition has developed a culture of mutual respect.

“We know that every shelter in our coalition is staffed by professionals who are all working hard, who all have compassion, and who all will act with integrity,” Debbie says. “We know that by helping other shelters — and receiving help from other shelters — we can have the best possible outcome for the animals in our community. We are also committed to maintaining accurate data that is consistent among the shelters in the coalition. We use the data to help us measure the success of our work and to help determine where we should be putting our resources.”

City of Portland	
2006 live release rate:	52.1%
2014 live release rate:	93.1%



Leadership and decision-making

ASAP partners have been thoughtful and strategic about how they work together. Leadership meetings are held monthly and typically include the directors and operations managers of each organization. Issues and events impacting the partners, the community and ASAP's goals are discussed openly with a focus on finding solutions. The coalition has held strategic planning sessions to identify and develop goals as the animal welfare landscape in the community evolves.

WHAT WORKED

- **Sharing organizational changes and challenges:** Trends, events and obstacles within partner organizations impact the coalition. ASAP partners can best support each other and achieve the coalition's goals when they know what others are struggling with.
- **Thinking strategically:** ASAP partners have always remained focused on how the individual organizations and the coalition can save the most lives. Analysis, planning and implementation are guided by data.
- **Not requiring agreement on everything:** ASAP partners work together on key initiatives but the group has not attempted to get all of the partner organizations to adhere to the same adoption, intake, foster, or other protocols and policies.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Implementing a full strategic plan:** Trying to implement a full strategic plan for ASAP has been challenging when the partners are so busy with running their organizations. Having some ASAP leadership members "at large" has helped because they are able to focus more time on the planning process.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Continued focus on collaboration:** ASAP partners will continue to work together in formal meetings, committees and one-on-one conversations with a continued focus on collaborating to move the community's goals forward.



Spay & Save program

When ASAP leaders first started going through the statistics, they quickly discovered that cats were in the most danger of dying in shelters. In 2006, only 49 percent of cats were making it out of ASAP shelters alive. So, they made cats priority one. And they knew the best way to save cats was to keep them out of shelters in the first place. So they created the Spay & Save program, which serves four counties in the greater Portland-Vancouver metro area. The program offers low-cost and free spay/neuter surgery for both pet cats and free-roaming cats. The goal of the program is to keep struggling families and their pets together and to reduce the number of cats coming into ASAP shelters.

ASAP began by doing a targeted spay/neuter program in two high-intake neighborhoods. Given its success, ASAP implemented a communitywide program for low-income families. Pet owners on government assistance qualify for the \$10 cat spay/neuter and other low-income pet owners not receiving government assistance are eligible for other programs run by ASAP partners. There are no limits to the number of cats and kittens that can be brought in per household. People caring for free-roaming cats don't need to qualify under the Spay & Save guidelines.

ASAP has five Spay & Save surgical locations and all surgeries are performed by licensed veterinarians assisted by skilled support teams. The administration of the program is centralized at the Oregon Humane Society, with staff and volunteers operating the scheduling hotline. All ASAP organizations have access to the schedule and there's a single phone number for the public to call to get an appointment for owned cats. The Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon schedules and performs surgeries on feral and community cats in the metropolitan area.

"Our Spay & Save program is our best example of coalition integration," Brenda says. "Because all of us participate in Spay & Save, the results have been extraordinary." For instance, ASAP partner Multnomah County Animal Services (MCAS), an animal care and control agency serving Multnomah County and the city of Portland, is one of the surgery sites for ASAP's Spay & Save program. Each week, it has Spay & Save surgery slots at its shelter hospital, where spay and neuter surgeries, rabies vaccinations, microchips and pet licenses are provided. MCAS contributes \$25,000 each year to help fund Spay & Save surgeries, money that comes from dog and cat license revenue in Multnomah County.

MCAS also operates the Apartment Cat Team program, which provides trap/neuter/return services to low-income cat owners living in apartment complexes and mobile home parks. Apartment Cat Team cats are spayed or neutered at the Feral Cat Coalition, another ASAP partner agency.

Here's another example of the collaboration that occurs: Each Friday, the Bonnie L. Hays Small Animal Shelter in Washington County assists 16 cats from the public who qualify for

Spay & Save by taking them in at their shelter and transporting them to Cat Adoption Team for their surgeries. They return in the afternoon to pick up the cats and take them back to their shelter, where they discharge the cats to their owners. Without the transport provided by the shelter, people would have to drive 45 minutes to have their cats spayed or neutered, making it less likely that they would have it done.

The Spay & Save program is working well. “Our Spay & Save program reduced shelter intake of cats from the public by 35 percent by performing 40,000 spay/neuter surgeries through five clinics in four years,” Kristi says.

Again, the numbers show that much can be accomplished when agencies come together and work toward a common goal. The live release rate for cats in 2006, when ASAP was first formed, was just a little over 49 percent. In 2013, the live release rate for cats had climbed to 86.7 percent and in 2014 it was 91.2 percent.

WHAT WORKED

- **Targeting neighborhoods for spay/neuter services:** ASAP found out exactly where most unspayed dogs and cats were coming from and targeted those neighborhoods for spay/neuter services.
- **Establishing a Marketing Committee:** Members of ASAP’s Marketing Committee worked together on how to reach the target population most effectively.
- **Using social media:** ASAP uses social media channels such as Facebook and Craig’s List to get the word out to the public about ASAP’s spay/neuter services.
- **Solving challenges together:** One of the areas that ASAP serves does not have any spay/neuter services for cats, so other ASAP agencies must do transfers from that community to get cats fixed.
- **Quarterly Spay & Save promotions:** Quarterly free spay/neuter events or promotions offering other benefits (vaccines, free gifts, etc.) attract owners who can’t afford the \$10 copay.

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- **Collaborating with private veterinarians as surgery providers:** The process of qualifying Spay & Save clients and scheduling their cats at private veterinary clinics ended up being too complicated and did not fit in well with the everyday flow of a busy private veterinary clinic.
- **Scheduling system:** Centralized scheduling has benefits and challenges. The scheduling system can be slow and prone to freezing up when accessed remotely.

WHAT’S NEXT

- **Keeping up with the demand:** Brenda says Spay & Save is a service “that has to continue to evolve to meet the needs of the community.”



Transfer program

ASAP's shelters (which include four public open-admission shelters and two private shelters) are all committed to saving lives and providing the best care possible. When one of the shelters needs assistance with an animal for medical or behavioral reasons or a lack of space, the ASAP shelters collaborate on transferring the animal to another facility for treatment or further placement. Each year, several thousand cats and dogs are transferred between ASAP shelters. "We transferred 2,069 animals between our shelters in 2013 to save lives," says Kristi.

As mentioned above, ASAP's Lifesaving Committee is made up of operations managers at the shelters, who ensure that ASAP member shelters effectively and efficiently assist each other. For instance, a system was implemented to issue an email alert to all operations managers when space and/or extra care is needed for an animal. Dogs and cats in ASAP shelters are considered the responsibility of the ASAP coalition as a whole, not just the individual shelters.

"Our committee meets once a month to go over transfers, shelter updates, Asilomar training, euthanasia figures and anything else that comes from our main ASAP monthly meeting," says Kristi. ASAP also reaches out to other shelters and rescue organizations to transfer animals to and from their facilities so animals receive the best care and the best opportunity to find permanent, loving homes.

WHAT WORKED

- **Good communication among ASAP leaders:** Members of the Lifesaving Committee have each other's cell phone numbers so they can communicate with each other at a moment's notice. Committee members keep in regular contact with each other and meet regularly to discuss how transfers are going and to deal with any issues that might come up. Kristi says, "We had a season of ringworm last fall and the two shelters with rooms to treat ringworm were full. But, since we had agreed that no treatable/rehabilitatable animal would be euthanized, we had to make space. The shelter with ringworm kittens called CAT and we took the call seriously. In the end, we removed cupboards and bookshelves to move more kennels into our ringworm isolation area. It was tricky for a few months, but we got through it and so did the kittens."
- **Working with other groups:** Most ASAP partners transfer animals out to smaller foster-based rescue groups in addition to transferring within the coalition.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Not explaining to county shelter workers why they should transfer highly adoptable cats:** In the beginning it was hard for shelter workers at the county shelters to understand why they were sending young, friendly cats and kittens to other shelters. They only wanted to send the older, harder-to-place animals. The directors and managers worked with their

staff to help them understand that if they sent easy-to-adopt cats first, that opened up cages faster, so more cats could be transferred and they wouldn't need to euthanize because of lack of space. There were so many cats who needed help that it made sense to send the ones who could go home right away.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Continuing the good work:** ASAP's shelter members will continue to transfer animals as necessary in order to save lives.
- **Continuing to use data to drive programs:** The coalition is now recording and sharing reasons for every euthanasia so that efforts can be focused where they will save the most lives.



Adoption programs

When ASAP began, members of the coalition implemented a number of actions to increase adoptions. ASAP member organizations pool their resources to offer special adoption discounts, collaborate on adoption events and take advantage of greater media exposure to save more lives. Photos and information about adoptable animals are posted on shelter websites and Facebook pages. ASAP also provides resources to adopters to help them care for their pets after they take them home. For instance, the Oregon Humane Society offers discounts on training classes for people who adopt from any of the ASAP organizations.

ASAP believes there's a perfect home out there for every animal, including animals with special needs. ASAP is devoted to helping to get special-needs pets ready for adoption, so these dogs and cats get the medical care they need and help with behavioral issues if necessary.

WHAT WORKED

- **Maintaining autonomy:** There currently is no universal adoption application process for ASAP; each shelter has its own adoption process and fees, and that seems to work fine.
- **Reaching out to the community:** ASAP makes sure the community knows about the wonderful pets waiting to be adopted at ASAP shelters, about the resources available to them, and about what they can do to help save more animals in their community. People in the community have responded by getting behavior training or advice to keep their pets, getting their animals sterilized to avoid adding to the shelter population, and supporting their shelters through adoption, fostering, volunteering or donating money.
- **Willingness to take in special-needs animals:** ASAP shelters, as well as rescue groups in the area, are willing to take in animals with physical or behavioral issues to give them the care they need to get them ready for adoption.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Joint adoptions:** Joint adoption events haven't boosted adoption numbers like ASAP members thought they would. The reason for this may be that all ASAP shelters offer their own adoption promotions throughout the year and the joint promotions were scheduled on top of all of the existing ones, perhaps leading to market saturation and thus yielding mixed results for the joint adoption events.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Improved marketing of pets with special needs:** ASAP is looking for ways to better market animals who have special needs and to get the word out that resources are available to help people who adopt animals with special needs.



Volunteer and foster programs

ASAP member organizations are fortunate to be located in Portland, where there is a very high volunteerism rate. The Oregon Humane Society alone has 2,000 active volunteers. Brenda says it's very important to let volunteers know that they're making a big difference in animals' lives. "We could not offer the breadth of programs we do without our volunteer workforce," she says. "We appreciate them and celebrate our successes as a group every year."

Foster volunteers play an especially important role in saving ASAP animals, especially those with medical or behavioral issues, who benefit immensely from the extra attention they get in foster homes. Kristi has created a model foster care program for kittens called Fostering 4 Rock Stars that can be applied to any shelter or rescue organization.

Thanks to a grant from PetSmart Charities, a number of downloadable resources are available on the Cat Adoption Team website at www.catadoptionteam.org/fostering4rockstars. There are resources for foster volunteer coordinators, foster volunteer parents and foster volunteer mentors, as well as marketing tips. Kristi's Fostering 4 Rock Stars program has become nationally recognized.

WHAT WORKED

- **Being located in a community with a high volunteerism rate:** Recruiting volunteers in the Portland area has been easier than it might be in other cities.
- **Sharing knowledge between shelter partners:** For example, Kristi has provided on-site training and consulting on kitten foster programs to two ASAP partner shelters, with a third scheduled in January 2015.
- **Engaging volunteers in a number of ways:** ASAP members distribute volunteer newsletters, have volunteer Facebook groups, send out update emails and host volunteer appreciation events. Volunteers receive training and manuals outlining what opportunities are available, how to receive additional training for their volunteer activities, and what is expected of them as a volunteer.
- **Having downloadable resources for volunteers:** These online resources ensure that all volunteers are uniformly trained and adhere to the same guidelines, and they can also serve as training guides for other organizations that want to install similar practices.
- **Using foster volunteer mentors:** Kristi says that foster mentors know your organization and understand the policies that are in place to make the foster program run smoothly. They are able to help new foster volunteers learn the ropes as well as assist them when their foster kittens are sick or need preventative care. Allowing volunteers to help in this way saves CAT's hospital team hours each week in phone calls, and also may mean kittens don't have to go to the emergency room, which saves a lot of money. CAT's foster

mentors go to the foster homes to check on the kittens and can recognize illness and start the kittens on a treatment plan based on protocols put together by the medical director.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Focusing only on getting foster care for kittens:** In the beginning, CAT only concentrated on bringing kittens into foster care. They didn't think about the end goal, which is spay/neuter surgery and ultimately a forever home. "We were full of kittens who all needed surgery around the same time," Kristi says, "and we did not have the space in our surgery schedule to accommodate them. We ended up with kittens waiting for four weeks longer than they should have to go home. A lot of people were no longer interested in the kittens now that they were so much bigger."

Kristi also says CAT didn't think about the support needed for 300 kittens in foster care. The hospital was fielding up to a dozen phone calls a day, some taking 30 minutes or more. That's why foster volunteer mentors are such a valuable addition to the kitten foster program.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Recruiting more volunteers, especially foster volunteers:** ASAP organizations will continue to recruit volunteers to increase the number of animals' lives saved.



Kristi Brooks



Brenda King



Deborah Wood

Presenters

KRISTI BROOKS is the director of operations for the Cat Adoption Team (CAT), the Northwest's largest adoption-guarantee, cat-focused shelter and an ASAP partner organization. CAT finds homes for approximately 2,500 cats each year, including more than 800 "graduates" of the kitten foster program. Kristi started fostering for CAT in 2002, taking over coordination of the kitten foster program in 2004 and developing it into a nationally recognized model. Kristi has traveled to shelters across the country to help them implement kitten foster programs based on CAT's model, resulting in dramatic increases in save rates in these shelters. Kristi lives just outside of Portland with her husband, daughter and adopted cat, Kate.

BRENDA KING brings more than 20 years of leadership and program management experience to her current role as the director of operations for Oregon Humane Society (OHS). Brenda joined OHS in 2005 to help with the capital campaign to build the Animal Medical Learning Center (AMLC) and managed the AMLC construction project. She is currently responsible for running the daily operations at OHS and oversees animal care, customer care, animal admissions, Best Friends' Corner retail stores, the behavior and training department, and facilities.

Her background includes seven years as a director of business development at American Express Corporate Services and program management experience for OECO Corporation. She lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and two furry soul mates.

DEBORAH WOOD is manager of animal services for Washington County, Oregon. Washington County is the second-largest county in Oregon with a population in excess of 560,000 people. During her tenure, euthanasia at the shelter has been reduced by 89 percent (from 3,434 animals in 2008 to 360 in 2014).

In addition to being a part of the ASAP Coalition, Washington County Animal Services has been a leader in recognizing the link between interpersonal violence and animal abuse. Their nationally recognized Animal Protection Multi-Disciplinary Team brings together the resources of the Washington County District Attorney's Office, local policing agencies, the Domestic Violence Resource Center, Animal Services and animal advocates in a coordinated approach to investigating and prosecuting animal crimes and protecting animal victims.

Prior to working for Washington County Animal Services, Deborah was the pet columnist for The Oregonian newspaper and is the author of 11 published books, including "Little Dogs: Training Your Pint-Sized Companion" and "Help for Your Shy Dog." Over the years, she has competed in obedience trials with her dogs and visited children's hospitals with her therapy dog.