



PET FRIENDLY

SERVICES OF INDIANA™

An Introduction to Animal Welfare

Have you wondered what the “animal welfare community” is and how you can make a meaningful difference for Indiana’s cats and dogs? This brief guide answers commonly asked questions and explains the various roles of animal welfare organizations. The guide also explains key strategies to save as many lives as possible and to reduce shelter intake and the unnecessary euthanasia of happy, healthy cats and dogs.

SHELTERS & RESCUES

1. Aren't all humane societies the same?

There are a variety of different “humane societies”. They can be international, national, statewide, or local. Each humane society is independent. There is no overarching regulatory authority to determine the efficiency of each organization.

2. What's the difference between a city/municipal shelter and a nonprofit shelter?

Nonprofit Shelters: Some humane societies (and shelters by other names) are nonprofit organizations that fundraise to support their work. Shelters that determine the number and specific type of animals they'd like to admit are called “limited admission” shelters. Because these shelters have great control over the animals that enter their doors, they *should* have high success rates or “live release rates.”

Nonprofit Shelters with Government Contracts: Some nonprofit shelters and humane societies provide services to their city, town, or county on a contract basis. These shelters receive funding, but it is often very limited.

Municipal Shelters are operated by local cities, towns, or counties through taxpayer dollars. These shelters have the unenviable task of admitting every animal that comes to its “intake door.” Shelter staff have no means to limit the number of animals, and they are frequently overwhelmed by the sheer volume – not to mention animals that are sick, injured, pregnant or with a litter, or simply lost. When shelters are full, staff must “euthanize” animals to make way for more incoming animals. Municipal shelters are generally tasked with “animal control” duties, including having their Animal Control Officers respond to calls regarding strays, chained dogs, and nuisance behaviors.

What is No Kill?

“No Kill” is an industry standard, defined as having a live release rate of 90% or higher. The standard assumes the remaining 10% of animals are sick, injured or need behavioral training. If a shelter has adequate resources to help these animals, the live release rate inches closer to 100%.

Because shelters vary in their ability to control intake, “No Kill” can be a confusing and misleading marketing term. Private shelters should always meet the 90% standard, whereas public shelters struggle through no fault of their own.

The following articles shed more light on this important topic:

[**What “No-Kill” Really Means**¹](#)

[**What does it mean to be no-kill?**²](#)



3. What's the difference between a shelter and a rescue group?

Rescue groups often provide lifesaving support to shelters! "Rescues" are generally all-volunteer organizations or have a small number of paid positions. Many do not have a brick & mortar building and save money by having volunteers "foster" animals in their own homes.

Many rescues work in partnership with their local municipal shelters and "pull" animals from overcrowded shelters. Rescues help animals with health needs and/or behavior training to make them adoption ready. Some rescues prevent shelter intake by stepping in to help with situations involving large numbers of animals and/or hoarding situations.

When animals are adoption-ready, volunteers take animals to adoption events and meet with potential adopters. They work diligently to ensure their foster animals find the perfect forever home. Once a pet is adopted, they pull another shelter animal and start the process again.

Because rescues often operate with smaller budgets and teams compared to shelters, they are often limited-admission and typically serve smaller numbers of animals than brick-and-mortar facilities.



An advertisement for a pet adoption guide. It features a purple background with three circular images: a man holding a black cat, a woman holding a white dog, and a woman holding a white cat and a brown dog. The text reads: 'LOOKING FOR A NEW BEST FRIEND? WE'RE HERE TO HELP!' and 'ADOPTION GUIDE' in a purple box.

Pet Friendly Adoption Guide

To help adopters understand the adoption process and the many types of shelters and rescues, Pet Friendly Services created an online adoption guide. Each adoption = a life saved!

AdoptINpets.org

4. What's a Community Cat program?

Community cat programs focus on feral and free-roaming cats. They work with community members who are feeding cats, but that either don't know about spay/neuter programs – or simply cannot afford to fix a cat, let alone an entire litter or colony. Community cat volunteers trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) cats, which stabilizes colony sizes. The people who were once simply feeding stray cats become "Colony Caretakers" who agree to provide food, water, and shelter for cats in their care.

While in surgery, each cat is eartipped so that trappers can easily identify which cats are fixed and which cats they need to focus on. The eartip also helps community members identify unfixed cats and alert their local community cat program to new arrivals to the colony.



Community cat programs are the quickest way to move open-admission shelters to zero-kill status because they prevent shelter intake of thousands of cats each year, yet funding for community cat programs is scarce. Because these cats are not adoption candidates, there are no incoming adoption fees to help offset costs. Additionally, most caretakers do not consider themselves to be "owners" of the cats and are hesitant to make a large financial investment. Community cat programs take on this financial burden. Some cats are sick or injured and require additional vet procedures to bring them back to health.

Pet Friendly Services has provided spay/neuter funding to nearly 200 community cat programs. We have also created two documents to help community cat programs remove barriers to getting lifesaving work done. The first is titled, *Community Cats: Indiana Municipal Guide for Busy Leaders*³, and as the name suggests, the guide helps elected officials and other local leaders understand the many benefits of community cat programs.

The second is a *guide for owners and managers of mobile home parks and multi-unit dwellings*⁴, where cats tend to congregate due to the availability of shelter opportunities. Many community cat groups have been denied access to trap-neuter-vaccinate-return in these communities due to a lack of understanding of how these programs work. Both guides help remove barriers to spay/neuter.

SPAY & NEUTER

Pet Friendly Services runs Indiana's only statewide spay/neuter program, working with a network of veterinary clinics, including low-cost clinics, to perform the surgeries. Spaying and neutering is the only humane solution to pet overpopulation because it addresses the root cause. Fixing one pet can prevent numerous unwanted litters and ends the cycle of overpopulation.

Spaying and neutering is also incredibly cost effective compared to sheltering animals. With the money it takes to place an adopted animal into a home, we can spay/neuter five animals - stretching our dollars to save both lives and money.

Pet Friendly Services runs targeted programs to reach limited-income pet owners, as they are more likely to relinquish pets at local shelters than their higher-income neighbors.

In addition to funding shelters, we also provide funding to community cat programs and rescues groups. These supportive partners are the only ones who can relieve the burden on overcrowded shelters by preventing "intake" or "pulling" animals.

5. What's a Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Clinic?

Low-cost clinics are nonprofit organizations that specialize in spay/neuter procedures. Their veterinarians are highly trained and provide exceptional service. The mission of these organizations is to end overpopulation.

These clinics are typically open to all pet owners, regardless of income. They also serve shelters, rescue groups, and community cat programs. Some clinics run transport programs to provide services to areas that lack adequate vet capacity.

Clinics often provide vaccine and wellness services. Some clinics are affiliated with an animal shelter, while others are independent organizations.



Spay/neuter programs are incredibly cost-effective compared to sheltering animals:

A national survey found that shelters spend an average of \$176 for each impounded animal, with a cost of \$450 to ultimately place an animal into a new home.⁵

Compare this to Pet Friendly Services' financial assistance programs, which reduces both shelter intake and euthanasia rates at an average cost of \$70 per animal.

**Cost savings:
\$106 - \$380 per animal.**



6. When to Spay or Neuter

Cats reproduce early and often, starting as young as five months of age. Pet Friendly Services encourages cat owners and caretakers to Fix by Five⁶ to prevent unwanted litters. Most private-practice Indiana vets perform surgeries for dogs and cats at 4 - 6 months of age. Most low-cost nonprofit clinics perform surgeries for dogs and cats at 2 months or 2 pounds.

Unaltered cats are extremely difficult to live with. Females go into heat, meowing loudly and continuously. The process repeats itself until they become pregnant. Unaltered male cats have high levels of testosterone which makes their urine especially strong smelling. Male cats do not want to be contained indoors when female cats are in heat, and they frequently slip outside when an unsuspecting person opens a door.

What about fixing large dogs? Some vets advise to wait to spay/neuter large-breed dogs. For pet owners who are willing and able to take full responsibility for their pets, this is a logical option. Public policy is to spay/neuter before adoption to avoid unwanted litters. In fact, spay/neuter before adoption is the law in Indiana.

In 2016, Pet Friendly Services worked to pass House Enrolled Act 1201⁷, which requires Indiana rescue groups and shelters to spay/neuter prior to adoption. Upon the bill's passage, Indiana joined 33 other states that had implemented this "best practice."

7. Why is it taking so long to get a vet appointment?

There's a nationwide vet shortage, so it's important to schedule spay/neuter appointments right away. The United Spay Alliance has a Vet Shortage Task Force⁸, comprised of vets and animal welfare professionals, working to better understand and address the issue.

About This Guide: This guide was compiled by Pet Friendly Services of Indiana. Pet Friendly Services is Indiana's statewide leader, with a mission to support the work of animal welfare organizations to increase their success rates.

Pet Friendly Services also hosts the Indiana Animal Welfare Conference, bringing our state's shelters, rescues and volunteers together for a day of learning and networking. Pet Friendly Services is financially supported by donations, grants and the #4 selling Pet Friendly specialty license plate. Contact us or visit us online to learn more:

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1. What No Kill Really Means: <https://www.vhslifesaver.org/news/what-no-kill-really-means>
2. What does it mean to be no-kill? <https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/news/what-does-it-mean-be-no-kill>
3. Community Cats, Indiana Municipal Guide for Busy Leaders: <https://petfriendlyservices.org/helping-at-risk-animals/community-cats/>
4. Community Cat Guide for Indiana Mobile Home Parks & Multi-Unit Dwellings: <https://petfriendlyservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Mobile-Home-Multi-Unit-Dwellings-Community-Cat-Guide-Indiana.pdf>
5. Getting to Zero: http://shelteroverpopulation.org/Getting_To_Zero.htm
6. Fix by Five: <https://www.unitedspayalliance.org/feline-fix-by-five/>
7. House Enrolled Act 1201: <https://legiscan.com/IN/text/1201/id/1365459>
8. Vet Shortage Task Force: <https://www.unitedspayalliance.org/vet-shortage/>