

Pet Support Services Toolkit

What are HASS Pet Support Services?

Pet support services provide help for caregivers facing hardships with the goal of keeping families together, even in tough times. Support may include but is not limited to telephone response and advice, medical support for owned pets, food and supplies, fence building or repair, behavior support, vaccines and microchips, fee and low-cost spay/neuter services, crisis or emergency boarding, owned pet fostering, and pet deposit assistance.

What problem does Pet Support Solve?

Some of the most common reasons animals are surrendered to shelters include issues with housing, lack of access to affordable veterinary care, and the need for behavioral support. Other reasons include financial strain making it difficult to access pet food or supplies, fencing demands, and a variety of other human-related factors such as medical emergencies, divorce or job loss. By providing as many resources and services as possible, animal welfare organizations can work toward residing barriers to keep pets and people together.

Get Started

1. Identify the top reasons for owner surrenders as expressed by the community

This can better prepare your organization to prioritize and focus on building and shifting programming and services that will best support your community members' needs. Use the [Community Partnership FUN! Brainstorming Worksheet](#) to outline these needs and who/if anyone can help in the community.

2. Catalog the current support system available in your community. Use the [Ecosystem Mapping](#) resource as a guide.

Examples of this include free or low-cost veterinary care, pet food pantry, safe haven care for pet guardians in short-term crisis, rental pet fee assistance, fencing or containment assistance, grooming, etc. Use [Ideal Animal Welfare Ecosystem](#) and pets.findhelp.com resources as a guide. This is a list of resources that ideally exist in your community for pet caretakers to access.



3. Share pet support resources and programming externally through your website, social media, or other marketing materials ensuring crisis and community services are informed as well.

See [VCAS Pet Assistance](#). You may choose to add an online pet support survey to your resource list.

4. Gather and distribute donated items for pet caretakers such as pet food, crates, leashes, pet beds, collars and more.
5. Complete the [HASS Pet Support Checklist](#) to outline in-house and external resources to support staff or volunteers working with families in need
6. Cross-train all intake and field services staff on pet support resources

Ensure they all have access to your community resource list and [basic medical and behavior information sheets](#).

7. Make all resource materials easily accessible to non-English speakers or readers
8. [Form partnerships](#) with community organizations that can provide additional solutions

What's Needed to Implement Pet Support Services

Technology

Choose a database or data tracking tool that allows your team to document all the resources and services provided to each individual and/or family, this includes outcome tracking.

People

Train staff and volunteers to work with families to provide resources and answer calls.

- Ensure anyone working with the public understands [Trauma Informed Care](#).
- Create job descriptions for Pet Support Services programming
 - [HASS Sample: Customer and Pet Support Supervisor](#)



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- [LifeLine Sample Community Caseworker](#)
 - [Gateway Pet Guardians Sample: Pet Support Counselor](#)
 - [Gateway Pet Guardians Pet Support Manager](#)
 - [Arizona Humane Sample: Bilingual Pet Resource Call Center Specialist](#)
 - [LifeLine Sample: Community Caseworker](#)
- Discuss the importance of setting biases aside and remaining open-minded to different [lived-experiences](#).
 - Focus on the needs of each individual case and provide the resources and services that could be the most effective for that specific human-animal family to stay together for the long-term.
 - Utilize and learn from your volunteers. If you have volunteers that are from the community, they may have helpful insight on how to better engage with more community members. Know that your organization does not have to tackle pet support programming alone. On the contrary, it should be a large collaborative effort.

Shift intake staff into pet support roles. Intake will still take place, but with more pet support services being provided, less animals will need to enter the system.

Assessment and Evaluation

Self-Assessment

The [Community Partnership Worksheet](#) can be used to assess which animal services resources the community needs and who provides them in your community. It can be used to compare against what your agency/organization offers and how you can pivot to fill gaps.

Evaluation

Evaluate your shelter's ability to provide solutions for every family that needs help. Evaluate how often the family leaves with their pet and resources versus how often intake is the solution.

Success can be seen in different ways!

One of the biggest challenges in increasing accessibility to pet support services is making sure community members are aware of all the resources they have access to



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

in their communities. A successful pet support services program would see an increase in connecting families to local social service agencies.

Another challenge is tracking outcomes after the human-animal family has left the shelter, but with proper documentation and follow up phone calls, a successful pet support services program can see an increase in families staying together long-term. Since many families may just need temporary support, such as housing, veterinary care, and supplies, a successful pet support services program can see an increase in intake diversion and fewer animals surrendered into the shelter system.