

Formative Lifesaving Assessment

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading national animal welfare organization dedicated to ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters. In addition to running lifesaving programs in partnership with more than 2,200 animal welfare groups across the country, Best Friends has regional centers in New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Salt Lake City, and operates the nation's largest no-kill sanctuary for companion animals. Founded in 1984, Best Friends is a pioneer in the no-kill movement and has helped reduce the number of animals killed in shelters nationwide from 17 million per year to about 1.5 million. That means there are still more than 4,100 dogs and cats killed every day in shelters, just because they don't have safe places to call home. We are determined to get that number to zero by the year 2025. Working collaboratively with shelters, rescue groups, other organizations and you, we will end the killing and Save Them All[®]. For more information, visit bestfriends.org.

Purpose

Best Friends Animal Society's shelter outreach team provides customized assessments and support for individual animal shelters and the communities they serve. Through the outreach program, each community receives a shelter operations and field services assessment (if applicable) designed to identify specific areas of need and help implement best practices in animal welfare. Ongoing support is also provided to ensure new programs and practices are sustainable and successful. Our outreach team uses a collaborative approach to each shelter partnership and believes that every shelter should have the opportunity to determine its own organizational needs based on lifesaving impact in that community. As a rule, we avoid a "one size fits all" approach because, just like every individual animal, each shelter and its community has its own individual personality and needs.

On March 12–13 of 2018, members of the Best Friends shelter outreach team did a two-day assessment of shelter operations. This document provides the findings and recommendations for Caddo Parish Animal Shelter (CPAS). The basis of the request for an assessment was implementing industry best practices to increase lifesaving, so this report will focus on areas in need of improvement regarding main operational activities and community impact. Areas where improvement is needed will be highlighted and followed by recommendations based on today's sheltering best practices. Once accepted by CPAS leadership, staff at Best Friends will work with CPAS to create an implementation plan and schedule periodic meetings to discuss progress and challenges.

Defining the opportunity

CPAS has made progress over the years supporting their community and reducing the euthanasia of companion animals; however, due to issues with their database it is impossible to statistically show the improvements and the animals most currently at risk. CPAS is currently working to clean up their PetPoint database and begin utilizing the system to the greatest extent. Despite the lack of statistics, it is evident that CPAS is operating well over capacity for dogs, and many improvement can be made to increase their live outcomes. While it did not appear that they were also operating over capacity for cats, many improvements can be made to reduce intake and increase positive outcomes for cats as well. CPAS is in a prime position to strategically improve the internal culture of the organization, adopt industry best practices, streamline processes, and take their community to no-kill status.

Population management and housing

The area of population management and housing at the CPAS animal shelter is by far the most pressing issue at the shelter and requires the most immediate attention. Multiple dogs in single cages, resource guarding happening among them, fights breaking out within the cages themselves, the difficulty in keeping the cages sanitized, and the failure to provide each individual animal with a plan for a positive outcome at intake are but a few of the issues we witnessed during this assessment. Admittedly, the lack of staffing plays a large role in what we observed. With some simple changes, immediate improvements can be made with the current staffing levels; however, we recommend that the government lift the current hiring freeze and allow CPAS to become fully staffed in order to truly fix the current situation.

There is also an immediate need to restructure the dog housing so that the dogs are not in the kennels while they are being cleaned, as is currently happening in the area that houses the dogs on bite quarantine. In cases where specific dogs cannot be removed from their kennels because it poses a staff safety risk, those dogs must be housed in a kennel with the ability to block the dog on one side of the kennel while the other side is being cleaned. Young puppies should be isolated from the general population because they lack immunity to disease. It is recommended that the quarantine area be utilized for these young puppies, and the kennels currently being used for them with the guillotines be utilized for those dogs on bite quarantine.

Population management needs to start before the animals even come into the building. In the field, the officers are picking up animals, such as cats in traps that are causing a nuisance, owner surrenders and stray animals. Trapped cats should not be picked up unless they are sick or injured, or for sterilization and returning to the exact location where they were found. Currently, officers will pick up a cat in a trap (even if the cat is wearing a collar and tag) if a property owner is complaining about the cat's presence. (There is no law in the parish prohibiting residents from allowing their cats to roam at large, provided they have a collar and tag.) Doing so instead of releasing the cat results in an unnecessary increase in feline intake and should be avoided at all costs.

Field services are moving toward picking up owner surrenders only in exigent circumstances, such as owners who are elderly or have physical disabilities that don't allow them to bring the animal to the shelter themselves. However, they are currently still picking up owners' animals at their request, out of fear that the animals will be abandoned. Reducing these owner-surrender pickups would result in only stray animals being picked up, and allow the field staff to focus on priority calls for service. A comprehensive return-to-owner-in-the-field program would reduce this number even more. (Due to the issues surrounding the shelter's database, we are unable to estimate how much intake would be reduced.)

As for owner surrenders in the shelter, a managed intake program should be implemented. While this assessment is filled with industry best practices that should be adopted, implementing managed admissions must be a top priority to allow the staff to control the incoming flow of animals. (Managed admissions refers to any form of regulating or scheduling intake. It can be thought of as controlling the "how" and "when" of intake, but not necessarily the "who.")

This is a cornerstone best practice that will allow Caddo Parish the ability to implement other industry best practices in order to fully support their community and achieve no-kill status. The key to a successful managed intake program is to provide resources to the animals' owners in hopes that the issues leading up to the surrender can be resolved, or that pet owners will rehome their animals on their own without having to come to the shelter.

Once an animal arrives at the shelter, it is the obligation of the shelter staff to start planning for a positive outcome for that animal, which includes fully vaccinating each cat and dog upon intake. This enables the staff to start moving the animals to where they need to go as soon as their hold time is complete. The objective here is to reduce the average length of stay (LOS), to free up much-needed cage space for when it is necessary, and to maximize cage space on the adoption floor to prevent overcrowding in the stray area.

Recommendations:

- Work with Best Friends to implement a managed admissions program and return-to-owner-in-the-field program, which will include a strategic implementation plan and mentorship throughout the process.
- Train field officers and dispatch staff in community cat nuisance-mitigation techniques.
- Fully vaccinate each animal on intake. Administering core vaccinations to all animals at intake is a critical practice in minimizing infectious disease and preventing widespread outbreaks. Vaccines are the best defense we have against some of the most serious, and sometimes deadly, contagious diseases that are of concern to animal shelters.
 - For cats, this means administration of the FVRCP vaccination, which provides protection against panleukopenia and the two upper respiratory viruses, herpes and calici, at the time of intake.

- For dogs, this means giving both the DA2PP vaccination, which provides protection against distemper and parvo as well as adenovirus and parainfluenza, as well as an intranasal vaccination containing Bordetella and parainfluenza with or without adenovirus at intake.
- Resolve the PetPoint database issue as quickly as possible, so that each animal currently in the shelter can be accounted for. Let Best Friends know if issues are not resolved and you need assistance.
- Perform daily rounds with representatives from each department, reviewing the records and status of each animal in the shelter. During assessment, a total of 22 cage cards were missing and two dogs were unaccounted for. With daily rounds, this would have been avoided.
- Discontinue the requirement that a veterinarian sign off on all animals prior to them being made available for adoption.
- Implement a fast-track program for highly adoptable animals on intake.
- Ensure that all adoption cages/kennels are filled at all times. Prevent bottlenecks from occurring and move adoptable animals up front as soon as a cage/kennels becomes open.
- Implement kennel enrichment for both cats and dogs.
- Secure all runs with carabiners.
- Take steps to reduce group housing as often as possible.
- Create a foster-to-adopt program.
- Hold staff accountable for sanitation throughout the building. During the assessment, puppies were housed in large Shoreline cage banks and while the interiors of the cages were sanitized in the morning, the external sections were not, leading to urine and feces dripping down from the cages above into the cages below. In one instance, a dog was diagnosed with parvo and the cage he was housed in prior to euthanasia had not been properly sanitized before housing other animals there.
- Heavy usage of bleach was observed. CPAS should switch to Rescue solution, which would also get rid of the need for using Pine-Sol to mitigate odors. Pine-Sol has been shown to be toxic to certain animals. During the assessment, most animals in the stray hold area were observed sneezing, and the veterinarian believes it was a result of the excessive bleach usage.
- Become familiar with "[capacity for care](#)" guidelines.
- Develop a surrender prevention program for citizens who wish to relinquish animals; utilize [Adopt-A-Pet](#).

Additional resources:

- [No-Kill Animal Shelters](#)
- [Best Friends blog – Call it owner surrender or on-demand dumping of pets, the policy needs to change](#)
- [Working Toward Positive Outcomes \(CCP\)](#)

Transport

While other recommendations throughout this assessment need to be implemented to resolve the root causes of the dog overpopulation situation, transporting animals north to no-kill communities can help address the immediate need. Many of the dogs in CPAS appear to fit the criteria for what receiving shelters are looking to import. We strongly recommend that CPAS participate in a transport program to alleviate operating above capacity for care for dogs and to give the shelter the ability to focus on long-term solutions.

Recommendations:

- Contact the ASPCA by emailing relocation@aspca.org to get involved as a source shelter for their relocation program.
- Become familiar with the [Best Friends Animal Transport Volunteer Playbook](#) and [other](#) best practice guidelines.

Customer service

While the staff are overwhelmingly pleasant, there is a tendency for them to not view each person coming into the shelter as an individual and to make assumptions that negatively impact the outcome of certain situations. In large part, managing intake will reduce the burnout and the pressure creating some of this burnout, but other critical actions can be taken to help the staff begin each interaction with no prejudice and in a positive tone.

During the assessment, there were three families who were all interested in adopting a cat that had been promised to a rescue group. All three were denied the adoption because the cat had been promised to rescue. All three were visibly upset by this decision, and two of the families left very upset, and almost certainly told their friends and family about their experience at the shelter. While the third family was still in the lobby, an argument between staff ensued over whether or not to give the cat to the family or to continue to hold the cat for the rescue group. This debate took place in front of the family in the main lobby. Ultimately, the director decided to let the family adopt the cat, and had the rescue group contacted to let them know.

Recommendations:

- Welcome each person to the facility in a warm and friendly tone, asking how they may be helped.

- Hold any disagreements or discussions between staff out of public view and only let the decision-makers discuss the issue.
- Train caregivers and volunteers to answer questions from potential adopters in the kennel area, and help them with visiting with an animal or the decision-making process to adopt.
- Have staff and volunteers utilize the GUTS approach: Greet, Use names (theirs and yours), Thank, Smile. Also, remember to invite them to come back.
- Ensure that staff become familiar with the [customer service materials](#) presented on the Maddie's Fund website.
- Cross-train and rotate staff.

Additional resources:

- [Maximize Lifesaving Results: Positive Interactions and Adoption Success Through Savvy Customer Service – Diane Blankenburg](#)
 - [Handout 1](#)
 - [Handout 2](#)
 - [Handout 3](#)

Policies

At the time of our assessment, shelter management was actively working on a series of standard operating procedures (SOPs). We would welcome the opportunity to review and provide input for any (or all) of the SOPs being created.

Resources:

- Example: [Best Friends Policies and Position Statements](#)
- [No-Kill Strategies: Community and Shelter Policies that Work – Arlyn Bradshaw, Scott Giacoppo](#)
- [How to Start an Animal Rescue or Other Nonprofit Animal Organization \(see the section “Define policies and standards”\)](#)
- [Working the System: Understanding Good Policies and How to Get Them in Your Community \(Arlyn Bradshaw, Scott Giacoppo\)](#)

Staff structure

Staff need to have a clearly defined reporting structure to ensure consistency and leadership. Conflicts regarding overlapping areas of responsibility were observed during the assessment, and unity of command was absent. Job responsibilities for each position need to be clearly defined and all staff need to be aware of those responsibilities. A chain of command needs to be

incorporated and honored both ways: communicating decisions from the top down and addressing issues from the bottom up (i.e., staff who have an issue should address it with their immediate supervisor first).

Recommendations:

- The organizational chart needs to have a horizontal structure and titles need to be consistent and accurately reflect position responsibilities.
- Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly articulated to each staff member.
- Place one person in charge of all kennel operations, including daily care, intake and adoptions. This will allow that person to specialize in all aspects of shelter operations and not become bogged down with other duties, such as medical or field operations.
- Create consistent and transparent titles for staff and reevaluate current individuals in those roles.

Culture

Overwhelmingly, the staff are proud to work for Caddo Parish and proud of the work they are doing, but they are on the brink of burnout and are overly taxed on a daily basis. Due to a government-imposed hiring freeze, there is barely enough staff to provide daily care for the animals. The staff who are there, particularly supervisory staff and kennel staff, have far too many responsibilities on a daily basis to operate at peak performance. This will almost certainly result in high turnover and low morale being a constant problem for shelter operations, thus costing the parish more money in the long run. Some simple steps, in addition to managed intake, should be taken to reduce stress and empower the staff.

Recommendations:

- Communicate the urgency to the local government and have the hiring freeze lifted.
- Job titles need to be updated to more accurately reflect staff duties and have a positive connotation.
- Join the [Best Friends Network](#) so you are eligible for the below and can partake in all the other benefits we offer our partners.
- Have each staff member sign up to be part of the Best Friends [Digital Community](#) and join the [Best Friends Network partners](#) Facebook group so they can connect with others in lateral roles across the industry.
- Have each staff member sign up for [ASPCA Pro](#) and the Maddie's Fund "[Chew On This](#)" blog.

- Include formal training opportunities (e.g., conferences) in the annual budget.
- Incorporate team-building activities into meetings.

Additional resources:

- [Animal Caretaker Burnout: When Hearts Are Larger Than Hands](#)

Communication

Most staff have a desire to be kept informed about what is going on at all levels of the organization, from appropriate highlights from city meetings to basic communication between departments. Each department appears to be siloed into their own responsibilities. There is ample opportunity to work inter-departmentally to not only inform but to also empower.

Recommendations:

- Conduct short daily team meetings to go over the highlights of daily rounds.
- Front-line staff should have regular team meetings in which organizational updates are discussed, and they would be in a position to openly discuss issues without fear of reprimand.
- Weekly organizational updates should be emailed to staff, as well as printed out and posted in key locations.
- There should be full transparency with the staff regarding statistics, departmental happenings, and any shelter-relevant information from the local parish government.

Software

It is imperative that Caddo Parish resolve the issues with the PetPoint shelter software program. This will drastically improve the shelter's ability to track the animals in the system and keep better statistical data on the animals they serve. It will also allow for greater amounts and types of data to be collected, which will result in the organization having a much better understanding of trends in intake, length of stay, reasons for surrender and demographics.

Resource:

- [Shelter Animals Count resources page](#)

Volunteer and foster programs

While it is commendable that a volunteer program is somewhat in place, a huge opportunity is being missed by not recruiting and retaining volunteers from the community. In addition, a foster

program needs to be implemented to substantially increase the number of animals that Caddo Parish can positively impact and to further engage the community. Research proves that the main reason people do not help out is because they are not asked. People want to help out, they want to be part of the solution, so it's imperative that CPAS reaches out to the community and asks for help.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the existing volunteer program by assigning a particular staff member to lead this critical program.
- Create a foster program that includes a foster-to-adopt aspect to prevent animals from ever having to come back to the shelter, as they can be rehomed through the foster families.
- Have leadership and staff review and become familiar with the following:
 - Best Friends [volunteer resource](#)
 - Additional Best Friends volunteer resources: located [here](#)
 - Best Friends [foster resource](#)
- Create a contract or code of ethics that volunteers and foster families sign, as a means of holding them accountable if they are not fulfilling expectations. (Best Friends can provide a template.)
- Schedule regular trainings and orientations for both volunteers and foster families.
- Have a list of daily tasks for volunteers to sign up for.
- Utilize the information found in the Maddie's Fund Learning Center regarding [foster care](#) programs.

Additional resources:

- [Best Friends Volunteer Handbook](#)
- [NKLA Fostering FAQs](#)
- [Kitten Foster Manual](#)
- [Dog Foster Care Manual](#)
- [Cat Foster Care Manual](#)
- [Pet Fostering](#)

Adoptions

It is crucial that CPAS be open for adoptions at hours that are convenient for the public to adopt, such as evenings and weekends, which are the most common times for families to adopt. Currently the shelter is open for adoptions from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday. The shelter also has additional hours for animal drop-off every day (except Sundays) from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. These hours make it easier to give

up an animal than to adopt an animal or to pick up a lost animal, which is the reverse of how it should be.

To better serve the community and animals alike, it is imperative that these hours be revisited, and that more weekends and evening opportunities exist for animal reclaim and animal adoption. Also, by providing hours on Sunday for animal reclaim, CPAS would be able to honor the true four-day stray hold as opposed to having to hold animals for five days, thereby automatically reducing LOS by one day. Adjusting staff hours and engaging volunteers can allow for this without increasing staff levels.

As an industry, animal welfare is moving away from adoptions as a source of revenue and not relying on adoption fees to balance the budget. While adoption fees are low at CPAS (only \$50 per adoption), it is key that CPAS not rely on those fees and have the bandwidth to run specials to entice people to come in to adopt. In addition, the cash-only requirement is another barrier to increasing adoption numbers.

Recommendations:

- Extend adoption hours into a few evenings a week, with the ultimate goal of being open for adoptions every night of the week.
- All staff should read about and become proficient with open adoption concepts.

Recommended resources:

- [Adopters welcome manual](#)
- [Open adoptions](#)
- Review and implement Humane Network's [comprehensive 10-step guide](#) to establishing a "culture of adoption."
- Update the adoption process to incorporate open adoption concepts and a conversational style. Recommended resource: [Achieving Successful Adoptions Through Conversation, Not Interrogation \(Todd Cramer\)](#).
- Create posters and signage that show the public what each animal receives at the shelter and the estimated cost per service.
- Conduct reduced-fee adoptions whenever possible. Read about the benefits of reduced-fee adoptions [here](#).
- When transferring animals to a rescue partner, transfer ownership of the animal in the same manner as an adoption.
- Utilize alternative fundraising to move away from adoption revenue as a source of income.

Additional resources:

- [Dog Adoption Survey](#)
- [Cat Adoption Survey](#)
- [Overcoming Adoption Barriers Research: Executive Summary](#)
- [Pet Adoption: Barriers and Solutions](#)
- [Tips and Tricks to Increase Adoptions \(webinar\)](#)

Enrichment

While it is obvious that the staff care a great deal about each individual animal, enrichment is not something the staff incorporate into the daily routine. While no shelter environment is ideal for giving animals the freedom to express normal behaviors and freedom from fear and distress, there are many easy and free ways to provide enrichment in shelters, which will help assure that the five freedoms are being met. Enrichment also plays a key role in reducing the likelihood of stress-induced illness, increasing adoptability of the animals, and preventing behavioral problems that can be created in a shelter environment.

Recommendations:

- Assure that the five freedoms are being met for each individual animal throughout the animal's stay at the shelter. The five freedoms are:
 - **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst**
By ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor.
 - **Freedom from Discomfort**
By providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
 - **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease**
By prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
 - **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior**
By providing sufficient space, proper facilities and the company of the animal's own kind.
 - **Freedom from Fear and Distress**
By ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.
- Implement enrichment for dogs and cats. Recommended resources:
 - [Enrichment for shelter cats](#)
 - [Do-it-yourself enrichment ideas](#)
 - [Enrichment for shelter dogs](#)
 - [Dog enrichment](#)
 - [Kennel enrichment](#)
 - [Dogs Playing for Life](#)
 - [Hiding places for cats](#)
 - [Enrichment on a Dime \(webinar\)](#)
- Consider applying for Jackson Galaxy's [Cat Pawsitive](#) program to implement a full enrichment program for cats.

Reduced-fee and free spay/neuter

Having informational brochures for the shelter staff and animal control officers to give to the public on spay/neuter and TNR is essential. The brochures should highlight the importance of spay/neuter, indicate where in the community services are available, and provide additional information on how to obtain reduced-fee or free services. Being able to provide free or low-cost spay/neuter of owned animals is key to reducing the population of homeless animals in the community and a cornerstone to reducing shelter intake. Spay/neuter vouchers also need to be available for staff to disperse.

Recommendations:

- Utilize the resources about spay/neuter provided on AnimalSheltering.org.
- To create CPAS spay/neuter brochures, ask permission to borrow content from other agencies, such as [this example](#).
- Utilize [Network Partners: Fix at Four Tool Kit](#) for engaging the community on the importance of spay/neuter.
- Collaborate with Robinson's Rescue to include their services on materials.

Additional resources:

- [NKLA Spay/Neuter FAQs](#)
- [Spay/Neuter CCP Flyer](#)
- [Spay or Neuter Your Pet](#)

Community programs and relations

This is an area that all of the shelter staff are enthusiastic about and with which they are fully on board. The shelter recently conducted one of their first low-cost rabies vaccination clinics. They were able to provide 400 free rabies shots and a handful of low-cost microchips. Recently, the parish arranged to have billboards promoting spay/neuter placed into the most at-risk neighborhoods. Although the shelter does not currently engage in trap-neuter-return programs, there are organizations in the community that have vibrant community cat programs underway. We strongly recommend that CPAS become actively involved with these programs and develop a good working relationship with those involved.

Unfortunately, CPAS has received some very negative media attention in the past, but now has the opportunity to shift from being the "pound" to being a fun, adoption-centric destination in the community. By making some simple adjustments that will subtly influence the public, CPAS can be seen as the true humane-minded, compassion-driven agency that it is.

Recommendations:

- Host regular meetings with animal control staff to discuss outreach strategies, events, promotions and messaging.
- Provide animal control officers with branded materials to hand out to the public.
- Encourage animal control officers to attend neighborhood meetings, visit dog parks without giving citations, get to know the owners of local animal businesses (e.g., groomers, pet supply stores) and be present at community events.
- Utilize [HSUS' Pets For Life](#) model for increasing direct community services.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to strategically place educational and informational materials throughout the community.
- Create and maintain pages on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (which can be done very easily by volunteers).
- Research online neighborhood groups to join, such as Nextdoor.com, and other county groups.
- Identify animal-friendly reporters in the region and call upon them to feature CPAS in articles of interest.
- Be transparent with the public by posting statistics online and using them as a call to action to increase community involvement.
- Utilize animals in your care to promote the shelter, using their stories to show who CPAS is as an organization.
- Reference "[Understanding and Developing Your Brand.](#)"
- Revisit and revise the shelter's mission statement to reflect the current vision and philosophies, and post it clearly for all to see.
- Create a vision statement for staff and the public to provide a clear path on where CPAS is going.

Additional resources:

- [Community Outreach and Engagement \(CCP\)](#)
- [Helping Pets by Supporting People: A Comprehensive Approach to Community Welfare](#)
- [Judgment-Free Zones: Building Relationships in Underserved Communities to Keep Dogs in Homes \(Maureen Keenan, Kelsey Westbrook\)](#)
- [Media Relations for Animal Organizations](#)
- [Local Media Tips](#)
- [Social Media Information and Tips](#)

Conclusion

While the number of animals, dogs in particular, coming into the shelter is overwhelming, we believe that CPAS has the potential to become a no-kill community and a local, regional and possibly national leader in the field of animal control. In order to do this, the recommendations of this assessment need to be considered an agency priority, and strategically incorporated into the daily operations. Best Friends Animal Society stands by CPAS to assist with the strategy and implementation provided that leadership is in full support. We will continue to support and work hand-in-hand with the shelter staff and leadership on sustaining CPAS's success.