

2015

Best Friends National Conference

Playbook



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

**Brown County,
Indiana**



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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 participant in helping the community to become no-kill:

Brown County Humane Society

Some keys to Brown County's success:

- Introducing an intense spay/neuter effort to reduce shelter intake
- Creating the Barn Cats program to get feral cats adopted
- Holding off-site adoptions in larger, nearby communities
- Developing positive relationships with other shelters and rescue groups
- Having open and friendly adoption counseling
- Marketing adoptable animals in a variety of ways
- Using a number of strategies to raise money
- Building relationships with people in the community



Introduction

Brown County, Indiana, is a rural community with a population of 15,000. Brown County Humane Society (BCHS), which is the only shelter in the county, implemented various strategies to make the county no-kill. From 2001 to 2010, the save rate climbed from a dismal 29 percent to 96 percent and a save rate of more than 95 percent has been sustained for five years. In 2014, the save rate was an impressive 98 percent, up from 95.4 percent the previous year, according to Jane Weatherford, treasurer of the Brown County Humane Society.

Brown County Humane Society was founded in 1966 as a foster-based rescue group for abused and abandoned pets. BCHS worked tirelessly to raise funds to open a permanent animal shelter. In the meantime, they leased a building from 1977 to 1982. In 1982, a BCHS member donated land with a barn to the organization. A few years later, the humane society constructed a shelter, which opened in 1987. The organization worked to expand and improve its facility and programs in subsequent years.

BCHS is an open-admission shelter, which means that it accepts all relinquished and stray animals from the public, and it has an animal control contract as well. The shelter currently cares for 600 to 700 pets each year. That number is down dramatically due to a robust spay/neuter program that started in 2010. In 2009, the intake was more than four times the per capita national average of pets coming into the shelter. The shelter has 20 dog kennels and room for about 50 cats at a given time.

To help the county achieve no-kill status, BCHS has implemented various strategies, focusing on adoption programs, including a foster program, a dog transport program, partnerships with breed rescue groups and off-site adoptions, as well as a proactive spay/neuter program. The ongoing commitment to spay/neuter has reduced the shelter population so much that BCHS is now considering importing both dogs and cats.

Brown County	
2001 save rate:	29.4%
2010 save rate:	96%
2014 save rate:	98%



Public assistance spay/neuter program

The Serving Pets Outreach Team (SPOT) focuses on educating the public about spay/neuter and responsible pet ownership. In 2009, with nearly four times the per capita national average of pets ending up in the shelter, BCHS took action. An intense spay/neuter effort is the key component of their program to reduce intake. The effect was immediate: Within five years, shelter intake was reduced by 57 percent. More than 3,600 cats and dogs were sterilized in those five years.

The SPOT program was tremendously successful and exceeded expectations. Jane advises that implementing an intensive spay/neuter effort in the beginning is crucial, but she does caution that the reduction in intake at BCHS was extraordinary, and other communities may not experience similar strides so soon after implementation of such a program.

WHAT WORKED

- **Financial assistance for spay/neuter:** BCHS offers reduced-price and free spay/neuter for people who need assistance.
- **Making spay/neuter accessible:** Jane explains that there is an old-time country vet in the community who is affordable but not very accessible. He doesn't offer appointments, so people have to go to his clinic and often end up waiting several hours to see him. So, BCHS has worked to make spay/neuter easy for people to do and also low-cost.
- **Partnership with Pets Alive spay/neuter clinic:** BCHS has established a successful partnership with the Pets Alive spay/neuter clinic in Bloomington. The clinic sterilizes cats for \$30 and dogs for \$60. Pets Alive picks up animals at BCHS. However, BCHS will pick up animals from people who can't get their pets to the shelter. "You have to do whatever you can to get (spay/neuter) done," Jane says. "You need to make it as easy and painless as possible."
- **Spay/neuter specials:** In 2011, the beginning of the second year of SPOT, BCHS sent out beautiful and snazzy postcards to every house in the county advertising \$1 spay/neuter for the first 100 cats and 100 dogs signed up. This really boosted its spay/neuter efforts. As an ongoing strategy, BCHS runs a spay/neuter incentive targeted at different pet populations every other month. For example, a Fix Your Mama campaign offered to fix all kittens and puppies for free when the client paid to have the mom fixed. SPOT ran a Fix Your Pit special in which the first 25 pit bull terriers or pit bull terrier mixes were fixed for free. The limited-time aspect of the campaigns motivates people to act fast to take advantage of the specials. BCHS has also offered free fixes for feral cats.
- **Word-of-mouth advertising:** Jane says that word of mouth is really big in rural communities. "If your neighbor got a dog neutered for five bucks, and it was really easy,

he's going to tell his neighbor," she says. "He's going to tell all his cousins who live around the corner. The word is just going to get out."

- **Spay/neuter price negotiation:** BCHS always offers \$30 cat and \$60 dog sterilizations. However, if someone contacts them who can't afford these prices, the organization will negotiate the price.
- **County government spay/neuter support:** BCHS asked the county commissioners to appoint a task force to study the overwhelming issue of the number of unfixed pets in the county and to recommend solutions. This helped county officials recognize the problem and the county council is now providing some funding for the public spay/neuter assistance program.
- **Booth at the county fair:** SPOT has a booth at the county fair to sign people up to get \$5 spay/neuter for their pets. Many locals attend the fair and this has been an effective way to access the target audience.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Not doing enough surgeries:** Peter Marsh, founder of Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets, estimates that the tipping point to see a decrease in shelter intake is five surgeries per 1,000 people annually. BCHS found that seven to 23 surgeries per 1,000 was not enough, but with 55 surgeries per 1,000 people there was an impressive reduction in intake (34 percent for cats and 18 percent for dogs).
- **Unfocused spay/neuter program:** Early on, BCHS was doing spay/neuter but was not completely dedicated to the effort. The organization was dependent on donations and grants, the money from which fluctuated quite a bit. It wasn't making a dent in the animal population in the county, and shelter intake was going up. In retrospect, Jane says that they should have focused on spay/neuter more exclusively in the beginning, but then she hesitates and explains that putting efforts into adoption programs also saved animals' lives and helped BCHS raise money for spay/neuter.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Continue to offer low-cost, easily accessible spay/neuter:** The program is now in a maintenance mode, with the goal of sterilizing 30 pets per 1,000 people annually. Greatly reduced spay/neuter specials will continue to be offered every other month to ensure that the program stays in the forefront of people's minds.
- **Exporting SPOT:** BCHS realizes that addressing homeless pet issues in its own community is not enough. The borders do not keep homeless pets from surrounding areas from coming into Brown County. SPOT volunteers have mentored an adjacent county to create a SPOT-like program there and are offering to help other nearby shelters implement spay/neuter programs in their communities.



Dog transport program

Once a month, Brown County Humane Society works with the CanINE Express to transport healthy, friendly dogs from south-central Indiana shelters to New England, where rescue groups with whom they collaborate adopt out the dogs. BCHS sends about 30 dogs a year on this transport, which is down from 150 in previous years. As a side note, the dog transport program helped the folks at BCHS “see the light,” as Jane describes it, and realize that there are communities that are not killing animals, and BCHS could achieve this same goal.

WHAT WORKED

- **Volunteer-run program:** Volunteers are responsible for making the dog transport program happen. They do everything from picking up the dogs for transport to actually driving the vans to take the dogs to the Northeast.
- **Collaboration:** The CanINE Express dog transport program was expanded to include approximately 12 south-central Indiana shelters and 15 shelters in New England and northeastern Ohio. This gave the Indiana shelters an opportunity to work together. The New England shelters have been great at sharing best practices and protocols with the Indiana shelters. Currently, about 100 dogs a month are transported from these Indiana shelters to New England and Ohio.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Expense:** The dog transport program costs a lot in terms of the actual money needed to get a dog ready to be transported to the Northeast. All dogs must be spayed or neutered, vaccinated, tested and de-wormed, which costs about \$80 to \$100 per dog. This is money that BCHS does not recoup.
- **Labor intensiveness:** Finding enough drivers to make the 2,000-mile trek each month is a challenge. An average of four vans go, with (ideally) two drivers per van. It is a straight-through drive, with one lengthy stop to get all the dogs out, fed and exercised. It's a tough volunteer assignment.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Phasing out the program:** Though the dog transport program has been a huge help to BCHS, the shelter would like to wean themselves off the program because of the expense involved, and instead place animals locally.
- **Creating a statewide spay/neuter fund:** Volunteers at BCHS have researched how New England was able to achieve a position of needing to import dogs to have enough in their shelters to meet their communities' needs. These volunteers are working with an Indiana state representative to create a spay/neuter fund similar to those in New England to help pay for spay/neuter surgeries.



Barn Cats program

Brown County Humane Society uses the Barn Cats program to get community (aka feral or stray) cats adopted. They have not euthanized a feral cat in four years. In this rural community, many people want cats around their farms and homes to keep the rodent population in check. People are not concerned about the cats being friendly. Jane cautions that all felines should be evaluated before being labeled “barn cats” as some may turn out to not actually be feral.

WHAT WORKED

- **No adoption fee:** BCHS does not charge an adoption fee for barn cats, but instead asks for a donation. This has encouraged more people to adopt community cats from the shelter.
- **Fixing barn cats:** Barn cats are spayed or neutered before being adopted out. This has two benefits. Obviously, it helps control the cat population in the community. It also encourages people to adopt from BCHS instead of just getting a stray cat from their neighbor, since they won't have to worry about a population problem on their farm if they have sterilized cats.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Treating ferals like other cats:** When kept in the shelter, ferals need hidey boxes that they can retreat to while the staff cleans their cages. This reduces potential injury to staff and helps the cats feel safer. It also allows staff time to evaluate the cats and determine which ones are really feral. Sometimes the “scaredy cats” will come out of their hidey boxes after they get used to the shelter routine.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Educating the community about feral cats:** There are still huge misconceptions about at what age and how often cats can breed and the environmental “danger” feral cats pose to native wildlife. BCHS plans to educate the community to encourage a wider acceptance of feral cat colonies.
- **Decreasing feral population:** SPOT will continue to work with people who have feral cat problems by helping to trap and sterilize the cats.



Off-site adoptions

Brown County has no big box stores, only local mom-and-pop stores. Since this is the case, BCHS does off-site adoptions at a PETCO and PetSmart in larger communities nearby. The organization houses four to five cats at the PETCO in Bloomington and at a PetSmart store in Martinsville, resulting in more than 130 adoptions each year, and organizes an adoption event at PetSmart in Greenwood every Saturday, which is anticipated to result in about 25 adoptions each year.

WHAT WORKED

- Volunteer caregivers:** Two times per day, volunteers care for the cats at the PETCO in Bloomington, helping BCHS avoid additional costs for animal care. It has been a bit of a challenge to get volunteers to drive 20 miles to Bloomington to care for cats, so local Bloomington volunteers are being used as well. The Martinsville PetSmart store has partnered with the local high school to have high-functioning special-needs children and their caregivers clean and socialize the cats at the store. This has been a great experience for all.
- Knowing the demographics of a community:** Cat adoptions at the Bloomington PETCO have been successful because of the demographics. Bloomington is a college town, and many college students have living arrangements that can accommodate a cat. The city of Greenwood, where BCHS holds weekly adoption events at PetSmart, has a higher median age and income level than Bloomington, so adoptions of both cats and dogs are successful there.
- Choosing stores wisely:** Picking which stores to hold adoption events at is very important. The PetSmart in Greenwood is the second busiest in the state, so BCHS has had a lot of success with holding weekly events there.
- Event consistency:** Being consistent about holding adoption events regularly at a store is key. The public has come to count on and expect the BCHS events at the pet stores.
- Paid staff person to oversee adoption events at PetSmart:** One paid staff person oversees the weekly adoption events at PetSmart and the volunteers. Because of the logistics of the events, which are held at a store 50 miles from the BCHS shelter, it requires someone who's highly dependable and always available. The investment has been worth it since paying a staff person has created dependability and structure.
- Raising awareness about BCHS:** An added benefit of doing off-site adoptions in neighboring larger cities is raising the visibility about the organization to a wider audience. Not only are adoptable pets promoted, but fundraising events, too. It provides an opportunity to talk to people about the programs and successes of BCHS.
- Building good relationships with stores:** Both PETCO and PetSmart have been generous to BCHS when the stores run special promotions to help shelters. Additionally, PetSmart

offers incentives for each adoption done through their store. Both stores are willing to provide toys or treats for our pet-centric events. Therefore, working with these stores has resulted in donations that would not otherwise have been realized.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Local off-site adoptions:** Originally, BCHS held adoption events at a local grocery store and farmers' market in Brown County. It provided good public relations for the shelter, but since the community is so small, this effort wasn't successful or sustainable. Doing off-site adoptions in cities nearby with a larger population base has been much more effective.
- **Dog adoptions in Bloomington PetSmart:** Trying to adopt out dogs at the Bloomington PetSmart was not successful because of the town's demographics. Bloomington is a college town, and many students are unable to care for a dog in a dorm or apartment.
- **Volunteer-run adoption events:** It wasn't effective to have volunteers oversee adoption events at any of the locations. The volunteers were not familiar enough with the pets or with the adoption procedure to be able to properly counsel an adopter or ensure all the necessary steps were taken to complete the adoption.
- **Holding off-site events irregularly:** Customers need to know when to expect an off-site event to happen. Just showing up on an occasional Saturday does not lend the consistency needed to make the effort worthwhile. Though BCHS did not hold some of its past events on a consistent basis, events are now done regularly and consistently.
- **Volunteers who are not outgoing:** Volunteers who are solely focused on the pets aren't very effective at helping with adoptions at off-site events. Volunteers need to be willing to engage in conversation with the public to both promote the pets and the organization.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Importing dogs and cats:** Because the pet population at the shelter has decreased so much, there is not always a good variety of pets to offer at off-site locations. Therefore, BCHS has just started partnering with neighboring shelters that are overcrowded or still euthanize, and is planning to take some of their pets into the program.



Foster homes

Brown County Humane Society has a successful foster program. The organization started out as a foster-based group, but now primarily places animals who need extra TLC in foster care, including those with medical or behavioral issues and young puppies and kittens.

WHAT WORKED

- **Foster families helping to find adoptive homes for animals:** BCHS foster families become very invested in the animals they care for and often use their connections to find homes for the pets.
- **Non-local foster homes:** BCHS has had great success with foster families who live outside of the local community in bigger cities. For example, the organization had one foster mom who turned two of the bedrooms in her house into catteries. She adopted out 100 cats a year via her extensive network; she worked for a large company and had connections with local vets.
- **Being selective about animals placed in foster care:** Young animals and animals with medical or behavioral problems are typically the best candidates for fostering. It's harder for people to meet animals when they are in foster care since they need to arrange a visit. Drop-in adopters to the shelter don't have the chance to meet foster animals.
- **Being selective about who is allowed to foster:** Home visits are done for any potential foster home to ensure the home is safe for the BCHS animals and to evaluate the pets currently in the home. This is an effective way to get a really good feel for what type of pet the family could foster and to understand their limitations.
- **Foster manual:** Each foster home is provided a manual with details about fostering, who to contact if there are problems, basic animal husbandry, and in-depth information related to development of young puppies and kittens.
- **Access to a veterinary technician:** One of the BCHS board members is a registered veterinary technician who generously donates her time and expertise to be on call for foster families that have questions related to their foster pets' health. Having this resource just a phone call away is very reassuring to foster families.
- **Foster home coordinator:** BCHS has one volunteer who is responsible for the management of the entire foster program. This takes a large burden off the shelter manager and allows the volunteer to have a more personal relationship with the foster families.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Mass recruitment of foster families:** BCHS tried a large media blitz to kick off the foster program several years ago, hoping to do a large orientation and jump into the program big time. In addition to having a low turnout, it became apparent that fostering is a big commitment for both the shelter and the foster family. Foster family recruitment is now done on a more one-on-one basis.
- **General plea for fostering:** People do not respond to a general plea asking for foster help. Instead, focusing on one particular pet who is in need of fostering has proven more effective. Being able to explain what the foster family's responsibility to that particular pet will be has been successful.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Foster families trained to do behavior modification:** Getting a pet into a foster home to learn basic manners or a few cute tricks would help move some of the harder-to-place pets. Providing training to foster families for this purpose would be beneficial.
- **Increasing exposure of foster pets:** When people come to the shelter, they need to be able to visualize the pets in foster care. BCHS is planning to create near-life-size foam cut-outs of the adoptable foster cats and place them in the cat adoption room, and will put color 8 x 10 photos of foster dogs on the entry door to the kennels.



Breed rescue partnerships and shelter trades

Brown County Humane Society has established positive relationships with several breed rescue groups and shelters. Indy Great Pyrenees Rescue, Central Indiana Lab Rescue and Adoption, and Rescue Farm are a few of the rescue groups that BCHS works with. When BCHS receives particular breeds, the organization contacts the breed-specific groups to see if they have openings. This collaboration with other rescue groups opens up space in the BCHS shelter for other animals. BCHS ensures that all rescue groups it works with operate as no-kill and are reputable by thoroughly investigating each organization and getting references.

BCHS has also built strong and trusting relationships with other shelters. Since shelters have different capabilities and strengths, shelter trades have been mutually beneficial in various instances.

WHAT WORKED

- **Collaboration:** The dog transport program provided an opportunity for BCHS to work with regional shelters, and thus get to know them better. Through these relationships, shelter trades have occurred. In addition, when BCHS considers working with an unknown breed rescue group, it's helpful to call a trusted shelter and ask about their experience with that particular group.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Isolation:** For years, BCHS was very internally focused and did little to get to know other animal welfare groups. Trying to “go it alone” did not work well. Realizing that collaboration is more effective than isolation has opened the doors to opportunities to better serve homeless pets.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Attending other pet-related events:** This year BCHS will participate in the Indy Mega Adoption event along with several other regional animal welfare organizations. That event will provide an opportunity to meet people from other shelters and rescue groups to seek additional partnerships. The PetSmart national adoption events will also provide a good opportunity to meet staff from a variety of organizations.



Adoption counseling

Prospective adopters meet with a Brown County Humane Society adoption counselor. The staffer talks with people about the kind of animal they are looking for and discusses what kind of animal would be best for their home and lifestyle. The counselor gives suggestions for animals and sometimes suggests alternatives to fit each adopter's situation.

WHAT WORKED

- **Being open and friendly:** BCHS has a policy of being inviting and approachable. Rather than making people feel bad or guilty, the shelter encourages adopters to return an animal if things don't work out. It's all about understanding and keeping the best interests of the animal in mind, Jane says.
- **Being no-kill:** People feel more comfortable about returning an animal to the shelter since it does not euthanize healthy, adoptable animals.
- **Adoption follow-ups:** Within three weeks of an adoption, a staff member or volunteer calls each adopter to see how the new pet is integrating into the family. This contact helps to build a stronger relationship with adopters and provides an opportunity to offer advice on specific issues a pet might be having.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Stringent adoption rules:** BCHS used to have rigid adoption guidelines, but now the focus is on having a truthful conversation with people to understand where they're coming from and to offer suggestions and information. Establishing a good relationship with adopters from the get-go is in the best interest of the animals.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Adoption counseling room:** A private area in the shelter to do adoption counseling is on the BCHS wish list. The shelter is cramped right now and it is difficult to find a quiet place to have a conversation.
- **Staff training:** General customer-service training using Jan Elster's "Animal Friendly – Customer Smart: People Skills for Animal Shelters" training guide is conducted periodically. In addition, webinars specific to adoption counseling are planned with the current staff.



Adoptable pets advertising

Brown County Humane Society has created a handsome pet flyer that is updated and posted at various locations in and out of the county twice per month. In addition, every other week BCHS has a quarter page of the local newspaper, a part of which is dedicated to a dog and cat.

WHAT WORKED

- **Volunteers updating and posting flyers:** A volunteer updates the pet flyer twice a month and then 20 additional volunteers post flyers at over 60 locations, including mom-and-pop grocery stores, laundromats, apartment complexes, senior citizen buildings, gas stations, vet offices, the library, county office building, post office and water company, as well as offices where the volunteers themselves work. Having a large contingent of volunteers helps get a large number of flyers posted.
- **Pictures of available pets on flyers:** Having pictures of pets currently available at the shelter helps generate interest. Jane says people often stop her on the street to ask if a particular animal they saw on the flyer has been adopted yet. In one amazing instance, a very senior dog who had been in foster care for four months was featured on the flyer. His original family saw his picture in the local gas station and within hours the dog was reunited with his family.
- **“Pet Tails” section in newspaper:** BCHS procured a quarter-page section of the local paper every other week. This section is paid for by local businesses and supporters. BCHS provides all the content for the section and is able to feature a cat and dog in each edition, run educational pieces, and promote various events, adoption promotions and spay/neuter specials. The shelter has received positive feedback from readers.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Pictures of pets in the newspaper:** BCHS used to pay to run pictures of individual pets in a local newspaper with a short description. This seemed to be effective at first, but after several years it turned out to not be cost-effective.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Posting more flyers:** BCHS relies heavily on out-of-county adopters; therefore, getting the adoptable pet flyers into more locations outside of the county is important. Recruiting volunteers to do that will be a focus.



Animal promotions on websites

Brown County Humane Society uses Petfinder.com, its own website, BCHumane.org and Rescuegroups.org to promote animals for adoption. About 70 percent of its placements are with people outside the county, many of whom saw the pets' profiles online.

WHAT WORKED

- **Every adoptable animal featured:** Every BCHS animal is included on Petfinder.com, BCHumane.org and Rescuegroups.org. Early on, Jane wondered if they really needed to include, for instance, 10 black cats, but staff insisted that every animal should get an equal chance at adoption. The strategy has worked out well. Featuring all the available animals has drawn more people out to BCHS because they want to go to a shelter that has lots of animals to choose from.
- **Using Rescuegroups.org:** BCHS was originally hesitant to use Rescuegroups.org because it seemed too good to be true. Rescuegroups.org provides the ability to post pets on its website one time and then it distributes all of the pet photos, videos and descriptions to more than 100 other websites. The process to get started was simple and the ongoing implementation has been smooth. This has added an extra 300 to 600 views of BCHS pets weekly and is free.
- **Volunteer photographers and videographers:** Volunteer photographers and videographers come out once a week to take pictures, shoot video and write up descriptions of the animals available for adoption. Just about every dog has a video made and the longer term cats are featured in videos also. The videos are especially helpful for dogs or cats who don't show well in their kennels. As an example, a dog who barks a lot or lunges in his kennel might be a terrific Frisbee dog, so capturing that on video will help promote positive attributes of the pet that won't be seen when a visitor walks through the kennels. The volunteers do a really nice job on the pictures and videos and take care writing the descriptions, which helps get the animals adopted.
- **Guidelines for writing bios:** Volunteers who are interested in writing bios for dogs and cats are given a one-page guide. The guide includes instructions for how to structure the bio and examples of dos and don'ts. Providing this guideline has given the volunteers more confidence about writing bios and has resulted in bios that highlight the best of each pet.
- **Cat and dog of the week:** BCHS features a cat and dog of the week on the homepage of its website. The extra exposure has helped these animals find loving homes.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Staff taking pictures and writing descriptions:** The staff simply did not have enough time to give this task the attention needed. Having dedicated volunteers who take

great pride in their photos and descriptions, and who love hearing about the successful adoptions, has been more effective.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Spreading the workload:** Writing good bios and taking and editing photos and videos is time-consuming. Updating the websites more than once a week would help move pets into adoptive homes more quickly. Finding additional volunteers to help with these tasks is a goal for 2015.



Shelter open hours

Brown County Humane Society experimented with its open hours to find the days and times that were most convenient and best for the local population.

WHAT WORKED

- **Weekend hours:** Since many people in Brown County are commuters who work Monday through Friday, having the shelter open from noon to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays has helped draw more people in and get more animals adopted.
- **Being flexible:** If a potential adopter is not available to visit during open hours, the staff schedules an appointment to meet with him or her after hours. On the days the shelter is closed to the public, if someone stops by and staff are available, they will welcome the customer into the shelter.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Evening hours:** BCHS experimented with being open after 5 p.m. on weeknights, but this was not effective, probably because many people are commuters and just want to enjoy some downtime at home after work.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Monitoring:** BCHS will continue to monitor the days and times that people ask for appointments and to evaluate the traffic on closed days. In addition, surveys are being utilized to evaluate overall customer service and one of the questions on the survey is related to the shelter hours. As data is gathered, BCHS will determine if adjustments need to be made.



Social media and email

Brown County Humane Society uses Facebook, Twitter and email to get the word out about adoptable animals.

WHAT WORKED

- **Featuring pets on Facebook and Twitter:** On its Facebook page (facebook.com/bchumane) and Twitter account ([twitter/BChumane](https://twitter.com/BChumane)), BCHS features a pet of the week, updates on special-needs pets, shelter supply requests and event promotions. They also post volunteer opportunities and share adoption statistics and successes. Reuniting lost pets with their families using these social media tools has been very effective.
- **Email newsletter:** BCHS sends out a twice-monthly email newsletter to more than 900 volunteers and supporters. The newsletter includes at least one pet who needs a foster home and one who is waiting for adoption. It also includes volunteer opportunities, shelter news, easy ways to help the shelter, reminders about important legislative issues, monthly shelter statistics, updates on various programs, and anything else that supporters might be interested in. The twice-monthly e-newsletter includes a picture, description and video of the featured pet. E-newsletters are really helpful because open and click-through rates can be tracked to see what people are responding to.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Being slow on the uptake:** BCHS is a bit behind on its use of social media and has most likely missed opportunities on many fronts.
- **Email contact management:** Donor software and email address lists are not currently integrated. This has caused some extra work for BCHS to ensure it is reaching as many people as possible.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Evaluation of other social media:** The cost-effectiveness of using additional social media, such as Instagram and Pinterest, needs to be determined. In addition, BCHS would like to have a more active blog to direct people to their website.



Adoption specials

Brown County Humane Society runs successful discounted adoption specials, including limited-time and continually running promotions. When it has a large number of a particular type of pet, BCHS uses these specials to adopt out as many of them as possible. These discounts help create a sense of urgency in people's minds and inspire them to come into the shelter to adopt.

WHAT WORKED

- **Two-for-one cats and kittens:** During kitten season, this promo has been particularly effective. Approximately 50 percent of kitten adoptions and about 25 percent of adult adoptions result from this special.
- **Hearts for Hounds:** BCHS did this promotion in February a few years ago, offering all hounds and hound mixes for a \$10 adoption fee. It really brought attention to the excessive number of hunting dogs who end up in the shelter due to the number of hunters in the community. It also gave BCHS a chance to educate people about what great family pets hounds can be. All seven hounds at the shelter were adopted that month.
- **Pet sponsorship program:** This program gives someone who has a special pet he or she likes but cannot adopt the option to pay the adoption fee to make the pet more attractive to someone else. The great thing about this program is that about 50 percent of the people go ahead and pay for the adoption, and then choose another pet to sponsor. A laminated flyer with a heart and the sponsor's name is placed on the cage to indicate which pets have a sponsor.
- **Best Friends sponsorship program:** For particularly hard-to-place pets, Best Friends Animal Society has offered to cover the adoption fee. To help draw attention to the pet, BCHS places a flashy sign with the Best Friends logo on the pet's cage. Since Best Friends has a large following, visitors to the shelter often recognize the logo and take time to visit the pet.
- **Red Collar Club:** Although this promotion has been retired because of fewer pets in the shelter, it was very effective a few years ago. Any pet who had been in the shelter longer than six months or was over seven years of age became a member of the Red Collar Club. These pets had a discounted adoption fee of \$10. A red collar flyer was hung on their cages to visually bring attention to them, and they were advertised on the websites as having a reduced adoption fee. This promotion was particularly effective because some people want to adopt the pets who need the most help. When they know a pet has been waiting a long time, they are more apt to give the animal a chance.
- **Cat of the Week adoption fee waived:** BCHS waives the adoption fee for the Cat of the Week, who's featured on the BCHS website, Facebook and Twitter. This brings special attention to the pet and adds a bit of urgency for people to adopt.

- **Being flexible and creative:** Sometimes, adoption promotions need to be planned and implemented quickly, depending on the current population in the shelter or outside circumstances. As an example, a bridge on the major road to the BCHS shelter was closed for two months. Visitors had to drive an extra nine miles, taking 20 additional minutes to get there. The shelter came up with a “Drive 9 miles to adopt a cat for \$9” adoption promotion while the bridge was closed.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Not choosing adoption promotion taglines carefully:** A Free Over Three promotion was misinterpreted by some people as meaning that if they adopted more than three pets, the fourth, fifth and so on were free. Yikes! That was not the intent. The idea was to get pets over three years of age adopted. After BCHS clarified, people were more interested, but the promotion had lost its punch.
- **Adopt a Lucky Charm:** During the week of St. Patrick's Day, any black or mostly black cat had a discounted adoption fee. This promotion was not very successful, probably because it was just a week long. Month-long promotions seem to work better.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Better use of social media:** As BCHS comes up with more catchy promotions, it hopes to better utilize Facebook and Twitter to help get the word out.



Raising funds

Brown County Humane Society uses a number of techniques to raise money, including donation solicitation, fundraising events and grants.

WHAT WORKED

- **Appeal letters:** The shelter has had success sending out appeal letters to people who have previously given money to the organization. The letters include a story about an adopted dog or cat and then a request for money so that the shelter can continue doing its lifesaving work. BCHS sends out three appeal letters per year.
- **Prospect letters:** BCHS sends out a prospect letter once a year to people who are not currently supporters. The goal of a prospect letter is not necessarily to make a lot of money, but to find new supporters who will continue to donate over the years. Prospect lists have been gathered from a variety of sources, including a list of everyone who

had paid dog taxes, purchased lists from mailing companies of people who buy animal products and a client list from a local vet.

- **Phone-a-thon:** Once a year, BCHS holds a phone-a-thon during which they call people who support them to solicit donations for either the SPOT program or for their medical fund, which is used for extraordinary veterinary needs. Finding a donor to match funds donated through the phone-a-thon has proven to be especially effective. It is important to focus the phone-a-thon on a particular need and not for general operations.
- **Grants:** BCHS has had success securing grants, including grants for facility improvements, such as a new fenced enclosure to exercise dogs and cat condos; donor management software; and initiatives, including volunteer and spay/neuter programs. There are many grants, especially for spay/neuter, that can be found via an Internet search. For spay/neuter grants, Jane advises proving the value with statistical data. In the case of BCHS, it costs \$240 per pet for care at the shelter, while fixing a cat costs \$30 and fixing a dog costs \$60.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Calling former adopters during the phone-a-thon:** During the first few years of the phone-a-thon, people who had adopted a pet in the previous year were called. The donations from this group were significantly lower than donations from existing supporters, so the adopter list was dropped as a viable group to call in subsequent years.



Fundraising events

Brown County Humane Society hosts three major events a year: Dawg Gone Walk & Fiesta, a barn sale, and Chocolate Walk. All the events are organized and staffed by volunteers. Thus, no paid staff time is taken away from the shelter.

WHAT WORKED

- **Dawg Gone Walk & Fiesta:** This event is held at a local sports complex in May, before the sports season kickoff. Dog lovers pay a registration fee and collect donations. On the day of the event, they enjoy contests and activities with their dogs. Local businesses sponsor the event and help make it a success.
- **Barn sale:** New and gently used items, along with antiques and obsolete inventory items from local shops, are donated to the barn sale by supporters. Items are reasonably priced. People flock to the barn sale year after year.

- **Chocolate Walk:** For the price of a ticket, walkers stroll through the quaint village of Nashville, sampling chocolate at over 30 shops. Restaurants, candy stores and specialty shops donate chocolate for 1,250 walkers.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Trying to do too many events:** BCHS used to do several smaller events to raise money. Events are labor-intensive and take a lot of time and energy. It is better to put on fewer events and develop and grow those instead of adding more events.
- **Continuing events that have outlived their life span:** Some events may grow old and are no longer cost-effective. BCHS had an event that it really enjoyed hosting, but the revenues were not growing and the number of hours spent planning and implementing it were just not worth it. It was difficult to let it go, but from a business perspective, it made sense.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Getting more from existing events:** To get people excited about attending, it's important to keep repeat events fresh and add new twists each year. Next year, BCHS is considering adding a 5K run to the Dawg Walk and moving the location. The Chocolate Walk will be in its seventh year, and BCHS is looking into expanding either the number of shops that participate or making it a weekend event instead of just a Saturday event.
- **Online auction:** BCHS would like to investigate the feasibility of having an online auction. For the event that was recently retired, Jane says BCHS procured high-quality items for a silent auction. Donors were happy to give to the silent auction, so BCHS knows that a supply of items for an online auction is attainable. This may be a less labor-intensive fundraiser.
- **Hiring a development person:** The BCHS board is exploring the idea of hiring a person devoted specifically to fundraising. Currently, all fundraising is done by the very busy volunteer board. Donor development needs additional attention to help the organization grow, and to do that, it may be necessary to employ someone dedicated to that endeavor.



BCHS shelter setup

The current shelter was built in 1987 and had a major addition in 2000. Even with fewer numbers of pets coming into the shelter, the workflow is inefficient. There are 20 indoor/outdoor dog runs built with concrete dividers and chain-link fence. The cat adoption room contains 15 large cat cages and a cat isolation room. As the cat population fluctuates, sev-

eral temporary cat condos are used. A small room serves as the medical clinic, as well as a staff lunch and meeting room. There is also a room with a raised tub to bathe pets, as well as a laundry and storage room. The lobby area is large and open, giving a welcoming feeling to visitors. However, because of the high ceilings, the lobby can be very noisy when several people are talking at once.

WHAT WORKED

- **Indoor/outdoor dog runs:** BCHS staff love the indoor/outdoor dog runs. They are large and can easily accommodate multiple dogs. Some dogs seem more comfortable in the shelter if they have a buddy to share their space with.
- **Lobby area:** The lobby area is large and open with lots of natural light. It is welcoming to the public.
- **Dog play areas:** Having outside fenced areas where dogs can interact with each other has been extremely beneficial to their well-being, giving them an outlet for their energy and the ability to interact with other dogs.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Long narrow walkway between kennels:** Currently, the dog kennels face each other, with a long, narrow walkway between the row of kennels. This creates a loud and oftentimes overwhelming environment for potential adopters. It is very difficult for people to figure out what a particular dog might be like with all the ruckus.
- **“Get to know a pet” room:** This room was designed to allow prospective adopters to interact with a dog or cat away from other pets and people. However, because there's no office space, it is currently being used as both the get-acquainted room and the manager's office. This setup is far from ideal for both the potential adopters and the manager.
- **No dog/puppy isolation area:** There is nowhere to isolate incoming or sick dogs or puppies from the rest of the population.
- **Lack of space:** There is no office space, staff break area or place to hold educational programs.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **New building:** The BCHS board is currently drawing up floor plans for a new facility. The groundwork should begin later this year. There are several items on the new construction wish list, including free-roaming cat areas, get-acquainted rooms, isolation rooms for cats and dogs, a staff break room, office space, an educational/multi-purpose room and a dog training room.



Community outreach

In addition to the spay/neuter program that SPOT administers, SPOT is also the community outreach arm of BCHS. SPOT volunteers spend at least two days a month on field runs, visiting clients at their homes or attending community events. The outreach portion of the SPOT program helps educate some folks about the need for spay/neuter. It's important to build relationships with people in the community who don't trust or who have never visited the shelter.

WHAT WORKED

- **Advertising free straw for outside pets:** SPOT's first outreach effort was to offer delivery of free straw to anyone in the county who had outside dogs or cats. This offer was very well received by the target group of people that SPOT needed to engage. It was important to deliver the straw so that SPOT volunteers could evaluate how pets were being cared for and offer to help with any issues. Many spay/neuter surgeries were scheduled as a result of this initial outreach.
- **Going out into the community:** SPOT volunteers often simply stop by houses where they see dogs or cats outside and strike up a conversation with the residents. Most people are very willing to talk about their pets. Offering free food or a free collar is a great ice-breaker. Really getting to know and understand citizens is important in determining how to create a community where all animals are valued and respected.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Expecting people to come to the shelter:** Many people in Brown County still think of the shelter as the "pound," a place where animals are killed. They also fear being judged by animal welfare advocates. It wasn't until these folks met friendly BCHS volunteers and were treated with respect and educated about the shelter that they considered coming into the shelter. SPOT took the shelter to them and has made friends with many people who previously avoided the shelter.
- **Not making the effort to connect with impoverished people:** BCHS had offered free food to needy families for many years, and many folks benefited from the program. The problem was that they would stop in, get the food and leave, and BCHS never really established a relationship with them. Having SPOT volunteers specifically tasked with building relationships with lower-income people has helped educate them about other resources available for their pets.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Public dog-training program:** Through a grant, a BCHS staff member will be taking the Karen Pryor Academy training to become a public dog trainer. BCHS will then begin offering this program to the community. This effort should help reduce the number of dogs who end up at the shelter because of behavioral issues.



Behavior coordinator

In 2013, a behavior coordinator was hired. The intent was to have the behavior coordinator work with dogs on basic manners, kennel enrichment and behavior modification.

WHAT WORKED

- **Hiring a novice:** Funding would not allow for hiring an experienced trainer, so BCHS hired a person who was keenly interested in learning positive reinforcement training, but did not have hands-on experience. Having an enthusiastic person eager to learn new skills worked out great.
- **Connecting with experienced trainers:** Shortly after hiring the behavior coordinator, BCHS contacted a training facility and was excited to find two trainers who had previously worked in shelters. They were very aware of the challenges in a shelter and were very willing to donate their time to the shelter one day a week to help train the shelter staff.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Limited time devoted to the program:** In addition to training pets, the behavior coordinator was scheduled to clean kennels. That ended up taking too much time away from training dogs and cats, and the pets were not progressing fast enough.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Training volunteers and other staff:** Having additional people to reinforce what the behavior coordinator is teaching dogs and cats will increase the rate at which learning takes place. Additional staff time is limited; therefore, BCHS would like to recruit volunteers to consistently employ the methods the behavior coordinator is using.
- **Behavioral consults:** Providing support to people who are having behavior problems with their pets before they relinquish them is key to reducing the number of pets entering the shelter. BCHS would like to implement a behavior hotline to address behavior issues.



Volunteer program manager

In 2014, BCHS added a volunteer program manager. Adding structure to the volunteer program was essential for retaining volunteers. Before BCHS had a program manager, people would often volunteer one time, and then not return. Having someone devoted to cultivating volunteers helps retention.

WHAT WORKED

- **Allowing the volunteer manager to work off-site:** BCHS's facility has no office space for a volunteer manager. When others had tried to structure the volunteer program, they inevitably were called upon to help with myriad activities in the shelter. Working off-site has given the volunteer program manager the space needed to focus on the program.
- **Hiring a "people" person:** Managing volunteers, by definition, is about dealing with people. Having an enthusiastic, easy-to-talk-to, outgoing person is extremely important in this role.
- **Involving the staff in the volunteer program:** Asking the shelter staff for their ideas about how best volunteers could assist them was key to getting their support for the program. Close communication between the volunteer program manager and the staff has helped keep everyone on the same page.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

- **Having one person manage the intake/adoption area and the volunteer program:** The first few attempts to structure the volunteer program involved having a staff person oversee the program. Those efforts were thwarted because of competing priorities within the shelter.
- **Large volunteer groups:** Because of the small facility, large groups of volunteers cannot be accommodated. A few times, projects were created just to keep a group busy. Ultimately, this strategy failed because the groups did not feel their work was fulfilling. Large groups are now asked to divide into smaller, more manageable groups or to help the organization on projects away from the shelter.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Growing the volunteer program:** Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a high priority. The volunteer program manager is especially focused on finding professionals who might be good candidates for the board.



Presenter

Jane Weatherford has served on the board of directors of the Brown County Humane Society for over 30 years in a variety of capacities, including president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and various committee chairs. She graduated from Purdue University with a bachelor's in biology and from Indiana University with a master's in biology. After 33 years, she retired from a career at a large pharmaceutical company, where she spent the last 15 years working in the animal health division.

Animal welfare is her passion and she is now able to volunteer full-time for the Brown County Humane Society. Her involvement ranges from walking shelter dogs weekly to website design to donor development. Jane and her husband, Scott, share their lives with two rescued dogs, a cat and a revolving door of various foster pets.