



# Pet-Friendly Agencies, Shelters and Residential Facilities

One of PAWS' goals is offering education and support for agencies whose human clients have companion animals and both may need some help. Here are some tips for Community Agencies and Shelters.

## COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Do you work at a community agency that assists low income, in-crisis, or disadvantaged people, and want to ensure your clients receive the help they need with their pets? Animal companions help those in crisis - this is a proven fact. So ensuring your clients can get the help they need without forfeiting the safety or companionship of their pet is vital and should be on the agenda of any organization helping those in need. Any step towards assisting at-risk people with their pets is a step in the right direction!

[Read about the benefits of animal companionship to human health and welfare.](#)

Here are just some of the ways you can achieve positive change in this area:

1. Connect your clients with the appropriate pet-related services. Contact us at [apply@pawscanada.ca](mailto:apply@pawscanada.ca) for help with finding organizations that might be able to assist.
2. Assist your clients financially with access to veterinary care.
3. Provide food and supplies for your clients' pets. These can be sourced through donations and take a significant financial load off of your client's minds.
4. Advocate for pet-inclusive services within your organization.
5. Educate your donor base and partner agencies about the underserved needs of your clients with pets.
6. Create a foster network to assist your clients who are going through a transition and have nowhere for their pets to go.
7. Develop relationships with local kennels and catteries, so that your clients can board their pets safely during transitions for discounted or no cost.
8. Transform your residential facilities into pet-friendly facilities.
9. Apply for grants to cover the costs of pet-related care and services.
10. Fundraise or donate to pet food banks, the Farley Foundation and other groups dedicated to improving access to pet-related services.

We at PAWS work with multiple community agencies across Ontario, to ensure that everyone can access the help they need for their pets. Please take a look at [our Programs](#). To learn how you can work with us more directly, please email us at [outreach@pawscanada.ca](mailto:outreach@pawscanada.ca).

# SHELTERS and RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

The brutal fact is the majority of those going into any kind of residential facility do not have the resources to ensure the safety and care of their animal companion while they're in shelter. But having to give away, abandon or euthanize their pet should not be their only option. Shelters can become part of the solution by offering pet-friendly facilities to their clientele. How? Well, we have some expertise in this area, so let's break it down!

## Making Your Shelter Pet-Friendly

Transforming a residential facility into a pet-friendly space is a complex and challenging task, but not an impossible one. Many different areas need to be addressed, including:

### 1. Safety

Resident and animal safety must be considered and protected. This includes the behavioural concerns that come with placing animals in new and potentially stressful situations, especially where they might encounter strangers, children and staff.

PAWS recommends training all staff in safe animal interaction, posting notices around the facility for all residents, and ensuring the animal's owner understands and legally acknowledges their responsibilities in terms of keeping their pet under control and accompanied in public areas at all times.

There is a wealth of information available on topics such as understanding dog body language, reducing stress for pets, and managing multiple animals in small spaces.

You can also request our help developing your own documentation, or finding certified animal trainers to train your staff, by emailing us at <mailto:outreach@pawscanada.ca>

### 2. Facilities

Creating appropriate space for animals to live, sleep, exercise, eat and eliminate is essential. Not every facility will easily accommodate these needs, but most will be able to adapt at least partially. Premises with private rooms, outside space and extra storage rooms are best positioned, but even those with communal living can make some changes to accommodate several animals at a time. **Ask us for our help in determining how your facility can be adapted, and for guidance on applying for funding to do so.**

### 3. Food and other pet supplies

Accepting animals into a shelter does not guarantee their owner will have all the supplies needed to care for them. Your shelter must be prepared to assist them with food, bowls, beds, dog bags, cat litter, leashes, collars, muzzles, pet carriers, cages or crates, treats, toys, waste disposal bins, and more.

Many of these items can be sourced via donation, and many areas now have pet food banks to serve struggling families, so sourcing these items may not be the hurdle you'd expect. Connect with us for advice on sourcing donations.

#### **4. Cleaning**

Animals in shelter equals more cleaning; this is an unavoidable fact, and to ensure everyone's continued health and safety this must be addressed proactively. Those keeping their pets with them must be tasked with cleaning up after them in private spaces but remember that there will be an additional cleaning burden during resident switchovers and in communal areas.

In addition, safe disposal sites must be provided for pet waste, separate from other waste areas, and any outside spaces must be kept clean and safe (this includes bearing in mind the toxic effect on many animals of lawn pesticides and vermin deterrents). Animal eating areas must also be kept separate from human eating areas.

#### **5. Ventilation**

Allergies are of increasing concern and accepting animals into a shelter may negatively impact residents or potential residents with pet-related allergies. This is not an insurmountable problem and can be addressed in several ways (depending on the size and layout of your facility).

The most comprehensive solution is to modify the ventilation system so that the pet-friendly area of the facility has separate airways to the rest of the facility, keeping allergens contained. However, this can be expensive. A more affordable but less thorough solution is to keep animals out of all communal areas, and place residents with animals far from those with allergies, thereby reducing exposure.

#### **6. Medical**

Lastly, animals come with their own suite of medical concerns. This includes:

- Parasites. All animals entering shelter should be proactively treated for parasites, such as fleas, ticks, worms and so on. Not only do these present a health hazard to the animal itself and all the other animals in the shelter, but to humans too. Topical treatments and medications for parasites are easily obtainable and should be kept on hand to administer to any new animals entering the facility.
- Vaccines. All animals entering shelter should be vaccinated against the most basic illnesses common to that species, to prevent avoidable sickness and cross-contamination with other animals. Affordable vaccinations are available via various programs and at specific veterinary clinics, or via our programs.
- Spay and neuter. The last thing you need is a litter of puppies or kittens appearing out of nowhere, so all animals residing in the shelter should always be spayed or neutered as a preventative measure. The good news is that doing this also protects the animal from future, avoidable diseases, so it's good for everyone. Affordable spays and neuters are available via various programs and at specific veterinary clinics, or via our programs.
- Basic wellness. It is not uncommon for pets belonging to disadvantaged or in-crisis families to have some unaddressed medical needs. Small problems, when addressed

early, can be manageable and affordable, but if left unattended can become potentially life-threatening. PAWS advocates for a basic wellness check for all animals on a periodic basis, and, crucially, as a first step when accepting an animal into a shelter facility. This protects the animal's quality of life, secures the animal's future with their owner, and helps avoid much larger crises for both the animal and their human down the road. Community programs and affordable veterinary appointments are available throughout Ontario, to facilitate this level of care.

- Emergencies. Lastly, emergencies do happen, and can run into the thousands. Whilst not something a shelter can necessarily plan for; this should be kept in mind when accepting pets into your facility. Having a plan on how to address emergency veterinary care needs is key to providing a well-rounded pet-friendly approach to your services.

This is our key area of expertise, and we work tirelessly to ensure those in need can access veterinary care for their animal companions.

In summary, PAWS has experience in helping shelters become pet-friendly, through practical advice, expert training, donations and grant-sourcing. We can help your organization. Any step towards assisting at-risk people with their pets is a step in the right direction!

Contact us at [outreach@pawscanada.ca](mailto:outreach@pawscanada.ca) for more information or to request our help.

