



COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED SHELTERING FACT SHEET



Memphis Animal Services will combine traditional animal control functions with community-supported sheltering to proactively address the needs of pets and pet parents in our community.

Community-supported sheltering is an animal shelter model that supports the human-animal bond by emphasizing keeping pets with their families.

This is through support and resources for:

- Pet parents to help them keep their pet
- Pet finders so a found pet can stay in their community having a much higher chance of getting back home

This helps keep pets out of the shelter unless they absolutely need to be there.

SERVICES PROVIDED TO PET PARENTS & PET FINDERS



- Spay/Neuter
- Doghouse
- Fence repair
- Behavior & training
- Veterinary care
- Pet deposits/pet fees for housing
- Assistance caring for a found pet, finding the owner, and/or rehoming a found pet
- Assistance for pet parents to rehome their pet if absolutely necessary

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What's wrong with the way we've always done it?

The 'old way' took animals out of certain areas and either funneled them to rescue partners, euthanized them, or redistributed them to other areas via adoption without addressing the systemic root issues affecting pet parents and their ability to care for their pets. Although we were taking large numbers of animals in, intake numbers did not decrease and large, adult dogs were still being euthanized because there weren't enough kennels for them. If our primary focus goes back to picking up every stray animal, no questions asked, and impounding them, we ignore the systemic problems facing the Memphis pet-owning community and continue the cycle of lack of spay/neuter, education, and resources. Instead of "how quickly can we get this pet into a shelter kennel?" we will ask "how can we safely keep this pet in his/her community to find their owner or an adopter?"

Who will this programming help?

This programming will better help pets because we are no longer applying the one-size-fits-all “impound them all” philosophy to every single pet. That is not what fits every pet’s needs, and now we’re going to be working hard to identify those needs and meet them.

It will better help pet parents who believe they have to surrender their pet or just need help with their pet. It will better help the families of lost pets; keeping pets in their communities makes them much more likely to get back home.

By creating a reciprocal system of support **for** and **from** the community, we help our citizens live in a community that no longer euthanizes healthy pets just because the shelter’s out of space, and no longer eagerly takes pets away from families who just need a little help.

Do you plan to keep these practices long term or is it just during the pandemic?

We don’t intend for our COVID-19 policies to be long-term, but we do intend for our community-supported sheltering approach to be long-term. It’s important to distinguish between the two.

COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of operations at MAS, and forced us to determine how to do things differently while still performing our core functions. Our operations during COVID-19 have greatly reduced, and that’s by necessity. In an effort to save human lives and reduce spread, we have implemented split staffing, limited the number of guests in the building by doing adoptions by appointment only, and limited animal intake to emergencies. When COVID-19 no longer requires us to perform our daily operations with half of our staff, we will be able to house more animals and have more people in the building, so those animals can leave more quickly.

Is MAS not picking up strays anymore?

That’s incorrect. We still pick up any pet that’s a public safety risk and every pet that needs immediate medical intervention. For all other pets, we’re engaging citizens more to see if something can be done before the animal comes to us. The idea is for Memphis Animal Services to be both an Emergency Room and a Community Resource Hub, not the first stop for every animal in the city.

What should I do if I pick up a stray animal?

Go to www.memphisanimalservices.com or call MAS at 901-636-1418. We can work together to either find the pet’s original owner or find the pet a new home. We’ll provide everything for the pet through our Found Foster program, including marketing, assisting with adoption, and administering needed basic medical care and supplies if you can keep the pet in your home where he/she is not taking up a kennel at the shelter and is more likely to get back home.

What are you able to do now that you couldn’t do before? Why can’t you do both?

If we focus first on keeping pets in their homes and neighborhoods, our team has the availability to provide education and resources instead of simply running the machine of impounding, pleading for rescue/adoptions, then euthanizing healthy adoptable dogs for space. With increased kennel capacity, shelters could do things like providing temporary housing for pets whose families need a short-term housing solution.

Where did this idea come from? Who supports it?

Leadership from over 30 municipal shelters nationally, as well as industry leaders in Petfinder, Michelson Found Animals, Maddie’s Fund, Pedigree Foundation, Best Friends Animal Society, American Pets Alive!, ASPCA, the Humane Society of the United States, and many more, support programming for community-supported sheltering.

Where are my taxpayer dollars going now? What are your employees doing?

We’re making more efficient use of taxpayer funding. Our average cost to care for a pet in the shelter is \$309. It costs less than that, on average, to help a pet using community assistance strategies, so we’ll be able to help more pets with our funding now.

Many of our staff members are working differently than they have before. For example, **animal services officers** are now expected to spend more time on stray calls to find the owner instead of taking the dog out of its neighborhood to a shelter knowing that dog has less than a 10% chance of finding its way home again. **Animal care technicians** can dedicate more time to each dog, providing enrichment, playgroups, and one-on-one time. **Vet clinic staff** is just as busy as ever with exams, meds, emergencies, vaccines, and spay/neuter surgeries for adopted pets.

Some animals are ‘better off’ in the shelter. Are you saying we should ‘keep them with their families’?

Some of the pets we serve in our shelters have been victims of cruelty or neglect, or are owned by people who indeed cannot provide adequate care for them, as in the case with people who demonstrate hoarding behaviors and have too many animals. By reducing the number of animals who need to come into and be housed long term in the shelter environment, these animals who need to be in our custody will receive comprehensive, immediate, and ongoing care. This model will help shorten the length of time animals are in the sheltering system and help them to go to foster homes as soon as they are stable and ready to live with a caregiver. Utilizing a case management approach allows shelters to conduct individual needs assessments of each pet and person who comes to us for help.

Aren't you just doing this so your numbers will look better?

Actually, our belief is that this programming will make our "numbers" look worse. When a shelter truly operates like an emergency room, taking in mostly dangerous or medically needy pets, the save rate will naturally go down as a lower percentage of the animals are able to be saved. We are working on ways to quantify our community outreach work so we can include that data when we report on shelter statistics. For us, success will be defined by a new set of data and metrics, which will reflect our work in the community. We're redefining success, and the save rate will be just one piece of the puzzle.

There are more strays on the streets; what do you say to that?

The data doesn't support that assertion. Comparing data from before and after MAS went to emergency-only intake due to COVID-19, calls reporting strays went down 31%, calls reporting aggressive strays went down 10%, bite reports went down 23%, and requests for Dead Animal Pickup went down 10%. Public safety will always be a priority, and we are constantly looking at new ways to collect and analyze data so we can stay on top of this.

Aren't you worried this approach is going to lead to a rabies outbreak? That's why shelters were created.

Animal shelters were created in the late 1800s to keep people safe from animals spreading rabies--before a rabies vaccine was available. Even though the rabies vaccine became available decades ago, most animal shelters are still operating on the same model from 120 years ago. Now in the United States, rabies is extremely rare in domestic pets, only having infected 63 dogs in 2018, making dogs 1% of all animals infected in the U.S.

MAS will continue to make public safety calls a very top priority. Any citizen who sees a dog or cat behaving in a way that appears it intends to harm a person or another pet should call 545-COPS immediately to dispatch an MAS officer to the scene. The same is true for pets that appear to be ill or injured.

Aren't you abandoning your state-legislated charter?

State law gives counties and municipalities the authority to license and regulate animals, including the capture and impound of stray animals. However, the law does not mandate these actions nor does it dictate how shelters perform their functions.

What can I do to help make this a success?

There are a number of things you can do to help!

- [Foster](#)
- [Donate pet food, supplies, or funds](#)
- [Sign up to be a community outreach action volunteer](#)