

2016

Best Friends National Conference

Playbook



No-Kill Community:
What Worked, What Didn't,
What's Next

Heber City, Utah



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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:

- Paws for Life Utah
- Heber Valley Animal Services

Some keys to Heber City's success:

- Focus on saving lives and a commitment to no-kill
- Forward-thinking leadership
- Strong partnership between nonprofit group and municipal shelter
- Open communication
- Clarity of responsibilities
- Growing network of volunteers and foster families

Heber City, Utah	
1999 save rate:	55.2%
2015 save rate:	100%



Introduction

In 2014, Paws for Life Utah, a group in Heber City, Utah, that partners with Heber Valley Animal Services, the agency that runs the local municipal shelter, held a very special event called “Bash the Gas.” They hauled the old gas chamber out of the shelter and drove it to the city park, where community members were invited to take a sledgehammer to it. The event was held to “commemorate the fact that we are no-kill and to demonstrate to the community that the gas chamber was really no longer in the shelter,” says Cathy Boruch, Paws for Life Utah founder and executive director.

Although the shelter wasn’t officially recognized as a no-kill facility until 2013, it had actually been no-kill since 2008, says Justin Hatch, supervisor of Heber Valley Animal Services. “Bash the Gas” was held to make sure the community knew the shelter was no-kill.

Paws for Life Utah (PFLU), an all-volunteer nonprofit organization, was started in 2012 to support the Heber Valley Animal Shelter (HVAS). Many of the PFLU volunteers had been volunteering and saving animals in the community for years before the organization was formed, but consolidating their work by creating a nonprofit really increased their effectiveness, namely by allowing accessibility to grants.

Before 2000, the situation in Heber City was grim. The shelter, built in 1993, was designed as a high-kill facility, with a gas chamber used for killing and very little medical care for the animals. The community had a poor image of the shelter, and the leadership of the shelter was not advocating for increased lifesaving.

There was also little support from the police chief, who leads Heber Valley Animal Services. But then a new police chief, Dave Booth, came on board in late 2012 and things changed significantly. The new police chief embraced change, and the old-school, backward way of thinking was transformed into a shared mission to save animals. Cathy says, “Because of his demonstrated leadership and support of Paws for Life Utah, the police department, animal services and the community in general recognize the value that this partnership provides.”

After PFLU was created, its leaders met with the police chief and animal services staff to discuss the needs of the shelter and the community at large. A working agreement was created that defined roles, and close collaboration between PFLU and Heber Valley Animal Services subsequently improved daily operations at the shelter. It was determined that PFLU could step in as needed to operate the shelter, help care for the animals, clean the shelter, help with medical needs, and provide spay/neuter services and immunizations.

In addition, an animal control board was formed, comprising members from each city council as well as a representative from the county council, animal services and PFLU. This board is instrumental in ensuring that the needs of animal services and PFLU are being communicated.

Today, Cathy and Justin have offices in the shelter and are supervised by the police chief. The close partnership between PFLU and Heber Valley Animal Services is helping to sustain the no-kill status of the community.



A winning partnership

One of the biggest keys to no-kill success in Heber City is the close collaboration between PFLU and the HVAS. Here are some ways in which PFLU and the shelter work together:

- Hiring decisions are made jointly, with both groups coming to agreement on who to hire.
- PFLU meets monthly with the Heber City police chief, who runs the animal shelter.
- They set goals together and have an open line of communication.
- They share public relations efforts and a Facebook page.
- They have gained the trust of the city council, which backs the no-kill efforts.
- They put on joint fundraising, adoption and community events that deepen the partnership.
- Through the partnership, animals in the shelter are provided with health care, immunizations and other services as needed, whether it's a behavioral issue that must be addressed before adoption or simply basic training.

The PFLU and HVAS partnership is also contributing to making Utah a no-kill state. They have extended their outreach throughout Wasatch County as well as to other cities in Utah, pulling animals from kill shelters. They rescue both animals who are easily adopted and those who can be more difficult to place, such as seniors and animals with special needs.

There are still some challenges to overcome, but PFLU and the shelter are facing them together. For example, animals with extensive (and expensive) medical needs have at times overwhelmed the shelter. To raise the necessary funds to pay for medical care, they have successfully turned to the community and local media outlets for help. The partners also struggle with finding sources for money for spay/neuter, so they are always on the lookout for new avenues for grants.

In addition, the shelter sometimes sees more animals at intake than it can handle, so the partners have come up with creative solutions for moving animals out of the shelter, such as taking the overflow to a boarding facility that gives them a discount and working hard to expand the foster care program. And rescue groups in the area pull animals from the Heber shelter when they have space. At times, the shelter has also struggled with rehabilitating animals suffering from behavioral problems. Bringing a volunteer certified dog trainer on-board has helped a great deal.

Despite the challenges, PFLU considers its partnership with Heber Valley Animal Services to be a model for other municipalities and rescue organizations that want to work together to reduce the number of dogs and cats being killed in shelters.



Network of volunteers

Because the shelter has only three employees, PFLU and HVAS rely on their volunteers (a total of 250) to keep the shelter running smoothly. Volunteers assist at the shelter by walking the dogs, caring for the cats, cleaning cages and runs, and providing affection and exercise to help socialize the pets, which improves their chances of finding forever homes. PFLU looks for volunteers who share their mission to save the animals rather than looking for experienced shelter workers. “We look for people who are compassionate and who are there just to help the animals,” Cathy says.

As mentioned above, PFLU has a dedicated volunteer who is also a certified dog trainer. She works with dogs with behavioral issues at the shelter and continues to work with them after they’ve been adopted into forever homes.

WHAT WORKED

- Providing training for volunteers in the form of one-on-one mentoring (e.g., with a shelter technician to learn shelter protocol)
- Making sure volunteers clearly understand what their responsibilities are (e.g., by having them perform tasks while under the supervision of senior volunteers)
- Making sure volunteers know how much they’re appreciated (e.g., by giving them a free lunch at adoption events, having a member of the leadership team present at every event to thank volunteers, and holding an annual volunteer recognition event)
- Recruiting volunteers via Facebook and other social media channels
- Advertising for new volunteers at adoption events

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- Volunteers who have their own agendas
- Not being clear with volunteers about what their responsibilities are

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to bring in more dedicated volunteers
- Expanding volunteers’ roles as the organization grows



Foster program

Of the 250 volunteers, 115 of them also serve as foster parents, taking animals into their homes when they need more help, such as those who have special needs, or when the shelter is overcrowded. As with all volunteers, PFLU looks for foster families who are dedicated to saving animals. All potential foster volunteers are pre-screened before they can foster animals.

WHAT WORKED

- Giving foster volunteers a clear definition of their responsibilities via a detailed foster agreement that clearly describes those responsibilities
- Pre-screening potential foster volunteers through a foster care application and face-to-face or phone interviews
- Getting referrals of foster volunteers from other volunteers
- Increasing the communication between the foster coordinator and foster volunteers
- Defining the role of foster parents for specific types of animals, such as those with medical needs or those in hospice care
- Communicating the need for foster care volunteers on Facebook and other social media channels

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- Having a foster care manager who didn't have the time to communicate on a regular basis with foster volunteers, to ensure that their needs were being met
- Having foster volunteers who live more than an hour away from adoption events

WHAT'S NEXT

- Advertising the foster program at adoption and other community events
- Including an appeal for more foster parents in marketing and promotional materials
- Communicating the need for foster parents via PFLU's partnership with a leadership class at a middle school in Park City



Adoptions

When it comes to adoptions, the most important thing is to match the right person with the right pet. “We want to make sure there’s a good match and that the animal will be part of the family,” Cathy says. If an animal isn’t working out in her new home, the adopter can bring her back to the shelter and the shelter will refund the adoption fee.

The partnership found forever homes for 848 dogs and cats in 2015, up from 669 in 2014. In addition to adoptions at the shelter, PFLU and HVAS hold a number of off-site adoption events every year. Several Petco locations host adoption events twice a month, the partners participate in Best Friends Super Adoptions and local businesses host adoption events.

With support from a private donor, the cat area at the shelter was remodeled, so the cats can now roam freely rather than being housed in cages, which means happier cats and more cat adoptions. This success led to the city council approving a PFLU proposal for a new adoption center. It’s now part of the city’s five-year plan.

PFLU and HVAS know that one of the best ways to get shelter animals adopted is to put their photos and stories in as many places as possible, so potential adopters can see them. With that in mind, PFLU posts pictures and stories about adoptable pets on its Facebook page and other websites, including Petfinder.com, and promotes them in the local newspapers and on local television stations.

WHAT WORKED

- Getting adoptable pets’ photos and stories out into the world as much as possible
- Holding off-site adoption events to increase the number of animals going home (two adoption events per month at different Petco locations and about four others per year at different community events)

WHAT DIDN’T WORK

- Holding adoption events at businesses unrelated to pets (e.g., tractor supply store, sports-mens’ warehouse) and not advertising adequately that adoptable animals would be there

WHAT’S NEXT

- Opening an adoption center within the next two years
- Expanding outreach in Utah and pulling animals from shelters in rural areas



Spay/neuter program

PFLU believes that one of the best ways to achieve no-kill is to prevent unwanted litters of dogs and cats. With that in mind, PFLU strives to educate the public on the importance of spaying and neutering. To consistently address the need for people to spay or neuter their pets, PFLU volunteers hand out information at the farmers' market and adoption events, and discuss the importance of spay/neuter on local TV talk shows.

All animals coming into the shelter are spayed or neutered and vaccinated. There are three veterinarians who do the surgeries at low cost. And twice a month, volunteers drive animals from the shelter to Best Friends Animal Society's Orem clinic for spaying or neutering.

In addition, low-cost spay/neuter and vaccinations are offered to pets in the community. PFLU received a grant from the State of Utah for low-income families to have their pets spayed or neutered for free. Also, PFLU periodically has a free spay day at the animal clinic in Heber City and conducts them on a regular basis for low-income families.





Community cats

When PFLU began, the community cat situation was out of control, so building an effective trap-neuter-return (TNR) program was an early goal of PFLU. The organization developed a great network of volunteers and veterinarians who work together to trap, neuter and then return community cats to their neighborhoods. The volunteers also find barns and other safe settings for cats who can't be returned to their original locations.

PFLU and HVAS collaborate closely to save the lives of community cats. PFLU holds trainings to show people how to perform TNR for these cats, and there's a trap loan program at the shelter. When someone brings community cats into the shelter, the cats are spayed or neutered and returned to their colonies. When semi-feral kittens are brought in, PFLU volunteers work with them to get them socialized, and then they're put up for adoption.

One important asset to the TNR program is having a veterinarian who is available most nights. The partnership now has a veterinarian who allows people to drop off community cats at his office at random times. It's especially critical in the hot or cold months, when time is of the essence. Cathy says, "This is so useful because we never know if we are going to actually trap any cats and how many we will get. Also, we cannot allow cats to sit out in the cold or heat for long, so the timing needs to be flexible."

WHAT WORKED

- Communicating with the community and educating them about community cats through newspaper ads, flyers and promotion of the free TNR program
- Training people how to do TNR
- Socializing semi-feral kittens

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- At first, not having a dedicated veterinarian available at random hours

WHAT'S NEXT

- Continuing to reduce the number of community cats through TNR
- Extending outreach regarding community cats to surrounding counties



Community education

Heber City is a small town in a fairly rural area and, historically, the community wasn't particularly interested in no-kill, nor were they advocating for the welfare of pets, who were considered to be livestock by some. It was a big challenge to overcome the mentality of some community members, many of whom believed that no-kill meant, among other things, allowing dangerous dogs to be adopted into homes.

Cathy says, "We make it a point, at every opportunity, to let the council and general public know that we do believe in rehabilitation for dogs with aggression issues. We have a designated trainer and we also have training facilities where we can send our animal-aggressive dogs. It's a learning process for people to see and understand behavioral changes in dogs. Our trainer conducts regular sessions, open to the public on this very subject, which is quite helpful in getting people to make the shift as well."



Presenters



Cathy Boruch

Cathy Boruch is the executive director and founder of Paws for Life Utah, a nonprofit, volunteer-run organization dedicated to helping find homes for dogs, cats and other at-risk animals in the municipal shelter.

A no-kill advocate, Cathy is a supporter of partnerships among animal shelters and rescue groups to bring no-kill to communities across the nation. Cathy has been a lifelong advocate of animal rescue and has worked with the challenges of large-scale metropolitan areas, as well as growing rural communities that have a critical need for animal rescue and rehabilitation.

Prior to founding Paws for Life Utah, Cathy worked for Amkor Technology as their senior vice president of global human resources. She also worked for Boeing Corporation for many years, holding various leadership positions. Cathy was a board member and vice president of development and endowment for the Arizona Humane Society. She was also an advisory board member for Friends of Animals Utah.

Cathy and her husband, John, reside in Heber City, Utah, with their two dogs, cat and three horses, and the many moose, deer and wildlife that frequently visit.



Justin Hatch

Justin Hatch has been with Heber Valley Animal Services for 15½ years and has served as supervisor for 11 years. He served as secretary for the Utah Animal Control Officers Association for nine years and has been president of the association since 2014.

Justin has been recognized as Officer of the Year by both the Utah Animal Control Officers Association and the Heber City Police Department. The Heber Valley Animal Shelter has twice been recognized by Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets in Utah. Justin and Cathy Boruch with Paws for Life Utah are the leaders in a coalition showing that rescue groups and shelters can have a working partnership that changes animals' lives for the better.

Justin has a yellow Lab, a shih tzu and a Maine coon cat. He has been married to his high school sweetheart, Natalie, for 25 years, and they have three children.