

Animal Trainer & Behaviorist

Job Description

Purpose of Position

The Animal Trainer/Behaviorist plays a crucial role in improving animal welfare, increasing adoptability, and reducing return rates after adoption. Their work bridges the gap between animal care and human-animal relationships.

Expectations

To provide humane care and treatment for animals at the Naperville Area Humane Society (NAHS) and assist in maintaining a safe, sanitary, and compassionate environment for all animals in our care. This role works closely with Animal Care staff and volunteers to ensure the health and welfare of all animals, following the *Guidelines for Standards of Care* established by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians.

As a representative of NAHS, the Animal Trainer & Behaviorist must enthusiastically support the organization's mission, goals, and strategies by using positive reinforcement techniques only.

Note: The responsibilities described herein are intended to outline the general nature and level of work performed and are not an exhaustive list of all duties and requirements.

Work Relationships:

Reports to: Director of Shelter Operations

Responsibilities

Behavioral Assessment:

- Evaluate the behavior and temperament of incoming animals (dogs, cats, etc.) to understand their needs and suitability for adoption.
- Identify signs of fear, aggression, anxiety, or other behavioral issues.
- Help determine appropriate housing, enrichment, and handling methods for each animal.

Training and Behavior Modification:

- Design and implement training programs to address behavioral challenges (e.g., leash pulling, excessive barking, fearfulness, reactivity).
- Use positive reinforcement techniques to teach basic manners and coping skills.
- Work with animals who have been neglected, abused, or undersocialized to rebuild trust and confidence.
- Collaborate with animal care regarding pharmacological interventions for behavioral concerns.

Enrichment and Welfare:

- Research training techniques and develop enrichment activities to prevent boredom and stress in shelter environments (e.g., puzzle feeders, play sessions, scent games).
- Monitor animal stress levels and suggest adjustments to housing, routine, or enrichment as needed.
- Works closely and communicates regularly with the Animal Care team to promote the overall well-being of each animal at our shelter and to improve their marketability.
- Observes, communicates, and documents in-shelter animal behaviors into ShelterLuv.
- Identify signs of behavioral decline and implement intervention protocols.
- Plans activities to reduce animal behavior decline and improve the animal's shelter environment safely and within fiscal responsibility.

Staff and Volunteer Training:

- Train shelter staff and volunteers in safe handling, body language interpretation, and positive training methods.
- Create behavior protocols and ensure consistent implementation across the shelter.

Adoption Support and Counseling:

- Assist in matching animals with suitable adopters, based on temperament and lifestyle.
- Provide adopters with training tips and behavior support to ensure successful transitions into homes.
- Offer post-adoption follow-up or support hotlines for behavioral concerns.

Collaboration and Policy Development:

- Work with veterinarians, management, and other shelter staff to create behavior and enrichment policies.
- Contribute to decisions about rehabilitation, transfer, or humane euthanasia when behavior poses a safety risk or quality of life is a concern.
- Co-creates annual plan and budget for the animal training and behavior program functions.

Advocacy and Education:

- Promote humane, science-based training methods.
- Educate the community about animal behavior, responsible pet ownership, and the importance of positive reinforcement.
- Establish positive relationships with outside vendors and organizations, and identifies opportunities for in-shelter animals to increase exposure to potential adopters and fosters.
- Identify ways to improve pet retention; support pet owners and NAHS adopters/fosters with obtaining educational, and behavioral resources.

Customer Service:

- Demonstrate a positive, professional, and compassionate attitude toward coworkers, volunteers, and visitors.
 - Support the overall mission of NAHS by promoting responsible pet care and adoption.
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Qualifications:

- Minimum of a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent certifications and/or work experience in animal sciences, animal behaviors, animal training, animal sheltering, communications, education, or public relations.
 - Minimum of a certification in Dog Training & Behavior from an R+ Behavior Program required (CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA/KSA, VSA-CDT, KPA-CTP, IAABC, etc).
 - Completion of Fear Free Shelters Certification required, Fear Free Certified Professional Certification preferred.
 - AKC Approved Evaluator for the Canine Good Citizen Test preferred.
 - More than one year of experience coordinating an organization's programs required. Minimum of one year supervisory experience required.
 - Proven program management, public speaking, training and event planning experience required.
 - Experience using shelter CRM software, or comparable database management software, highly preferred.
 - Direct experience with Shelterluv, and Volgistics software a plus.
 - Experience working with a variety of age groups is preferred.
 - Experience presenting educational programs is a plus.
 - Familiarity with Illinois State Education standards and animal laws are helpful.
 - Animal welfare experience and knowledge of humane education preferred.
 - Willingness to become certified in human/pet CPR & first aid training required.
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Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- Proven and effective verbal, written and interpersonal communication skills required.
- Program management, event planning, and project management skills.
- Confident and engaging public speaker and program presenter.
- Excellent customer service skills required.
- Supervisory skills and knowledge, and the ability to work well with culturally diverse populations across age groups is required.
- Must be proficient with computers. Interest in and knowledge of animal welfare related topics and issues.
- Strong organizational and project management skills.
- Ability to use supervisory skills to resolve problems with clarity, tact and success.
- Excellent attention to detail and teamwork skills.
- Ability to use sound judgment when addressing volunteers, clients, animal-related concerns and confidential information.
- Must have emotional intelligence, work ethics and integrity skills.

- Knowledge of animal breeds, behaviors, infectious or and/or zoonotic disease and safe handling is required. Skilled and committed to building and maintaining professional relationships at all levels.
 - Commitment to demonstrating NAHS' values, mission, culture agreement is necessary.
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Physical Requirements:

- The person in this position needs to frequently move and traverse about inside the office, and throughout the shelter and its grounds,
 - Must be able to operate, activate, use animal handling and office equipment.
 - Must be able to prepare, inspect, place, detect, and position the body in order to care for and restrain and/or handle animals routinely.
 - Must be able to communicate, detect, converse with, discern, convey, and exchange information routinely.
 - Must be able to detect, determine, perceive, identify, recognize, judge, observe, inspect, estimate, and assess animals routinely.
 - Must be able to move, transport, position, put, install, and remove up to 50 lb without assistance.
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Work Conditions:

- Work is performed in a high-noise environment and may involve exposure to industrial cleaning chemicals, fumes, dust, animal waste, zoonotic diseases, and potential bites or scratches.
 - Physical activity includes frequent bending, stooping, lifting, and standing for long periods.
 - Schedule includes rotating shifts, evenings, weekends, and holidays.
 - Adherence to all safety procedures is required at all times.
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Employment Classification:

At-Will Employment: Employment with NAHS is at will, meaning it is for no specific duration and may be terminated by either the employee or NAHS at any time, with or without cause.

Equal Opportunity Employer: NAHS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law. Employment decisions are based solely on qualifications and organizational needs.