

Adopters Welcome

Embracing adopters by removing
unnecessary barriers to adoption



**Humane
World for
Animals™**

Formerly called the Humane Society of the United States
and Humane Society International



Agenda

- What is Adopters Welcome?
- Why do we need it?
- Removing barriers at each step
- How to begin
- Q&A

The background features a large, faint circular graphic containing silhouettes of a dog and a cat. The dog is on the right, and the cat is on the left, both facing right. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

What is Adopters Welcome?

Adopters Welcome

- Framework that **encourages all community members** to adopt
- Conversations > Applications
- **Emphasizes support** so that all pet owners and pets can succeed
- Believes all people who want a pet are **deserving of the love a pet provides.**
- Creates **long-lasting relationships** between shelters and rescues and adopters



The background features a large, light blue circular graphic containing stylized silhouettes of a dog and a cat. The dog is on the right, and the cat is on the left, both facing right. The silhouettes are layered and slightly offset, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Audience Poll



Why do we need Adopters Welcome?

How do people acquire their pets?

Cats

Shelter- 24%

Found pet- 24%

Friend/relative- 23%

Rescue group- 13%

Dogs

Breeder- 23%

Friend/relative- 20%

Shelter- 19%

Rescue group- 14%

The Adopter's Journey





Disconnect

- **Over 50% of cat and dog owners would prefer to adopt** from a shelter or rescue*
- Only about **33% adopt a dog** and **37% adopt a cat** from a shelter or rescue*
- Why?

**American Pet Products Association. (2024). "APPA's Dog and Cat 2024 Report: Strategic Insights from the National Pet Owner Survey"*

Ripple effects of denied adoptions

Denying an adoption creates a ripple effect

- Increased length of stay > decreased quality of life for animals
- Strain on resources (time, funds, space)
- Adopters may seek out inhumane sources for pets
- Pets and owners cut off from safety net programs
- Broken trust and relationships with community we serve
- Generalized stigma about pet adoption





**Removing barriers at
each step**



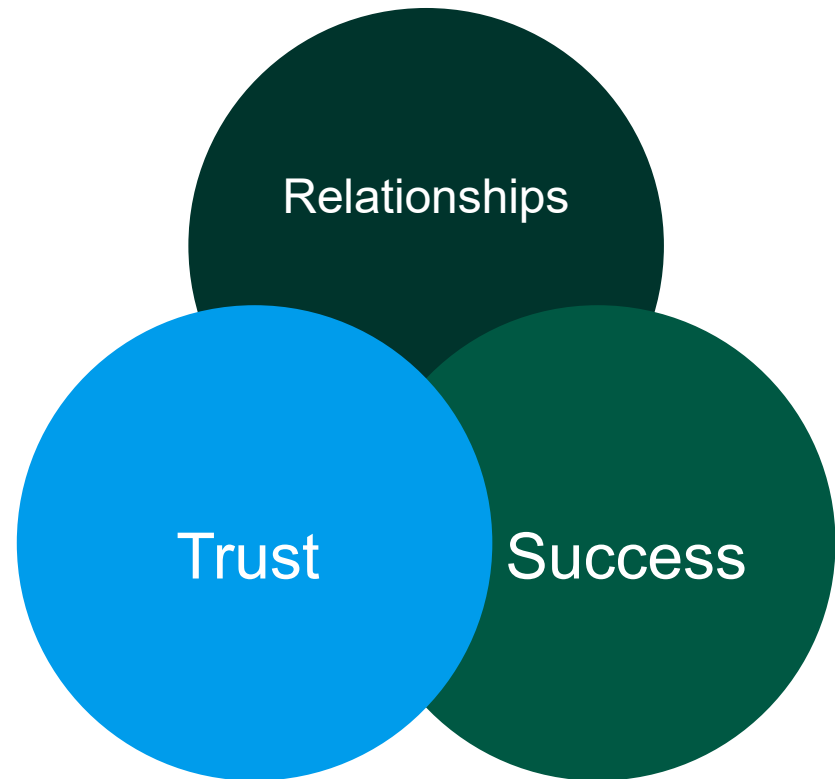
REMOVE BARRIERS: Adoption requirements

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Audience Poll

Why traditional policies fall short

- Fears of what could happen to pets often drive policies, not what actually happens
- Restrictive policies limit options for animals and exclude potential adopters
- Automatic 'noes' and 'must-haves' create unnecessary barriers



Policies that remove barriers



Support renters

Trust adopters to handle housing issues and offer support where needed



Indoor cats

Use persuasion, not policies, to promote indoor living



Veterinary care

Support access to care without requiring proof

Policies that remove barriers



Breed equality

Treat all dogs as individuals,
not by breed stereotypes



Fence requirements

Support exercise and safety
without discriminating against
renters and those without
fences



Yes/No Applications

Support homes for the long run
instead of investigating them
once

Case study: Housing

- A 2014 study found no difference in pet retention after an OH shelter ended a strict landlord check policy
- One study found 90% of dog breed guesses by adoption agencies didn't match the predominant breed identified through DNA analysis
- Americans move an average of 11 times in their life



Data homework

On average only about 35% of dogs and cats in homes today are adopted from shelters or rescues*

What percentage of your community has adopted from your organization in the past 5-10 years?

**American Pet Products Association, 2024 Dog & Cat Report

A large, faint, circular logo in the background, composed of dark green silhouettes of various animals including a dog, a cat, a bird, and a fish, arranged in a circular pattern.

REMOVE BARRIERS: Paperwork



Why applications fall short

- Long, intrusive applications discourage adopters
- Miss opportunities to build relationships
- Not accessible to all adopters
- Discourage adopters from disclosing challenges

Questionnaire, not application

Designed for conversation-based adoptions and promotes barrier-free adoptions

- Learn about the adopter and their household
- Identify topics important to the adopter
- Customizable to fit your organization's needs
- No automatic rejections
- Build trust and partnership
- Prioritize the adopter's needs and preferences
- Empower team members to be flexible and responsive



A large, faint, circular graphic in the background. It consists of a thick, dark green arrow that curves clockwise around a central point. Inside the circle, there are silhouettes of various animals: a dog at the top, a cat on the left, a pig at the bottom, and a bird on the right.

REMOVE BARRIERS: Promoting adoptions

Overcoming Adoption Marketing Barriers

- How is your current adoption messaging being perceived by the community?
- Are you utilizing fee-waived adoption promotions?
- Are you providing adopters with hands on interactions with animals?
- Are your current business hours accessible to everyone?
- Are you waiting for people to come to you?
- Do you have enough staff and volunteers to respond to potential adopters?





Perceived adopter investment

- A 2012 survey of adopters found pets adopted on the spur of the moment were just as likely to still be in the home after 6 months as those adopted by owners who had done lots of research*
- Research shows attachment to cats adopted through fee-waived programs were no different than those who required a fee**

*American Humane Association & Petsmart Charities, Keeping Pets in Homes, 2013

**Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee-Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions 2009

A large, light blue graphic in the background shows a hand cupping a dog and a cat. The dog is on the right, looking up, and the cat is on the left, looking towards the dog. The hand is positioned at the bottom, supporting the animals.

Supporting staff and volunteers

Building a supportive culture

Adopters Welcome approach can represent a paradigm shift in how to approach all aspects of shelter work

- Encourage open communication and feedback
- Provide resources for stress and trauma support
- Celebrate successes and learn from challenges



The importance of training

- Adoption counselors need knowledge, skills, and confidence to support adopters
- Training helps counselors navigate complex conversations and make informed decisions
- Inclusive training ensures all team members feel supported and valued

Learning when things don't go as planned

Unsafe culture	Safe culture
“Who did this and why did they do it?”	“How did this happen and how can we prevent it?”
Blame motivates safe behavior	Risk is inevitable and unpredictable in high risk, high consequence work
Increasing regulation reduces errors	Employees are an asset to be valued and learned from



How to begin

Training resources

- humanepro.org/topics/adopters-welcome
- Adopters Welcome training manual
- Webinar series & certificate
- Training request form!





Questions?

Lindsay Hamrick lhamrick@humaneworld.org