

## **Open Admission Shelters, Limited Admission Shelters, Breed Placement Groups**

### **WORKING TOGETHER**

Many people are becoming more aware of the various groups that are out there to help animals. The days of the “Dog Pound” are hopefully disappearing into the past as most of us take our missions of sheltering and re-homing pets to higher levels. The Humane Society of Elmore County is an Open Admission shelter which means we do not turn animals away (the only exception to this is if an animal has bitten a person within the past ten days as that animal must either be quarantined under direct veterinary observation or euthanized and tested for the presence of rabies in accordance with Alabama State Law). This means we take in animals that are perfectly healthy, happy and well-adjusted pets, but also those that are injured, diseased, vicious, feral, unsocialized, scared, traumatized, elderly, untrained, etc. While our primary focus is on dogs and cats, we take in all species of domesticated animals to include horses, goats, pigs, rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, birds, etc. We are not a wildlife rehabilitation center, so when wildlife or exotics find their way through our doors, we work with licensed rehabilitators and state or federal conservation officers to help those animals. While we are a private, non-profit organization, we also have contracts with the county and towns in Elmore County to take in and shelter animals from their Animal Control Officers. This translates into about 5200 animals coming through our doors annually with anywhere from 250-350 being in our care on any given day. The sad reality is that with this number of animals, and no matter all the efforts we take to find homes for as many as possible, we do have to euthanize far more than any of us wants to. This is the reality of our throw-away world – space is the single most important limiting factor for every shelter and to keep our animals in a humane environment means we must know our limits. If we cannot find enough homes for a critical number of our pets in need, we then must euthanize animals to make space for all those that just keep coming through our front door. For all of us who work in shelters and truly love animals, this is a very sad reality to our profession and something we don’t take lightly. Our shelter does not euthanize after a certain number of days. We hold all strays for seven days in accordance with Alabama State Law, but after that hold period, each animal is evaluated on an individual basis. Please understand that owner surrenders do not require that same hold period and those pets are also evaluated on an individual basis.

You may have noticed that we used the term “Open Admission” shelter. Another term that you may have heard and that makes all Open Admission Shelter staff and volunteers cringe is the term “Kill Shelter.” For shelters like ours which is the only sheltering facility in our county, calling us a “kill shelter” does us a tremendous disservice. This term focuses on only one of the aspects of our reality, overshadowing all the great things we do to help the animals in our care and in our community. For far too many animals we are the best thing for them, at least until we can place them into a loving and lifetime home. And for some who are so diseased or ‘damaged’ whether it be physically or mentally, euthanasia can be the kindest thing to alleviate their suffering and we comfort those animals right to the end. Just like the term “pound” has modernized to “shelter,” we would like people to drop “kill” shelter and either just call us a Humane Shelter or at least describe us as an Open Admission Shelter to better reflect the realities of what we do.

As an Open Admission shelter we do all those things that Rescue or Limited Admission Shelters do – we provide a humane environment for our animals, we see to their medical, physical and

mental needs, we love them, we screen potential adopters, we ensure all of our adopted pets are spayed or neutered, and we work to place our animals in the right home for that pet which sometimes does mean denying an adoption if it isn't right for the animal. We also do community outreach – educating children and adults alike, participating in community events to provide humane education, have a nursing home shelter pet visitation program, work off-site adoptions and many, many other things, all to improve the welfare of animals in our community.

The second group is that of the “Limited Admission” Shelters. I have explained that we are too often referred to as a “Kill Shelter” and Limited Admission Shelters are often called “No Kill” Shelters. So what is the difference between an Open Admission shelter and Limited Admission Shelter? There is a place for all of us and working together we can educate the public and help more animals find new homes and live better lives. The key difference is that “Limited Admission” or “No Kill” Shelters generally take in only those animals they know they can handle and that they can find homes for since they do not euthanize unless it is humanely necessary due to disease, illness or injury. Limited Admission Shelters are primarily 100% private, non-profits, so are under no contractual obligations to take in animals from anyone. Reputable Limited Admission Shelters never exceed their capabilities (space, financial, care, expertise) so, understanding the realities of re-homing pets, they have to turn-away many animals due to sheer numbers, adoptability, etc. Limited Admission groups generally do not take in vicious or feral animals, and if they have the space, will first evaluate that animal's adoptability before committing to an animal. “Adoptability” may seem to be a rather ambiguous term, but practiced sheltering personnel understand exactly what it means. We all know that certain sizes, breed types, colors, temperaments, ages, behavioral issues, etc play a huge role in being able to find an animal a home, and Limited Admission Shelters simply can't take in an animal who may take years to find a home if ever. But, just like those of us in Open Admission Shelters, we all love animals and do what we can to help those in our care.

The third group is “Rescue.” “Rescue” groups are primarily 100% private, non-profit groups who focus on either a specific breed or type of animal due to love for that breed or expertise in a particular species. Most Rescue Groups operate as a group of individuals who house the animals in their care in their homes and not in a centralized facility like a shelter. Just like Limited Admission Shelters, working together, we all are doing what we can to help better the lives of animals. Rescue Groups face the same limitations of space in the term of foster homes, finances, overwhelming numbers, etc. Now the one issue that crops up when using the term “Rescue Group” is an implication that those of us in Humane Shelters have not been a part of “rescuing” an animal. Perhaps a more descriptive term for Rescue Groups should be “Breed Placement” groups. Now you may think we are getting carried away with ‘political correctness’ terms, but where this crops us is when a shelter works with a Breed Placement Group to release a certain animal to them and then we find it listed on the web or in a publication as being “rescued from a high-kill shelter.” Now we understand that there are all qualities of shelters and staff, some great, some good, some o'k and some truly bad; but the same can be said for Limited Admission Shelters and Breed Placement Groups. But, in general, we are all working long, long days to rescue animals and everyone involved needs to understand each others capabilities and limitations so we can work together for the ultimate goal of helping an animal in need.

What can you expect as a Limited Admission Shelter or a Breed Placement Group in working with the Humane Society of Elmore County? Foremost we want you to know that we believe in

doing what is best for the animal – that is the most important aspect of our mission and one we take quite seriously. So, here are some criteria on how we work with other groups:

- Understand that we are a mandatory spay/neuter shelter and any group we work with must be the same and be willing to provide proof of the spay or neuter for any animal released to them. FYI – in accordance with Alabama State Law (as of 1 July 2006) any dog or cat adopted from a shelter, animal control facility or rescue group must be spayed or neutered at the time of adoption, within 30 days of the adoption if the animal is sexually mature, or within 30 days of the animal reaching sexual maturity (generally considered to be six months of age).
- If we are not familiar with a particular group we will first do research to determine the viability, operation and reputation of the group. This means we will contact other shelters, veterinarians, other rescuers, animal control, state humane agencies, etc to ascertain the legitimacy and reputation of the group.
- We will generally never bother a ‘rescue’ group about an animal that is vicious, feral or otherwise unadoptable (this does not include curable illnesses such as heartworms, skin conditions, etc.).
- We will be completely honest about how the animal came to us, what we have seen of its temperament, how we have cared for that animal, etc.
- We can work with other groups to release an animal in one of two ways:
  - Some groups ask that we have the animal spayed or neutered prior to release and at our fee as it is cheaper than they can have it done and they pay our adoption fee.
  - Many groups have their own veterinary care well arranged and we then release the animal to them at no charge. In general we will have given that animal a basic set of immunizations and de-worming in our shelter.
- Our shelter does not have a time limit on how long we keep our animals. Each animal is evaluated on an individual basis. In general if we feel the animal is “good enough” to contact a rescue group about, then that animal is safe with us. But we do ask you to understand that kennel/cage space translates to lives, so the quicker a dog or cat can move to a placement group means we can help that many more animals coming in to take its place. And we all know that some animals do well in a kennel environment and others change over time. We do all we can to enrich our animals lives while they are with us, but must take into account the animal’s physical and mental well-being in making ultimate decisions.
- We do treat select dogs for heartworms in our shelter. In the event we have spayed/neutered, sheltered and kept a dog all through heartworm treatment, we will need the adoption fee and the heartworm treatment paid for before we can release it to a placement group.
- We all know the popular breeds and can often find perfectly wonderful homes for many of these. This just means that we will not always contact a placement group for assistance on a particular animal, but will happily respond to inquiries from placement groups on a particular pet.
- We understand that we often contact placement groups about a dog with heartworms that must be treated and that is significant in terms of cost and time to the placement group. We greatly appreciate placement groups that can take those animals as treating a dog for

one to two or even three months in a shelter environment is a difficult proposition and negatively impacts our ability to care for perhaps dozens of other animals instead.

- We ask that when any placement group working with us takes on one of our pets, that in the internet or other posting for that pet it is noted that the placement group was able to “assist the Humane Shelter in helping this pet” or something to that effect. Please do not post that you have “rescued this pet from a high kill shelter” as we find that not only misleading but degrading to our shelter, staff and volunteers.

We want any group working with us to know that we love and care for the animals in our shelter just as much as you do those in your care. Our staff is small, but quite dedicated and we welcome any individual or group to visit our shelter at any time.

Feel free to contact us at [hselco@bellsouth.net](mailto:hselco@bellsouth.net) or by phone at 334/567-3377. Our shelter is open Mon-Thu 8 am – 4 pm; Fri 8 am – 5 pm and Sat 8 am – 3 pm. The Humane Society of Elmore County is located at 255 Central Plank Road, Wetumpka, AL 36092.

Let’s all work together to educate and save the lives of the wonderful animals who find themselves in our care – as we have chosen to work or volunteer in animal welfare, we owe these trusting souls our very best efforts on their behalf.

Rea Cord  
Director  
Humane Society of Elmore County