

2016

Best Friends National Conference

Playbook



No-Kill Community:

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

Lynchburg, Virginia



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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 participant in helping the community to become no-kill:

- Lynchburg Humane Society

Some keys to the success of Lynchburg Humane Society (LHS):

- Rebranding the organization with a new logo, mission and vision
- Involving the community, being transparent about what LHS is doing and showing appreciation for the community's help
- Using creative marketing ideas and promotions to attract more people to the shelter and get more media attention
- Instituting a foster-to-adopt program that gives potential adopters a chance to spend time with an animal before making a decision
- Implementing some new cat programs to help keep cats and kittens out of the shelter
- Moving to an appointment-based owner surrender program, which gives staff an opportunity to help people find ways to keep their pets or rehome them
- Not being afraid to think outside the box and try something new

Lynchburg, Virginia

2008 save rate:	49%
2015 save rate:	94%



Introduction

For more than a half century, the Lynchburg Humane Society has operated as a private nonprofit organization caring for lost and homeless animals. Operating as a state-mandated shelter for the city, the Lynchburg Humane Society accepts every stray or unwanted animal that comes through its doors. These include animals who are easily adoptable as well as those who need special nurturing from abusive or neglectful experiences.

In 2005, Lynchburg's community and animal situation was assessed, and people were told that no-kill was impossible to achieve in their community. Thankfully, not everyone agreed with that negative assessment. In 2009, a Lynchburg Humane Society board member was inspired to set out on a quest to get the community to no-kill. The rest of the board agreed.

One of the first things the board did was to bring Makena Yarbrough on board as the Lynchburg Humane Society's first executive director. They couldn't have made a smarter choice. Makena had plenty of experience working in the animal shelter arena, having worked as the director of operations at the Richmond SPCA and as the associate director for the Charlottesville-Albemarle SPCA. Perhaps even more important, Makena was an "out of the box" thinker, a person who wasn't afraid to try new things in the effort to save more animals and lead Lynchburg toward the no-kill goal. "Impossible" is not a word that's in Makena's vocabulary.

Makena and the board members went right to work on a strategic plan that would help them achieve their vision of a no-kill Lynchburg. (Makena eventually tripled the number of people on LHS's board of directors. The more creative thinkers around the table, the better, she reasoned.) Both Makena and the board knew the image of the organization needed to be refreshed, so they rebranded the entire organization with a new logo, mission and vision. They reached out to the local press to help garner public support for the organization's new direction.

Another thing that Makena and the board did was to make some internal changes to LHS's culture, especially in the way LHS views the community. Sure, there are a few bad apples out there, but rather than hold the public entirely responsible for the pet homelessness problem, they instead focused on the idea that the vast majority of people in the community are good, caring people who would gladly help LHS with their no-kill mission if they were asked to contribute. "When you present to the community the problems you're facing, they respond," Makena says.

Finally, the organization changed existing programs and implemented new ones that have increased the number of lives saved from 49 percent in 2008, the year before LHS began its no-kill mission, to a no-kill save rate of 94 percent in 2015. Here's how they did it.



Adoptions

The change in LHS's attitude toward the public had a direct effect on LHS policies, including its adoption program. For example, black-and-white adoption rules were eliminated in favor of treating adoptions on a case-by-case basis.

To get more animals adopted, LHS started using some creative marketing ideas. Adoption promotions have included Talk Like a Pirate Day and High Five Day (in which adopters received \$25 off the adoption fee if they "high-fived" the adoption counselor). There are reduced-fee and sometimes free adoption specials. Clever promotions and specials also draw more media attention, giving the animals more exposure and a better chance of being adopted.

Another lifesaving thing LHS did was to change its adoption policies regarding pit bull terriers. For years, pit bull terriers had been held to a higher standard at LHS. LHS would do extra screening on pit bull terrier adopters, even doing landlord checks. LHS staffers would tell potential adopters about the problems involved in owning a pit bull. The shelter would do additional behavior testing that it didn't do on other breeds of dogs. All of these practices just perpetuated the myths about pit bull terriers and made it more difficult to find good homes for them.

LHS's no-kill mission changed all that. Pit bull terriers are now treated like any other dogs. They are housed with other dogs and enjoy play groups with other dogs. And landlord checks are no longer done. "We stopped treating them as different," Makena says. Also, in an effort to educate the community, Makena produced videos showing pit bull terriers and the families who love them. She wrote an editorial for the paper to dispel the myths about pit bull terriers. These efforts have resulted in more pit bull terrier adoptions.

LHS's new adoption strategies are paying off. In 2008, before LHS launched its no-kill mission, 1,068 animals were adopted from the shelter. In 2014, 1,741 animals were adopted into new homes and 276 were returned to their people.

WHAT WORKED

- Coming up with creative specials and events to draw more potential adopters to the shelter and more media attention
- Treating pit bull terrier adoptions like any other adoptions
- Communicating with the public to dispel the myths about pit bull terriers

- Treating adoptions on a case-by-case basis
- Having adoption hours seven days a week to make it easier for working people to adopt pets

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- Having black-and-white rules about adoptions
- Having more stringent rules and policies regarding pit bull terrier adoptions
- Conducting off-site adoptions, which were good public relations opportunities but didn't result in very many adoptions

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to offer specials and events to get even more animals adopted



Appointment-based pet surrender program

In late 2009, LHS started an appointment-based pet surrender program. If someone wants to relinquish a pet, he or she must make an appointment to do it. The appointments give LHS an opportunity to talk to people who want to give up their pet and offer them resources to help them keep their pet or tips on how to find a good, loving home for their pet on their own. Another important thing that the appointment-based system does is give people a little more time to rethink their decision to surrender their pet.

Makena says the number one reason people surrender their pets is that they're moving and can't find a pet-friendly apartment. So, LHS offers them a listing of pet-friendly rentals in the area.

When it comes to simple behavior problems, LHS staffers can often give people all the information they need to fix the problem. "Sometimes, we just give them tips on how to handle it," Makena says. For more serious behavior problems, LHS refers people to other training resources and a behavior hotline. In addition, if someone brings in a litter of puppies or kittens, LHS staff will talk to the person about getting the adult animals spayed or neutered and will do it for free to prevent future litters.

LHS publishes all of this information — tips on how to deal with behavior problems, links to

outside resources and pet-friendly rental lists — on its website. Thanks to the appointment-based surrender program, Makena says, about 60 percent of people end up keeping their pets or rehoming them on their own.

WHAT WORKED

- Creating an appointment-based pet surrender program to allow LHS staff to offer help to people who want to relinquish pets
- Having a variety of resources for people who want to relinquish pets

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- Allowing people to just drop off their pets at any time without offering them help

WHAT'S NEXT

- Creating an in-house behavior modification program and training to help more animals get adopted
- Offering medical and financial assistance to low-income people with pets
- Creating a program with local landlords to increase the number of homes and apartments that allow pets, without making pet owners pay additional costs



Free and low-cost spay/neuter programs

More than 41,000 dogs and cats have been spayed or neutered at LHS's South Central Spay/Neuter Clinic; 6,000 of these surgeries occurred in 2014 alone. Four days a week, LHS even offers a transport shuttle that travels to locations in nearby counties, where animals are picked up, taken to the clinic to be spayed or neutered, and then returned to those locations so their people can pick them up. By offering these services, LHS is reducing the number of unwanted animals in the community, thereby decreasing the number of animals who enter the shelters each year.

In 2011, LHS decided to stop taking community (aka free-roaming, feral, stray) cats into the shelter. Instead, with help from a grant from PetSmart Charities™, LHS started City Cat Fix, a trap/neuter/return program. Community cats are now humanely trapped and taken to the

clinic, where they're spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and then returned to the areas they came from. The program is free to anyone living in the city of Lynchburg. LHS has rental traps available for a refundable deposit and educates people on how to humanely trap community cats. People can make an appointment to bring the cats to the clinic themselves or they can use LHS's transport shuttle.

These spay/neuter programs are having a positive impact on LHS's save rates and have helped LHS achieve no-kill. In 2008, the year before LHS began its no-kill mission, the shelter had a 60 percent save rate for dogs and a 36 percent save rate for cats. In 2014, LHS's save rate was 97 percent for dogs and 91 percent for cats.

WHAT WORKED

- Offering free and low-cost spay/neuter and making sure the public knows it's available
- Creating the City Cat Fix program to get community cats spayed or neutered and keep them out of the shelter
- Offering a transport shuttle to help people get their pets to the clinic for spay/neuter
- Offering specials at the clinic, such as free spay/neuter for pit bull terriers

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- Bringing community cats into the shelter

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to expand spay/neuter programs



Foster programs

In 2009, LHS put an article in the newspaper telling the community of its dire need for people to foster animals until permanent homes could be found for them. LHS also reached out to the community through other media outlets and on its Facebook page.

The foster program started out slowly, but eventually grew. Some people foster for a short time, others foster for longer periods, and some end up falling in love with their foster pets and adopting them. If needed, LHS helps its foster volunteers with food and supplies.

LHS also has a foster-to-adopt program, which gives qualified families the chance to “try

out” an animal in their home. LHS launched the program to not only free up space in the shelter, but to give people a chance to see if a pet was the right one for them before signing the adoption papers. “This may sound a bit flip, but it is like a car salesman saying, ‘Here, take the car for the weekend and see how you like it.’ We are doing the same thing in hopes that people like the pet and keep the pet,” Makena wrote in her blog on the LHS website.

In April 2014, Makena put out a plea to LHS’s supporters, asking for foster families for kittens. “Last year, 134 kittens lost their lives in our shelter because of the poor conditions of this building,” Makena wrote in her blog. “We are done with this. When people drop off stray kittens, they think they are better off here when they just aren’t. Rusted surfaces, poor air handling and crowded conditions, coupled with poor immune systems equals dying kittens.”

LHS needed people with an extra bathroom, guest room or other safe space to take in a kitten or litter and care for them until they were vaccinated and ready to be adopted. Makena wanted to make the idea of fostering fun and inviting, so those who volunteered were given T-shirts identifying them as “kitten warriors.” It worked. In the spring and summer of 2014, the busiest kitten months, LHS had 62 more kittens and cats in foster homes, which resulted in a 65 percent reduction in kitten and cat deaths compared to the same time period the previous year. Some of the kitten warriors even ended up adopting their foster charges.

Makena and others at LHS have learned that if you need the community’s help, all you have to do is ask. A couple of years ago, a sudden storm came through and knocked out the shelter’s air conditioning and the cats were stuck indoors. LHS put out a call for help on its Facebook page and about 50 people came forward offering to foster cats in their homes.

WHAT WORKED

- Reaching out to the community for help via the LHS website and through newspaper articles, radio and social media
- Creating a foster-to-adopt program to get more animals adopted and free up space in the shelter

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- Caring for kittens in an old shelter with rusted surfaces and poor air quality

WHAT’S NEXT

- Continuing to recruit more foster volunteers and creating more foster programs



New brand, new facility

In 2009, more than 2,100 animals came to LHS's 7,000-square-foot shelter and when the shelter was overflowing, they housed some of the animals at a boarding facility at their own expense. The old shelter was only capable of housing 70 dogs and 150 to 200 cats, and the accommodations were not the best.

LHS had to get very creative with space: rearranging furniture to create more kennel space, turning the shelter's conference and food storage rooms into additional cat areas, and making maximum use of every available space. At the same time, staff worked to make the shelter a more pleasant place for the animals. For instance, they took the doors off the cat kennels in the adoption room, turning it into an open cat room to help boost adoptions. And they made changes to the shelter's cleaning and health protocols.

As creative as they were, however, they knew they needed a new, larger facility. The fundraising campaign to build a new shelter began in 2009 with Makena and a half dozen board members brainstorming around a table in the shelter's small break room. The organization was subsequently rebranded with a new logo and new website that explained its no-kill mission and its goal to build a new shelter. They reached out to the local press to help garner public support for LHS's new direction. "It was helpful that we had a clear vision," Makena says.

They recruited more board members, individuals who shared their commitment to LHS's no-kill mission and helped spread the word about the need for a new shelter. Some of the new board members had close connections with prominent people in the community, and many of them came forward to help make the new shelter a reality. Makena says, "Once the momentum started, more people came on board."

There were a number of fundraisers, including small cocktail parties in which people donated \$10,000 and more. The goal was to raise \$4.8 million for the new shelter. The city of Lynchburg pitched in \$675,000, but the rest of the money came mostly from donations, both large and small. People in the community gave whatever they could.

Some people told Makena and the board that raising \$4.8 million was impossible. They ended up raising \$5.2 million. After all, when it comes to Makena and the LHS board, the word "impossible" simply does not exist.

In March 2015, LHS opened the Edythe Elizabeth Stauffer Center for Pets, a beautiful 25,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility capable of comfortably housing 300 cats and 125 to 150 dogs. The new facility will allow LHS to save even more lives, giving it the needed room to expand existing programs and create new programs to help animals.

Another goal for the future: Makena says LHS wants to be seen as a regional no-kill center that's helping to reduce the killing in the entire area. "We want to be the safety net in this area," she says.

WHAT WORKED

- Making the best use of space while still in the old shelter
- Inviting individuals who share LHS's no-kill commitment to join the board
- Educating the community about the need for a new shelter and reaching out to the community for help
- Having a clear vision of what LHS wanted to accomplish

WHAT'S NEXT

- Expanding programs in the new, larger shelter
- Helping other shelters become no-kill



New slogan

A small group of people at LHS formed a committee to brainstorm about a new slogan or "catch phrase" for the organization. The former catch phrase was "Giving Animals a Second Chance," which was a great statement when LHS was striving to become no-kill. But now that the organization has achieved that goal, the committee thought it needed something new.

One member of the committee suggested a simple new slogan: "Find Happiness." The rest of the committee agreed that it was perfect. After all, that's what the organization does — offering programs to help animals and the people who love them find happiness. In 2014, LHS helped 1,741 animals find new homes and 276 animals were reunited with their people, thereby helping more than 2,000 pets — and even more people — find happiness. "There are so many varied ways to find happiness and we hope that more of our pets will find their ultimate happiness through new lifelong homes," Makena says.



Innovative ways to encourage people to come to the shelter

In 2015, Lynchburg Humane Society launched an array of new events, all of which are designed to draw more of the community to the shelter and hopefully motivate folks to take home a new pet. Here's a bit more about these events:

- **Food truck Fridays:** Several food trucks come into Lynchburg Humane Society's parking lot every Friday to sell food. Workers at LHS open up the shelter and set out tables both inside and outside, where people can eat. Food trucks are a new fad in the area, so they entice people to come to the shelter.
- **Speed dating:** Speed-dating events have been a real hit. Not only do they give animal lovers an opportunity to hook up, these events encourage people to take a furry friend home with them. LHS places dogs and cats every few spots with a volunteer so the daters get some quality time with a really cute available pet. The community loves these events and LHS got some great press about it. The one glitch is that there are more women than men who attend, but LHS is working on solving that problem.
- **Children's camps:** Last summer, LHS found a camp sponsor to pay for supplies and give some camp spots to underprivileged children. This year, LHS didn't get the sponsor but found individuals to sponsor some free camp spots. LHS is now hosting large school field trips as well.
- **Art shows:** Art shows are held the first Friday of each month. Makena says these events have been wonderful in drawing people who otherwise might have not come to the shelter.

WHAT'S NEXT

- Holding more outdoor events, such as a food, craft beer and music festival
- Finding a young professional group to help host speed-dating events
- Starting Friday babysitting camps for some overnight fun
- Encouraging the community to use the LHS facility for a variety of events, from birthday parties to weddings, and to see it as a place to just come and hang out even when there's no event happening



Presenter

Makena Yarbrough joined the Lynchburg Humane Society in July 2009 as the first executive director for the organization. She quickly worked with the innovative board of directors to develop and implement a long-range plan to take the community to no-kill. Since her arrival, the organization has tripled the size of the board of directors, developed a more equitable relationship with the city of Lynchburg as their contracted pound, begun managing the regional spay/neuter clinic, created a citywide free spay/neuter effort for community cats, and increased community awareness and involvement in the cause.

Under Makena's leadership, the organization has decreased intake and implemented a number of new programs that have increased the save rate from 49 percent to 94 percent. After a very successful capital campaign that raised \$5.2 million in two and a half years, the new Edythe Elizabeth Stauffer Center for Pets opened in March 2015.

Makena began her animal welfare career in 2000 with the Richmond SPCA, first as the director of education and then as the director of operations. Before coming to Lynchburg Humane Society, Makena was the associate director for the Charlottesville-Albemarle SPCA.