



## **Volunteer Handbook**

## **Introduction to the Mendocino Coast Humane Society**

Welcome to the Mendocino Coast Humane Society. We are proud to have you join our team! We hope you will ask questions during your time with us. We believe all questions are important, so please do not hesitate to ask.

The Mendocino Coast Humane Society is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We receive our funding from donations, fundraisers and our thrift store "The Ark". We do not receive any funding from the state or county government.

The Mendocino Coast Humane Society does have a contract with the City of Fort Bragg to receive all animals impounded by the Fort Bragg Police Department. We also do Dog Licensing for the City of Fort Bragg.

## **Our Mission**

To contribute toward a better life for animals and to inspire public awareness of animal's needs.

## **Our Purpose**

- To secure permanent, loving and responsible homes for animals.
- To work toward ending the problem of pet over-population.
- To serve as a source of public education and assistance regarding the responsibilities of animal stewardship.
- To provide a safe haven for homeless animals.

## **Shelter Location & Hours**

Mendocino Coast Humane Society Adoption Center  
19691 Summers Lane  
Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Phone: 707-964-SPAY (7729) Fax: 707-964-1149

Website: [www.MendocinoHumane.org](http://www.MendocinoHumane.org) Email: [susanb@mendocinohumane.org](mailto:susanb@mendocinohumane.org)

Open hours: Monday thru Saturday 12:00 – 5:00

## **Volunteer Information**

### How to Become a Volunteer

All prospective volunteers will go through a volunteer orientation and sign a liability release before becoming an active volunteer. We require a monthly commitment of at least 5 hours. The information compiled in this handbook will serve as your guide as you begin your volunteer work with us. For further information contact the Volunteer Coordinator ([susanb@mendocinohumane.org](mailto:susanb@mendocinohumane.org)) or MCHS management.

### What we ask of our Volunteers

- Take your volunteer commitment seriously. People and animals are depending on you.
- Commit to volunteer on a regular schedule if you are able.
- Conduct yourself in a manner that makes us proud to call you one of our volunteers inside and outside of the shelter.

### In return you will get

- An opportunity to work in a growing and respected animal shelter that helps the community as well as the animals.
- Education about animals through direct volunteer work.
- The opportunity to develop new skills or polish old ones.
- A chance to meet others who share your interests.
- And last, but not least, lots of tail wags and kisses from your 4 legged friends.

## **Guidelines, Policies and Procedures for Volunteers**

Please read these guidelines and the agreement carefully. Shelter management will be happy to discuss any of our policies with you.

Waiver and release form: A waiver and release form must be signed before you begin volunteering.

Tetanus shot: Volunteers are required to have a current tetanus shot.

Responsibilities and Dedication to MCHS: Animals are to be treated kindly, gently and professionally. Volunteers must support our policies inside and outside the shelter.

Alcohol and Drugs: The sale, use, possession or transfer of a controlled substance or alcohol on the MCHS premises or during work time is prohibited and illegal.

Professional Attitude: Volunteers must:

- take their commitment seriously.
- agree to conduct themselves in a professional manner with the animals, coworkers and the public.
- be friendly and courteous to the public.

- ask the staff for assistance with any questions to which you are not sure of the correct answer.

Accidents and injuries: Any accident or injury occurring on the job must be reported to the shelter supervisor immediately. Bites resulting (cat and dog) in broken skin are considered an injury and must be treated immediately. Concealing of injuries is grounds for dismissal.

Proper Dress: Volunteers are asked to convey a professional public image. Overall appearance should be neat and clean. Apparel attracting undue negative attention is not acceptable at any time. Wearing of shorts is not recommended. Hoop or dangling earrings represent a safety hazard and should not be worn. If in doubt, or you have questions about appropriate dress, check with a supervisor.

Volunteer Personal Property: MCHS is not responsible for loss, theft or damage of personal items. Volunteers are advised not to bring excessive amounts of cash or valuables with them while working onsite or at MCHS events.

Recruit other Volunteers: Tell your friends about our program and enlist their interest to volunteer their services.

#### Reasons for Dismissal:

- Failure to adhere to the rules and procedures.
- Any abuse of animals.

Volunteer positions needed for the Shelter:

- Cat Socializer (including Playing and Petting) and Groomer (Brushing)
- Dog Walker, Trainer, Groomer (Brushing and Bathing)
- Front Desk Volunteer – answer phones, help potential adopters and other volunteers
- Gardening and Grounds Maintenance
- Handyman and Building Maintenance and Repair

Other Specialized Talents that could be of use to the shelter – such as Mechanic, Electrician, Plumber, Photographer, etc

#### **Disease Control**

When you are at MCHS, it is essential that you follow our rules for which pets you are to work with. Always read signs on kennels before interacting with animals. If you are unsure, ask management which animals are not safe to touch. Animals can die because of people's mistakes.

#### Hand Washing

You must wash your hands often, preferably between each animal you pet. To properly wash hands, you must wet them with warm water, lather away from the water for 20 seconds, rinse

well and dry thoroughly. Wet hands transfer bacteria and viruses, and simply wetting and drying hands is worse than not washing at all. The hand sanitizer gel is okay as long as you haven't been handling sick pets, but it's not as good as washing.

### Foot Baths

After being in the Dog Kennels, foot baths are required if there is transferable disease (parvo, coccidia, etc.).

### Zoonotic Diseases

There are some diseases that can transfer between animals and humans. Some examples are: ringworm, giardia and cat scratch disease. Because of this, we are careful about washing our hands. You should avoid touching your hands to your eyes or mouth while interacting with the dogs or cats.

### Don't take it home!

If you have pets at home, you must be especially careful that you aren't taking germs home on your body or clothes. Most of our pets are healthy, but occasionally we will have a disease outbreak and if this happens, our pets at home will be safe if we regularly change clothes and shower upon returning home from the shelter.

### **Restricted Areas**

- Volunteers are not allowed behind the counter in the reception area without prior permission.
- Volunteers must not go in the Isolation Wards. The animals are in quarantine and what they have may be contagious.
- Only staff and hospital personnel are allowed in the Surgery Suite.

**Welcome to the wonderful world of Humane Society Volunteering!**

**We hope you enjoy your time with us.**

## **Volunteer Job Descriptions**

### Cat Socializer and Groomer:

#### Purpose:

Play with, brush and love our in-house cats. This alleviates stress and gives the cats much needed attention thus increasing their chances of being adopted. It's also a great opportunity for teaching the cats basic socialization skills.

#### Responsibilities:

Remember to play with the cats in the community rooms (including Kitty Cottage) before playing with cats in kennels, and don't go back into the community rooms or Kitty Cottage after petting kennel cats. Always ask staff which kennel cats are OK to touch.

### Dog Walker, Trainer, Groomer:

#### Purpose:

Exercise, play with, brush and love our in-house dogs. This alleviates stress and gives the dogs much needed exercise, thus increasing their chances of being adopted. It is also a great opportunity for teaching the dogs basic socialization skills and reinforcing good manners.

#### Responsibilities:

Be sure to check the kennel card that says if the dog can be exercised or not. Some dogs will have special instructions. Do not rough-house with the dogs, do not allow them to jump all over you, drag you behind the leash, or mouth on you. Remember that these dogs are under a lot of stress from living in a shelter. Treat them with kindness.

#### Duties:

- Take the dog out of its kennel on a leash for walks.
- Exercise and play with the dog.
- Brush the dog and give it a bath, when needed.

### Office Assistant:

#### Purpose:

Assist management with customers, office duties and help maintain cleanliness of shelter.

#### Duties:

- Always be courteous to staff and customers.
- Assist with customers and answer phones.

## Dog Handling Guidelines

Why are shelter dogs so different? Dogs in a shelter are not the same as your dog at home. Your dog knows his surroundings and is familiar with your moods and what your expectations are. Dogs in our shelter are in a confusing situation. They are in an unfamiliar setting, surrounded by dogs they don't know and handled by strangers. Many different people might handle one dog during the course of a day. With staff and volunteers working together, we can reinforce good behavior that will help our dogs get into loving, permanent homes. Always follow the guidelines of our staff. Our kennel staff knows the dogs in our care and will be able to assist you with dogs that suit your experience level. We do not want you or our dogs to be placed in a dangerous situation.

Always use caution when dealing with the dogs. Be alert to your surroundings. Be aware of what each dog is telling you. If you pick up signs that a dog is nervous or fearful, remove that dog from the situation immediately.

Shelter dogs are not the same as your family pet. It is easy to misinterpret what they are telling us. When a dog licks the muzzle of another dog, it is a sign of submission from a dog within a pack. Pushing a dominant dog to give a kiss or to receive a hug may be asking for a nip. Hugging a dog tells the dog you are dominant. Your dog at home might accept this behavior, while a strange dog may see your behavior as a challenge.

Remember, the role of our volunteers is to keep the animals in our care as stress free as possible and to avoid situations that promote inappropriate behavior.

- Check the dog's kennel card for special instructions before interacting with the dog.
- Deaf, blind, injured, etc. dogs should have something on their kennel to indicate this.
- Dogs with an "I can exercise" card can go outside. Dogs with "I can't exercise" may not go outside.
- If a kennel card says "Staff only" do not enter that kennel.
- If a kennel card says "Do Not Touch" that means DO NOT TOUCH!
- Handle only one dog at a time. With the exception of puppies and small dogs.
- Pick a dog appropriate for your size and skill.
- Do not handle a dog that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Maintain control of the dog at all times. DO NOT let them off leash anywhere.
- When removing a dog from a kennel, make sure they don't slip past you. With leash in hand, go into the dog's kennel, close and lock the gate behind you. Keep your voice soft and even. Always approach the dogs calmly and encourage them to be calm before you remove them from the kennel.
- Always check the dog's collar/leash to be sure it is secure.
- Do not allow dogs to jump up or play bite. Correct them calmly. Never yell or hit at a dog. If a dog jumps up on you, turn your back on him so that the dog is not getting any interaction with you until the dog puts all four paws on the floor, then you can turn and pet the dog. Remember, we want them to learn good habits, so that we can find good homes for them.

- Return the dog to the same kennel. Do not turn the dog over to someone else unless instructed to by the staff, but take the dog back to the kennel yourself. Remember, when you take a dog out, you are responsible for that dog until you return it to the kennel it was in.
- Never take a dog out of the kennel for a customer, without first checking with staff.

## Cat Handling Guidelines

Cats are not dogs! They respond to stimuli in different ways and have different ways of showing their stress and happiness. Volunteers are critical in helping them to be happy and well-adjusted during their stay here. A few tips on general cat behavior and on cat behavior in a shelter environment can be helpful in learning how to handle them properly. Domestic cats are social animals and they form bonds with their owners, as well as with other cats and species in their household.

Cats communicate by smell, body language and voice. When a cat bumps its head against you, it is depositing its odor on you and, in effect, “claiming” you as its own. Cats have especially expressive body language. Arching the back and puffing up the tail are warning signs. The cat is telling you to stay away! Hissing, flattened ears and backing away are defensive signs. Vocal communication also clues us in to what the cat is thinking. A hissing, growling or spitting cat should not be handled. Purring is generally associated with contentment, but cats often purr when they are stressed. Sick or injured cats also sometimes purr.

When cats first arrive at the shelter, they are often stressed. They are in an unfamiliar, frightening environment. Once cats have been here for a while and have calmed down, they often seek attention. Do not underestimate how important you are if you’re spending time petting and grooming cats. What you do is very important to the lives of these cats while they are in our care.

- Reinforce good behaviors. Don’t tolerate things that you might tolerate from your own cats (play biting, etc.).
- Discipline by tone of voice or by placing two fingers on the cat’s forehead with a gentle push – no hitting or yelling!
- Keep your volume level low. Don’t get excited. Monitor visitors, especially children, for too much noise or activity.
- If a cat escapes, follow it and say “loose cat” as you walk (don’t run). Others will join you in catching the escapee.
- Pay attention to the cat’s body language. Cats aren’t always predictable.
- Take health precautions. Wash hands often: don’t touch eyes, etc.
- Report observed behavior or health issues, including fur mats, excessively long claws, etc.
- Brushing is good. Ask for help in dematting, if serious.
- Watch out for earrings and contact lenses.