



Welcome to the Vernon County Humane Society, Inc.

Vernon County Animal Shelter

(Background)

The existing Animal Shelter was operated by the City of Viroqua until the Vernon County Humane Society, Inc. “VCHS” assumed responsibility of the facility on January 1, 2004. The Animal Shelter operates as a “No Kill” facility; that is, no adoptable animals will be euthanized for space reasons. The Shelter “has come a long way, baby” since the first one was built in 1977.

In the beginning, the uninsulated, inadequate steel building housed only stray dogs from the City of Viroqua. In the beginning, they ate from rusty coffee cans, drank unsanitary water, and sometimes went for days without fresh air. In the beginning, dogs that needed medical care didn’t get it. And in the beginning, most of the animals that entered the shelter never made it out alive.

Eventually, Vernon County contracted with the City to house their stray animals as well, and many cats were added to the dog population. Funding for the Animal Shelter has always been minimal, and with financial cutbacks around every corner, someone had to step up and take action on behalf of the poor animals living their final days at “The Pound.” That someone was Linzi Gronning.

While working as a Youth Group Instructor at the Viroqua Community Action Program, Linzi and her Youth Group applied for and received a grant to assist the local Animal Shelter. Soon they had friends pitching in to help the neglected homeless animals. The small group called themselves “Pals of Pets.”

Thanks to Pals of Pets, the Animal Shelter has hot water, air conditioning, outside runs for the dogs, and a grassy back yard for them to romp in, just to name a few things. Although Pals of Pets formally ceased operations when the VCHS took over the Animal Shelter, many of the same people still work together to raise funds directly for the homeless animals housed at the Shelter. Traditionally, about 95 animals *each year* are returned to their owners, another 150 adopt new families, and the balance find homes through other rescue/humane organizations.

As a non-profit organization, funding for the VCHS is always tight, and that's why Volunteers play such an important role. Volunteers allow us to offer high quality care to our animals, while keeping costs down. Volunteers help in all aspects of our organization, from those who assist with special events to those who work hands-on with the animals.

Being a Volunteer is extremely rewarding, educational, exciting and fun. ***You can have a huge impact on the lives of these homeless animals.*** Cleaning up a neglected animal, giving them a meal, a blanket and a pat on the head will touch your heart and bring you back for more. It is so rewarding to see how the animals respond immediately to the love they receive while they are at the Shelter. In many cases, this is the first time someone has really cared for them.

PLEASE NOTE: This Volunteer Handbook is meant to be a guide only. A book of complete Policies and Procedures is accessible at the Animal Shelter.

The Web

You can find the website for the Vernon County Humane Society, Inc., at www.vchumane.org. Our animals are routinely listed on the Internet at Petfinder. Go to our web site first, and then click on "See our dogs and cats" to go to Petfinder.com.

Hours of Operation

Business Hours

The Animal Shelter is open for all animal-related services Monday through Sunday by appointment.

Visiting Hours

The Shelter is open to the public for visiting and adopting animals every Saturday afternoon from 12:00-4:00 p.m., Tuesday afternoon from 4:00-7:00 p.m., and on Thursday evenings from 5:00-8:00 p.m., in conjunction with store hours of the downtown businesses. We need Volunteers to help keep these hours going!

Holiday Hours

The Shelter is open for all animal-related services and visiting and adopting animals on all holidays except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. However, we still need help with cleaning shifts on the holidays!

Emergency Service Hours

The Shelter promptly responds to animal emergencies 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Any situation is considered an emergency when a domestic animal is in danger or is creating a danger.

Special Events/Fundraisers

We offer and/or participate in a number of community events each year. Some are listed below. It takes many people to build a successful event. If you can help prepare and plan, bake, or spend time at any of the events, we'd appreciate your help!

January	-	12 th Day of Christmas; Shelter Open House
February	-	National Spay Day
April	-	Animal Abuse Month; Viroqua Home & Business Show
May	-	Be Kind to Animals Week; Westby Syttende Mai Parade

- June - Adopt a Shelter Cat Month
- July - Viroqua Sidewalk Sale Days
- August - Viroqua's Wild West Days; Candlelight Vigil
- September - Vernon County Fair
- October - Adopt a Shelter Dog Month
- December - Viroqua's Twinkle Fest Parade

- Ongoing - Petco & Other Off-Site Adoption Days
Microchip Clinics
Car Washes
Bake Sales

The Vernon County Humane Society Board meets the 3rd Monday of each month and all Volunteers are cordially invited to attend!

Youth Volunteers

Currently, children under the age of twelve (12) are not allowed in the Shelter without a parent or guardian, unless permission is specifically granted by Shelter Staff. However, we are making plans for Youth Volunteer opportunities in the near future, as follows:

Youth Volunteers add a special flair to the Shelter. Students ages 12 and up (or in 6th grade) learn many aspects of animal care while participating in a variety of Shelter activities. Training is offered in the care of cats, dogs and office support. Students benefit from the opportunity to meet other motivated young people while developing good work habits and communication skills.

Interested students under the age of 12 can volunteer with a parent or guardian. Volunteers 13 thru 15 must have a parental consent form. These parent-student teams work with the cats and dogs doing a variety of chores including cleaning, grooming and socializing the animals.

Youth Volunteers must attend an orientation. During the orientation they will meet the Shelter Staff, view a short slide presentation, set up a shelter tour, and learn how to schedule their shifts. They may volunteer after school, on weekends or while school is not in session. We request that Youth Volunteers limit their shifts to a maximum of two (2) hours.

Youth Volunteers are also encouraged to help at off-site adoption days and other fundraisers that are held during the year.

Youth Volunteers are required to fill out a Volunteer Application and their parents and/or guardians must sign an Agreement and Release of Liability form.

Adult Volunteers

A wide variety of opportunities exist for Adult Volunteers. Adult Volunteers help with Shelter activities and by spreading good will throughout their community, Vernon County, and all over the State. Some specific programs are listed below, but in most cases we can tailor a program to meet the skills you have to offer. We have had adults volunteer for everything from snow removal, to baking and telephoning.

All Volunteers must attend an orientation. During the orientation they will meet the Shelter Staff, view a short slide presentation, set up a shelter tour, and learn how to schedule their shifts.

Adult Volunteers are required to fill out a Volunteer Application and sign an Agreement and Release of Liability form.

Adult Volunteer Programs

Administrative Assistant

Use your clerical skills to help with many different office projects, like mailings, filing, photocopying, telephoning, e-mailing and putting together adoption packets.

Adoption Assistant

Assist Shelter Staff with customer service, answering questions about pet care, helping with Lost & Found reports, making follow-up telephone calls, and checking records. Adoption Assistants need to know a wide variety of information about companion animals, basic pet handling skills, be comfortable working with the public, and understand the Animal Shelter's adoption policies and procedures.

Animal Socialization

This is perhaps our most popular Volunteer activity. The dogs benefit from the variety of handlers, thereby learning to interact with many different people. The exercise helps break up their day and offers a much-needed change of scenery. Cats benefit from the hugs, petting, grooming, exercise and love they

receive. This is especially helpful for animals that may be long-term guests, helping them to remain friendly and adoptable.

Caretaker Assistant

Assist the Shelter Staff with daily cleaning, sanitation and care of the kennel areas. This includes all the animal housing areas, kitty litter pans, feeding and watering the animals, washing dishes and laundry, providing toys and bedding, folding newspapers and towels, and passing out treats.

Educational Assistants

Throughout the year, VCHS provides educational programs ranging from bite prevention to dog training. Education to the community is a vital goal of the VCHS. We hope to improve the care and quality of life for all animals in Vernon County by offering help with educational programs. We have a library of animal conference materials, magazines, "how-to" literature, booklets and video tapes, and we're looking for Volunteers to keep this program viable.

Foster Care

Each year a number of animals are brought to us that need more care than we can provide at the Shelter. They may be pregnant, young, orphaned or injured, and require a quieter environment than we can offer internally. Having a network of Volunteers that can provide temporary care and attention to these Special Needs animals helps us get them off to a good, solid start.

Off-Site Adoption Days

We always need help with off-site Adoption Days, whether it's transporting dogs and cats, handling them on location, helping potential adopters with Adoption Applications, handing out literature, answering questions, or selling baked goods and taking donations. We schedule Adoption Days at Petco in Onalaska 2 to 4 times a month.

Special Events/Fundraisers

Some of the events and fundraisers that we schedule are listed previously. We encourage new ideas and/or suggestions to make our current fundraisers even better!

Dress Code

Shelter workers should use a common sense approach to attire.

Wet floors can be slippery and proper footwear helps prevent accidents. Tennis shoes or work style boots with low heeled, non-slip soles are recommended. Rubber slip-on boots are also an option. Because sandals do not protect your feet from animal waste or cleaning chemicals, they are not allowed during cleaning.

Volunteer vests are available to identify you to the Shelter Staff and the public. T-shirts and sweatshirts should not have offensive graphics or logos. Shirts should not be torn or frayed. Remember to wear something that can be easily washed.

For safety and health reasons, long pants should be worn while working. Bacteria under dogs' nails can cause an infection should they jump on your bare legs and scratch you. Pants that are torn or frayed should not be worn.

Dangling or large jewelry can easily be caught on cage doors or tangled in animal claws and ruined. Jewelry can be hazardous to animals that are attracted to it, and some animals can potentially ingest them and become ill. Please limit jewelry while working.

In general, a casual environment exists, but remember – your appearance should reflect positively on the Vernon County Animal Shelter!

Shelter Ambassadors

All Volunteers should consider themselves Shelter ambassadors, willing to spread good news about the Vernon County Animal Shelter. True, some of the stories from the Shelter will have sad endings. But also let your friends and families know of the positive things that happen. ***Never lose sight of the happy endings.*** They greatly outnumber the sad ones. We pride ourselves on having some of the most adoptable pets available. The dogs and cats here have been exposed to countless Volunteers, Staff and “road trips,” making them more resilient and confident, and better able to fit into a new home.

Volunteers, like employees, must meet all adoption criteria, including adoption fees, if they choose to adopt a pet.

Good Volunteers are as valuable as paid employees. They are expected to be as responsible and caring. When you make a commitment to time or a project, we expect you to honor that commitment. Volunteers must support and promote the standards of the Shelter.

Shelter Policies

All new Volunteers will be asked to complete a Volunteer Application, with references. It is very rare, but occasionally a Volunteer doesn't abide by the policies in this Handbook. If that should occur, a Staff member will counsel the Volunteer. However, if there is no improvement, the Shelter Staff will have the discretion to terminate the Volunteer's commitment.

This Volunteer Handbook is meant to be a guide only. A book of complete Policies and Procedures is available at the Shelter.

Reminders

Be sure to sign the Volunteer Log Book upon arrival, and indicate the time you were there. It is the only way we can keep track of how many Volunteer hours are spent helping the Animal Shelter. Friends and family may not come in to help you without express permission of the Volunteer Coordinator or Shelter Staff. In addition, please call the Volunteer Coordinator or Shelter Staff if you cannot come in at your scheduled time. We understand a change of circumstance, but calling ahead helps us to plan our day. If you have any complaints, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator. We want your Shelter experience to be rewarding in addition to being helpful!

Frequently Asked Questions

One of the most important tasks of all the Vernon County Animal Shelter Volunteers is to assist the public at the Shelter and answer questions. Visitors to the Shelter and Off-Site Adoption Days are more likely to adopt when they are offered assistance in selecting a companion animal. In order to best serve the public and to be effective in getting Shelter animals adopted into good homes, the Vernon County Animal Shelter asks all Volunteers to become knowledgeable about Shelter animals, and basic policies and programs.

As a Volunteer, you will be confronted with a variety of questions while you are working with the public. You are not expected to know all the answers to all the questions, but you can prepare yourself by learning some basic Shelter policies and procedures. Below is a list of common questions and correct answers to help you get started.

*Please keep in mind that you should **never** give anyone information unless you are 100% sure you have the correct information – once you give an answer, it becomes fact to the person who asked! When you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, please find someone at the Shelter who has the information.*

Q. Where do the animals come from?

The Vernon County Animal Shelter houses stray dogs and cats from the City of Viroqua that are brought in by the Police Department. The Shelter accepts owner surrendered animals on a limited basis.

Stray dogs and cats from numerous townships of Vernon County are brought in by the Vernon County Sheriff's Department. Stray dogs and cats from the Cities of Westby and Hillsboro are taken to the local veterinarian clinics.

Q. How long do you hold strays before they are available for adoption?

The Vernon County Animal Shelter holds strays that have *no identification* for ten (10) days before they're considered for adoption. Adoptable animals will be available to the public on the eleventh (11th) day.

Animals that are microchipped or are wearing traceable identification may be held at the Shelter for an extended period while attempts are made to contact the owner and give them a chance to reclaim their pet.

Q. How do you define adoptability?

It is the policy of the Vernon County Animal Shelter to adopt out friendly, healthy pets. Behavior evaluations are utilized by the shelter manager to help determine adoptability. Sick, injured, vicious, and feral animals are held for the appropriate period to be claimed. If not claimed, they are placed in foster care whenever possible. Animals that pose a risk to public safety for reasons of health or temperament are humanely euthanized.

Q. So, what about euthanasia?

The Vernon County Animal Shelter does not euthanize for space or due to length of time an animal has been housed at the Shelter. It is extremely important to answer questions about euthanasia as accurately and with as much compassion as possible. *Every effort is made by the Shelter Staff to find forever homes for the animals.* Animals that are sick, injured, or need any kind of rehabilitation are placed in foster homes whenever possible.

Q. Can adoptable animals be handled by the public?

Yes. The adoptable animals are the only animals at the Shelter that are allowed to be removed from their cages and kennels. Adoptable dogs can be walked or taken to the fenced-in back yard. There are toys, balls and frisbees available.

Q. What's included in the price of the adoption?

All animals are spayed or neutered prior to adoption. In addition, animals receive age-appropriate distemper and Rabies vaccinations; they're treated for fleas and ear mites, and dewormed. In addition cats are tested for feline leukemia and dogs are tested for heartworm. A copy of the Shelter fees is attached, and is

also posted at the Shelter. Volunteers at the Shelter should be familiar with the fee structure and be aware of any updates.

The new family is also given a 4- or 5-lb. sample bag of Science Diet dry food and coupons.

Q. Aren't these puppies and kittens too young to be spayed or neutered?

Many spay/neuter clinics have been performing early-age (or pediatric) surgeries for over ten (10) years. The procedure is endorsed by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Humane Association, the American Kennel Club, the Cat Fanciers Association, many state and local veterinary associations, and an increasing number of local animal shelters.

Studies of animals that have undergone early sterilization show no significant adverse side effects. Younger animals recover more rapidly from both the anesthesia and the surgery. Certain undesirable behaviors, like roaming, marking territory, etc., may also be prevented.

Q. What's the process for adopting an animal?

Prospective adopters are asked to fill out an Adoption Application, including names, addresses and telephone numbers of their veterinarian and two personal references. We request a 24-hour waiting period to give Shelter Staff time to contact references, check if the adopter will be a responsible pet owner, and to determine the suitability of the particular animal based on the adopter's lifestyle.

Once approved, the adopter will sign the Adoption Agreement and pay the Shelter Staff. The Rabies tag and certificate, along with any medical or other information about the animal, is given to the adopter.

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***Please don't forget to sign and submit the
Acknowledgement and Confidentiality Pledge!***

Thank you!