



Adopters Welcome!

Suzanne D'Alonzo

Manager, Strategic Engagement HSUS



ADOPT

DONATE

VOLUNTEER

About Us

[Board & Staff](#)

[Community Partners](#)

[Publications](#)

[Employment](#)

[Press Room](#)

About Us

Love is adoptable

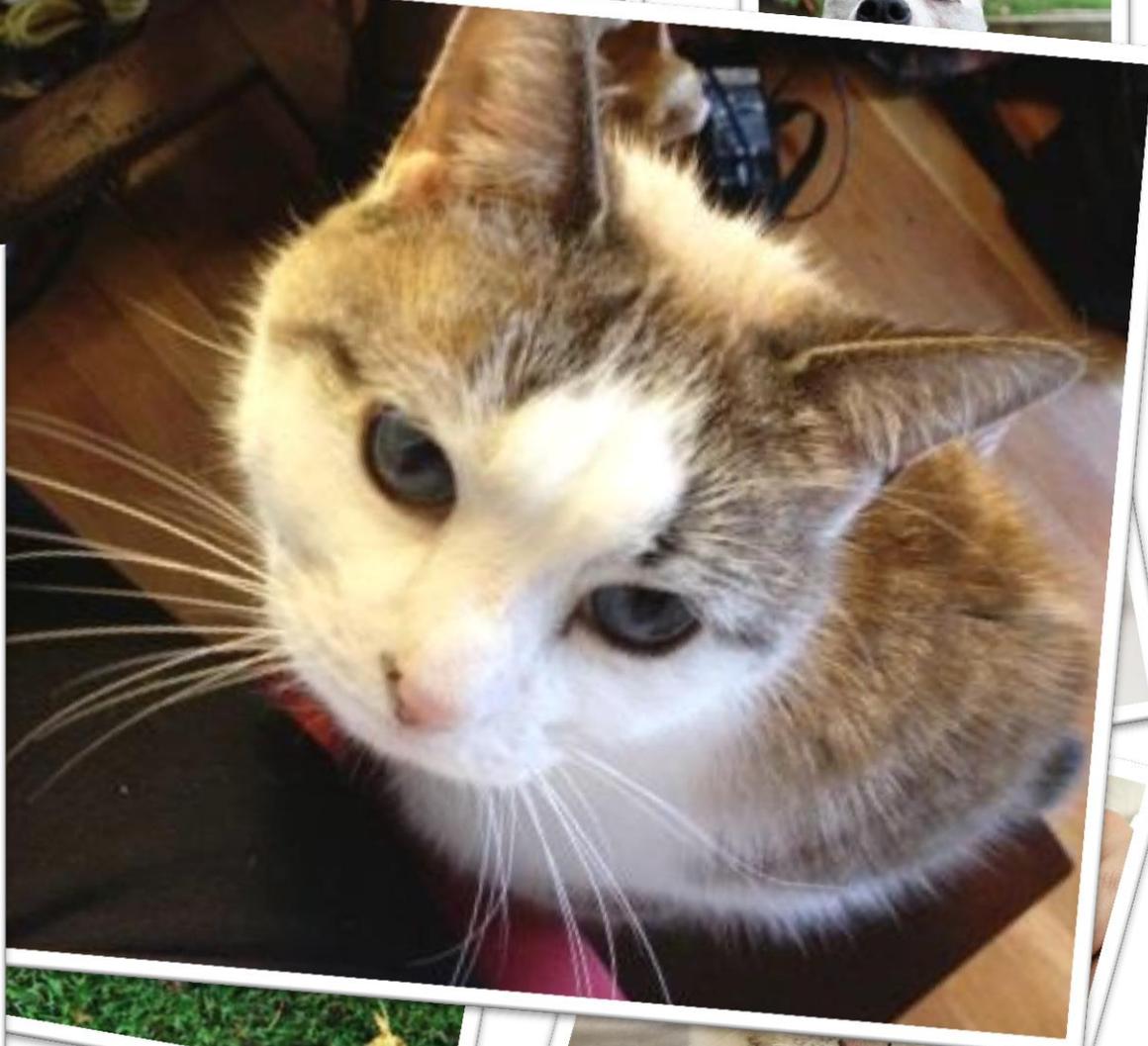
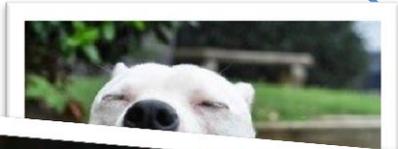
A Message from the Executive Director

I first entered the animal welfare field almost twenty ago. When I look back I realize that I have learned many things over the years and have evolved and changed certain opinions and feelings. I also realize that many of my core beliefs remain the same. I started working in an animal shelter after leaving a career in human services. People would ask me all the time "Were you tired of working with people?" I say the same thing today that I said then. "No, I love working with people but working in an animal shelter gives me the opportunity to work with both people and animals."



“If we start from a perspective that people are coming to us with the best intentions, we will have a much better success rate of finding life-long matches.”

-Carmine DiCenso, ED, Providence Animal Rescue League



Adopters Welcome!

The **negativity bias**^[1] refers to the notion that, even when of equal intensity, unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and events (e.g., traumatic events) have a greater impact on our decision-making processes than neutral or positive experiences. In other words, some negative experiences have a greater impact on a person's decision-making than an equally emotional positive experience. This has been investigated in the context of the formation of risk perception, learning, and memory, and decision making and risk considerations. -Wikipedia

Negativity bias

Tendency to be influenced by negative experiences more than neutral or positive experiences, which can impact our decision making and assessment of risk.

Adopters Welcome!

Cause for surrender/intake	Effect on adoption policies
Too many 	Require s/n for pets at home
Stray 	Adopt indoor-only cats/dogs to homes with fenced yards
Landlord issues 	Verify all renters have permission to own pets prior to adoption
Cost 	Check with veterinarian to make sure all current pets are up to date

Adopters Welcome! 

Adoption Forum I 1999

Adoption Forum II 2003

“The widely
has led many
reconsider the
processes to
open and give
and families

Illusion of control
A belief that we control
uncontrollable events. It is
stronger when there is an
emotional need to control
the outcome.

control was a
throughout the
truth is we
control the
adoption -
before the pet is
microchipped
ed.”

Adopters Welcome!

Confirmation bias, also called **myside bias**, is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. [\[N\]](#)
[inductive reasoning](#)
information search is stronger for [e](#)
People also tend to [e](#)
position. Biases [e](#)
explain [attitud](#)
even though [t](#)
[perseverance](#)
false), the irrationality [e](#)
encountered early in a series) and [illusory correlation](#) (when people falsely perceive an association between two events or situations). -Wikipedia

Confirmation bias

Tendency to consider information that confirms our beliefs, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. The effect is also stronger for emotionally charged issues.

Adopters Welcome!

Cats and dogs living in American homes (in millions)



Cats and dogs taken in by U.S. shelters annually



fewer than 6% of pets overall entering shelters each year.

Estimated number of cats and dogs in American homes –AVMA 2012

Estimated number of animals entering shelters in America each year – HSUS 2014

Adopters Welcome!



The majority of pets are doing ok!

Adopters Welcome!

The overwhelming majority: loved and safe

Halloween, Christmas, and Easter are over	You go home and think about it for a day	We “approve” you
We inspect your home	You bring in your pets for a meeting	You bring in all members of your household
You get your current pets spayed or neutered	You install a fence	Your children grow up
You fill out an application	We call your vet	We see proof of home ownership

Adopters Welcome!

Barriers have Risks

- Longer stays risk quality of life.
- Resources divert from other pets in **your community** that need you.
- Pets & people are cut off from safety nets.
- Less humane options are fueled as support gets limited.
- *Euthanasia risk increases... even if not directly experienced.*



Adopters Welcome!

The overwhelming majority: loved and safe

Halloween, Christmas, and Easter are over	You go home and think about it for a day	We “approve” you
We inspect your home	You bring in your pets for a meeting	You bring in all members of your household
You get your current pets spayed or neutered	You install a fence	Your children grow up
You fill out an application	We call your vet	We see proof of home ownership

Adopters Welcome!



Proactive Approach to Adoption

- Let the “Positives” in
- Attract & welcome adopters
- Reward their choice
- Set them up for success
- Support them if they need it

Adopters Welcome!

Four Steps

1

Implement policies that **remove barriers** and **increase options**

2

Rely on **conversations** instead of applications

3

Develop marketing that **overcomes barriers**

4

Train your team

Adopters Welcome!



NEW

Adopters Welcome — DIY —

First there was Adopters Welcome, the manual and webinar series to help find, engage and support more adopters. Now, putting Adopters Welcome into practice is easier than ever with our Do it Yourself (DIY) action plan.

Check out our new resources to jump-start an Adopters Welcome program at your shelter or rescue.

animalsheltering.org/adopterswelcomediy



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Adopters Welcome!

Step 1

Implement policies that **remove barriers and **increase options** for homeless pets in your community**

Automatic No's

Extra requirements

Built-in delays

Adopters Welcome!

Traditional Adoption Policies...

So You Think You Can Just Adopt a Dog?

The New York Times

Has Adopting Pets Become Too Difficult?

abcNEWS

No Pet For You

Want to adopt a dog or cat? Prepare for an inquisition at the animal rescue.

Slate

Are Shelters Too Picky With Potential Adopters?

 **THE DOGINGTON POST**
THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: ALL ABOUT DOGS

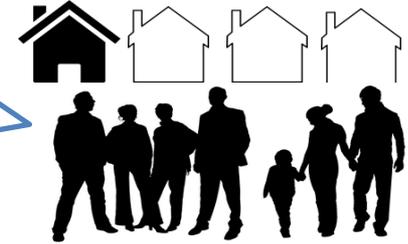
Adopters Welcome!

Who your policies impact:

Your animals



Your community & its pets



Your *potential* adopters

Your *actual* adopters

Your competition

Your agency



Adopters Welcome!

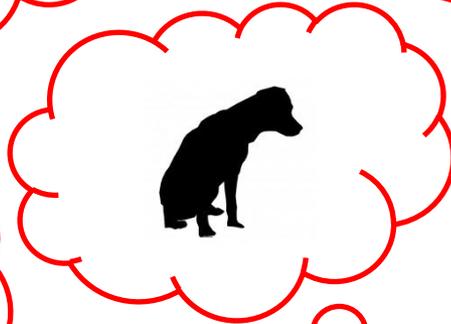
If policy is "Landlord approval required..."



How was it?
I'm looking
for a dog...



We need more
time, space,
and \$! And a
home for Frida!



Well, we
tried to
adopt!

Hell yes I
have
puppies!



Adopters Welcome!

If policy is "Support renters instead of policing them..."



Adoption is the only option!



Thanks for the tip!



Now we can help Digger!



Maybe I should go back to school...



Adopters Welcome!

Use persuasion to help cats live indoors.

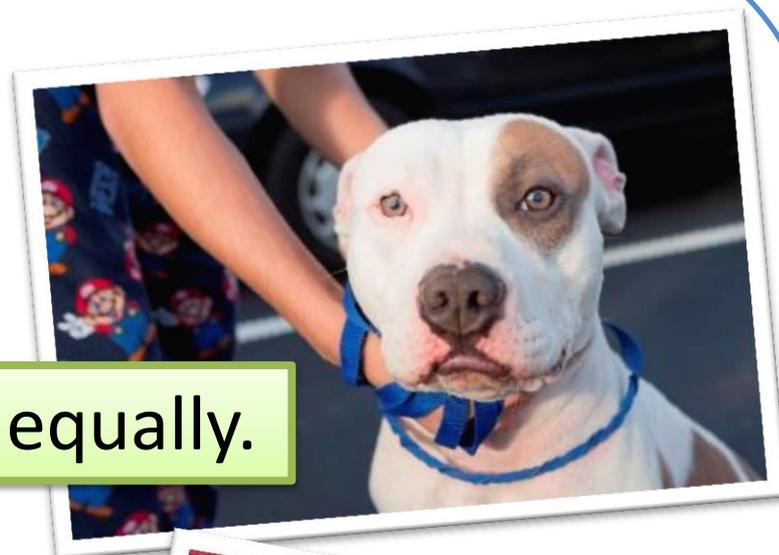
64-68% of owned cats are kept inside at least at night. This stat is on the rise!



Adopters Welcome!

**“I agree to restrain the dog either by
leash or fence when it is outdoors.”
- a Sighthound rescue**

Treat all dog breeds and types equally.

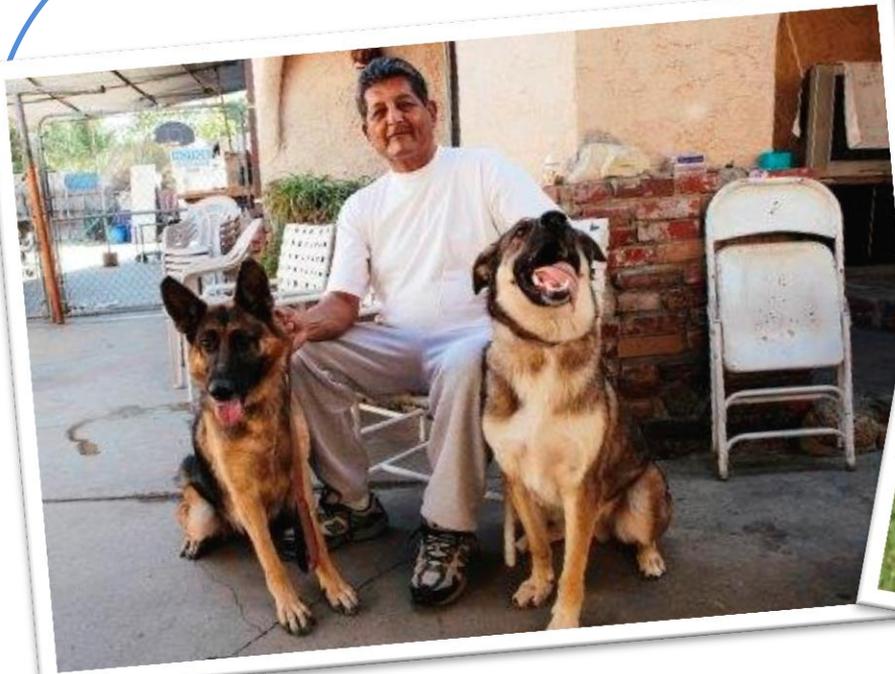


**“Do you have a
completely fenced-in
yard, or is there any
part of your yard that
is completely fenced
in?”**

**-a different Sighthound
rescue**



Adopters Welcome!



Provide tips on how to
intro new pets, don't
require "meet-n-greet"
unless adopter requests it.

Adopters Welcome!

Use persuasion to address declawing.



Adopters Welcome!

Support homes long-term instead of investigating them once.



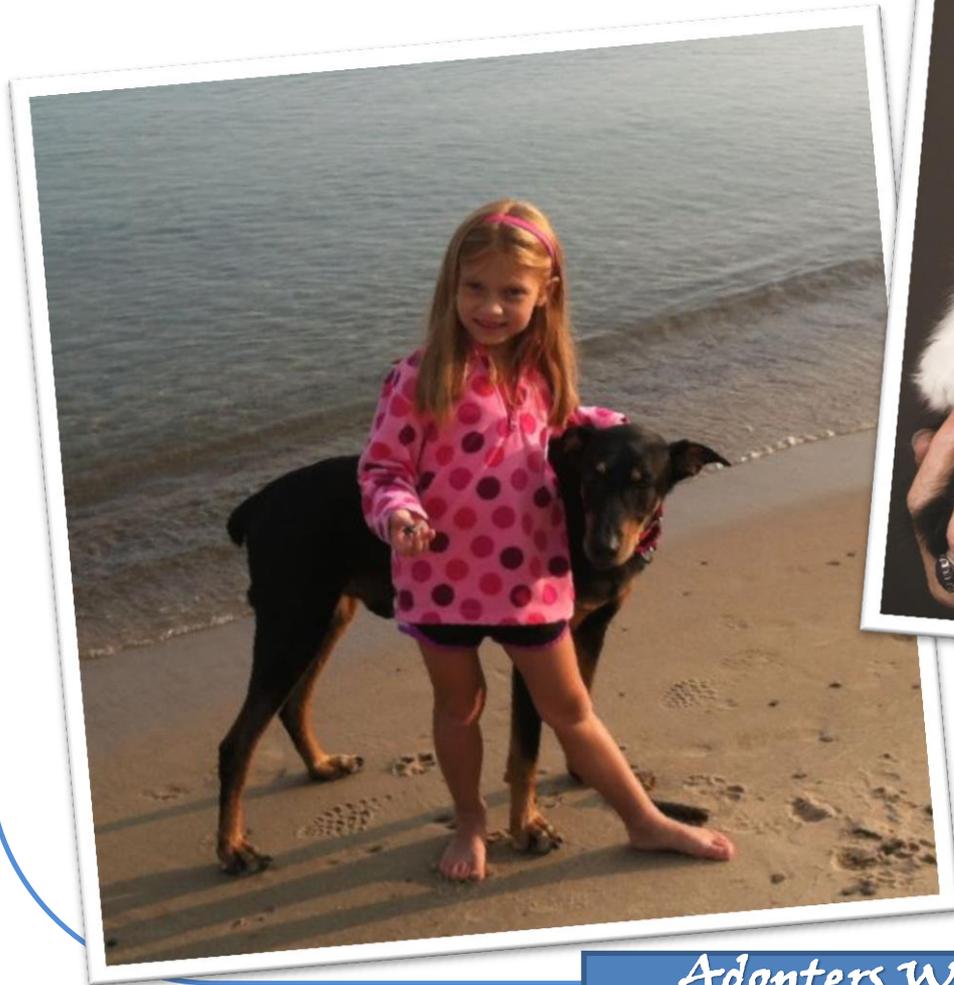
Adopters Welcome!

Help adopters keep their dogs happy and healthy whether or not they have a fence.



Adopters Welcome!

Help pets live happily
with people of all ages.



Adopters Welcome!

Agencies with <i>Adopters Welcome</i> programs:	Is this our policy?		
	Yes	Yes, but...	No
Do not require home checks.			
Do not require references, including vet references, and don't perform reference checks.			
Do not require meet-and-greets with pets already in the home.			
Do not require landlord checks or proof that renters are allowed pets.			
Do not require every member of the family to meet the animal before adoption.			
Do not automatically deny adopters considering declawing their cat, or who have had other cats declawed.			
Do not automatically deny adopters considering allowing their cat to go outdoors, or who have allowed other cats to go outdoors.			
Do not automatically deny people whose pets have had spotty or no vet history.			
Do not use different adoption criteria for different breed/types of dog.			
Do not automatically deny adopters because they have relinquished or rehomed past pets.			
Do not deny adopters because a prior pet was hit by a car, lost or stolen.			
Do not automatically deny adopters considering an "outdoor" dog or who have kept other dogs outdoors.			
Do not deny adopters because they have allowed past pets to breed or because a current pet is not spayed/neutered.			
Do not mandate that adopters have fenced-in yards.			
Do not deny adopters because they are "too old" or "too young" (unless they are legally prohibited from signing a contract under state law), have disabilities, etc.			
Do not deny adopters because they are unemployed, underemployed, work too many hours, etc.			
Do not deny adoptions based on the adopter's living situation or status (e.g., student, military, assisted living, renter, etc.).			
Do not discriminate (consciously or unconsciously) against any adopter based on race, color, class, occupation, gender, orientation, etc.			
Do ensure that animals can go home the same day they are adopted whenever possible.			
Do allow pets to be adopted as gifts.			
Do provide a no-fault return policy which allows adopters who return pets to adopt another pet or receive a refund of their adoption fee.			
Do allow adopters the option to rehome pets on their own if they can't keep the pets.			
Do ensure their adoption contract reflects the <i>Adopters Welcome</i> philosophy and contains no unnecessary language like "pets must be returned to us" clauses.			

Adopters Welcome Adoption Policy Review Worksheet

Adopters Welcome!

Put Your Adoption Policies to the AW Test!

- ID the policy
- ID its intention
- Does it reach or undermine its goal?
- Can you achieve that same goal without that policy?
- Replace or rewrite as needed

Use our
practical tool!
It's like a
policy filter!



Adopters Welcome!

Return policy

“It’s a hassle free program with more rewards than pitfalls.... It’s a program that helps us attract new adopters and helps us build trust & loyalty with existing adopters.”

**-Tamra Wagenknecht
Director of Shelter Services
The Anti-Cruelty Society**



Our Adoptions are Satisfaction Guaranteed.

While there is a person for every animal, we know that not every animal is for every person. If you adopt an animal from The Anti-Cruelty Society and discover that you are not compatible, you may return your pet, satisfaction guaranteed.



Adopters Welcome!

Rehoming policy

Family & friends =
ready-made
adopter pool!

Kentucky Humane Society™
Lifelong Friends

HOME ADOPT FOR PETS FOR KIDS PET SURRENDER HORSES NEWS & EVENTS GIVE ABOUT BLOG

SHARE [Facebook] [Twitter] [LinkedIn]

Re-Homing Service - Dogs

Owned Pets Who Need New Homes

This listing is a courtesy for those seeking to re-home their pets and for animal lovers looking to find a new pet. **No re-homing fees should be charged on any pets listed on the re-homing page.** Although this is a courtesy service, we welcome your All proceeds support our lifesaving work.

If you need to re-home your pet, [click here](#). For more specific questions, contact our free Pet Help Line at 502-509-4PET or email helpline@kyhumane.org.

Courtesy Listings of Dogs

SEARCH

Click here and subscribe to **KENNEL CHRONICLES**, our free monthly newsletter!

Click to View **ADOPTABLE CATS**

Click to View **ADOPTABLE DOGS**

Click to View **WORKING CATS**

Click for Info on **EQUINE PROGRAMS**

Your Help is Appreciated
DONATE ONLINE TODAY

Adopters Welcome!

Be a resource for adopters (& owners)

Adopter's challenge: houstraining new puppy/dog

Page
38

Helpful options	Where to find	Approximate cost	Additional notes
-----------------	---------------	------------------	------------------

Tips on houstraining

Crates

Baby gates

Enzymatic cleaners

Adopter's challenge: Keeping a new cat indoors

Helpful options	Where to find	Approximate cost	Additional notes
Tips on indoor enrichment	indoorpet.osu.edu/cats/	Free	Look under the "For Pet Owners" tab
Toys cats like to hunt	Local shelter's retail store All local pet supply stores Online	\$7+	Some favorites are: Treat-dispensing toys Fishing rod toys Interactive toys
Cat harness	Local shelter's retail store All local pet supply stores Online	\$10+	
Making cat-friendly changes to your home	<i>Catification</i> by Jackson Galaxy	\$13+	Includes ideas that range from cheap DIY to professional remodeling



Adopters Welcome!

Before you say no...

“I tried to adopt a kitten that was found alongside the road. By page 3 of the application I walked away in disgust.”

-comments, *Dogington Post* article



So You Think You Can Just Adopt a Dog?

Has Adopting Pets Become Too Difficult?

No Pet For You

Want to adopt a dog or cat? Prepare for an inquisition at the animal rescue.

Adopters Welcome!



Step
2

**Rely on conversations
instead of applications**



Adopters Welcome!

DON'T SHOP!

**Complete this
application**

ADOPT!

adopt a shelter pet.

Adopters Welcome!

animalsheltering.org/questionnaire

NO...

- No application language
- No request for landlord info
- No request for vet history or contacts
- No questions about gift adoptions
- No automatic no's
- No delays

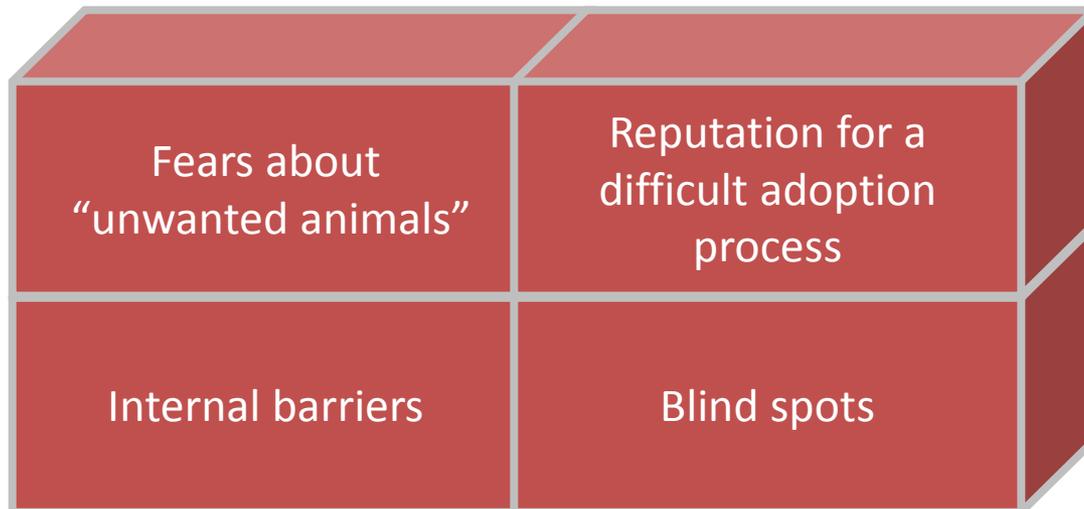
YES!

- We support gift adoptions. . .
- We support renters. . .
- Tells us about your household
- Tell us about your pets
- What do you want us to know
- Medical & behavior info
- Questions?
- Services & opportunities

Adopters Welcome!

Step 3

Develop marketing that overcomes barriers



Adopters Welcome!



Fee waived cat adoptions???



FREE with benefits. . .

- Attention grabbing!
- Promotes adoption for all animals
- Cats still have all the services you offer (unlike other free cats!)

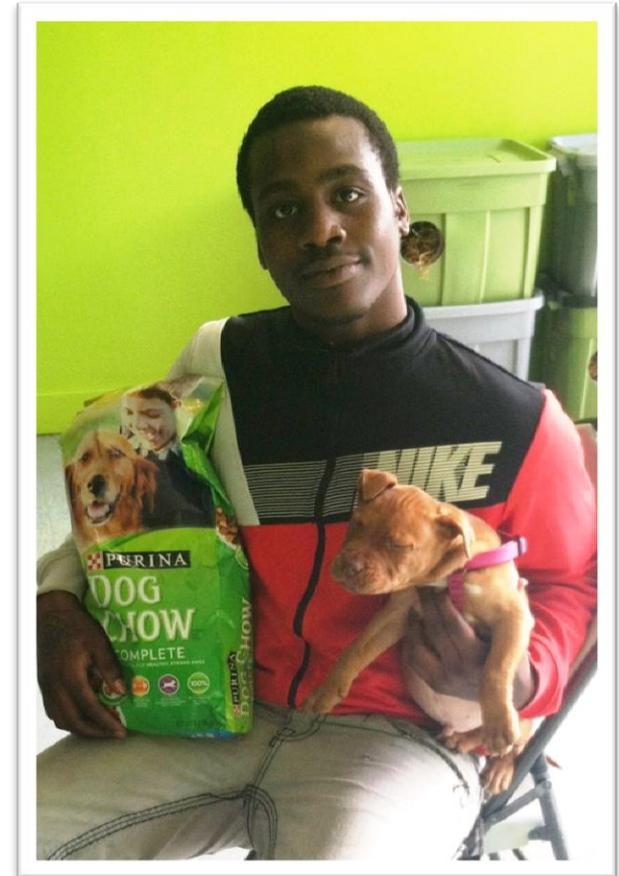
SURVEYS say. . .

- No impact on commitment or care
- Loss of adoption fees balanced by
 - Reduced length of stay
 - Increased donations
 - Product sales

Adopters Welcome!

Check your blind spots

- Don't take it for granted that everyone knows about you!
- According to nationwide survey, **40%** of pets come from shelters & rescues
- **Only 3%** of pets from shelters or rescues in neighborhoods served by Pets for Life
- Map past adopters to discover who you've been missing
- Find opportunities for adoption and more



Adopters Welcome!

Step
4

Train your team

*“Practice isn’t the thing you do once you’re good.
It’s the thing you do that makes you good.”*

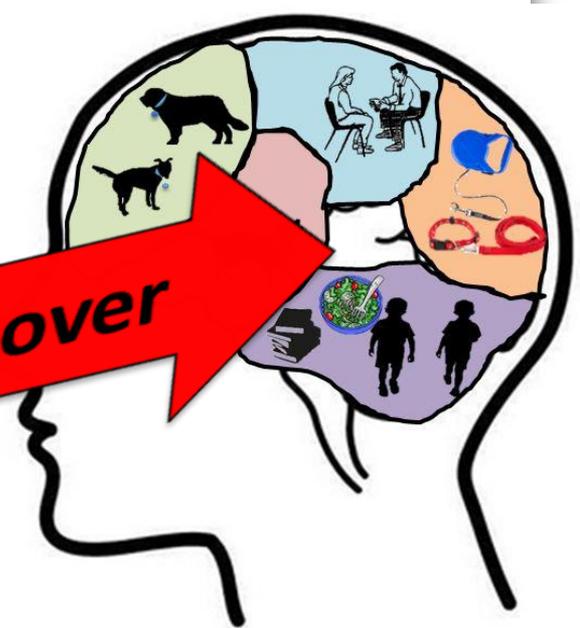
Adopters Welcome!

We'll explain this new pet's medical history and behavioral history. Check additional topics you'd like to discuss:

- Feeding this pet
- House-training/litter box training
- Grooming/nail trimming
- Exercise, toys and fun activities
- Puppy/kitten-proofing your home
- Finding a trainer
- Introducing this pet to other pets
- Microchips and other ID options
- Finding a veterinarian
- Declawing
- Crate-training
- Moving with pets
- Pulling on-leash

Other questions: _____

Very little room left over



Adopters Welcome!

Your team needs a positive, engaging communication toolbox!

- Open-ended questions
- Active listening & paraphrasing
- Positive tones
- Social connectors & conversation continuers



Adopters Welcome!

Adoption success has a positive ripple effect on animal welfare



- Help more animals
- Spread positive PR
- Draw in new adopters
- Promote adoption over other options
- Increased support
- Happy staff and volunteers
- Do even more for animals

Adopters Welcome!

TO DO LIST

Use the DIY to get started

Find, engage, and support more adopters

Enjoy wild adoption success!

Adopters Welcome!

Please Share!



AdoptersWelcome@humanesociety.org

sdalanzo@humanesociety.org

Adopters Welcome!