



AMERICAN HUMANE

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Tips for Shelters for Handling Home Foreclosures

Develop a plan of action for your shelter for handling home foreclosures. This plan should prevent relinquishment of pets by providing counseling and assistance to families. The best outcome for both pets and families is to keep them together! Here are some suggestions:

- Make sure all customer service staff members are trained in how to help people facing foreclosure. Compassion and understanding are paramount. Those faced with losing their homes may feel frightened, overwhelmed and embarrassed. The fear of losing their pets can compound these emotions.
- Provide families with a list of apartments that allow pets. You can find rental properties specific to areas and locations by visiting www.apartments.com. You can also customize searches based on types of pets allowed.
- Provide other tips for finding pet-friendly housing:
 - Tell families not to limit themselves to commercially managed rental properties and apartments. It may be easier to negotiate rent, pet deposits and size and number of pets with private landlords. If a person has a large dog or more than two pets, renting from a private landlord may be the best option. A great place to look for privately owned rental properties is www.craigslist.com and the classified ads in the local paper. It is also an excellent idea to ask family and friends. Often they will “know someone who knows someone” who owns rental property, and a personal reference from a friend or family member can go a long way.
 - Have families make sure their pets are vaccinated and spayed or neutered. Many landlords will want to see proof of this before they sign a lease.
 - Tell families to show prospective landlords proof that their pets completed obedience training. Reluctant landlords may be receptive to evidence that pets are well-behaved. Families may want to ask their veterinarian to write a letter of recommendation.
 - Encourage people to present themselves as desirable tenants and accentuate their positive aspects. Landlords want to rent to individuals who they believe will be good tenants -- people should not be afraid to use their jobs or personal habits to reveal their positive image.
- Immediately following a foreclosure, many families choose to move in with relatives who are unable to accommodate families' pets. If this situation is temporary, you can help families find boarding facilities for their pets until they are able to find permanent housing. By being proactive, you may be able to establish a partnership with a local boarding kennel and negotiate a discounted rate for foreclosure families, especially if you are willing to assist with some or all of the boarding costs.
- Recruit foster families for pets that need temporary housing. This is an excellent alternative to boarding kennels, especially for pets that will be displaced for a month or longer. You may already have foster programs that you could expand. Breed rescue groups can also be an excellent resource for foster homes.

- Offer behavior counseling and pet training for families facing foreclosure. Many pets may not be able to adapt to apartment living, especially dogs that are accustomed to a big house and yard. Boredom and confinement can lead to destructive behaviors and separation anxiety. If you have a behaviorist on staff, consider offering his or her services free of charge to these families. If you do not have a behaviorist on staff, consider offering financial assistance for outside training.
- Distribute press releases and contact local media to raise awareness about how foreclosures affect family pets. The media can be an excellent partner in helping your shelter recruit foster homes and get donations to help care for foreclosure pets. Emphasize your shelter's desire to help keep families and pets together whenever possible. However, also convey that you can accept pets when it is not possible for families to keep them. Be sure to get the message out that pets should *never* be abandoned in foreclosed houses.
- In some cases, foreclosure families will not be able to keep their pets despite your best efforts to assist them. These pets may be old or have medical problems that need treatment before they can be placed. Have a plan for caring for these animals and getting them adopted into new homes as soon as possible. Here are some suggestions:
 - Recruit additional foster parents to care for animals that are recuperating from surgery or illness.
 - Use the local media to generate awareness and to request donations of food, blankets, toys and other supplies.
 - Set up a "Foreclosure Fund" so people can make donations specifically for pets surrendered due to foreclosures. Consider offering sponsorships for individual animals.
 - If your shelter does not have a veterinarian on staff, be proactive in building a relationship with a local veterinarian who is willing to provide reduced-cost or free care for foreclosure pets.
 - Offer special adoption incentives or reduced adoption fees for foreclosure pets.
 - Always note on the animal's cage card that he was surrendered as the result of a foreclosure -- this will pull on the heartstrings of potential adopters.