



Pet Support Services Staff Social Workers and Case Workers

Why Include a Social Worker in Animal Welfare?

As organizations shift program focus to a community-oriented and prevention approach to care, hiring a social worker who is skilled in health and human services can ensure that people receive holistic support alongside their pets.

Getting Started

Hiring a social worker, social work intern, or staff member actively pursuing social work accreditation can enhance an organization's pet support goals and more comprehensively provide support to the community. Learn more about this below:

- [Integrating Veterinary Social Work into Animal Shelters](#) - Veterinary Social Workers (VSW), “attend to the human needs that arise at the intersection of veterinary and social work practice” according to [UT-Knoxville’s Veterinary Social Work Program](#). They help facilitate relationships between humans and animals in a variety of medical settings including clinics, hospitals, and shelters. Social workers serve to support veterinary staff in emotionally demanding workplaces, support clients as they navigate the medical needs of their pets and access to veterinary care, and serve as a critical component within the One Health approach of veterinary medicine.
- [Hiring a Social Worker or Intern](#) - This guide highlights the “why” of hiring social workers for your unique organization, how to get started, sample job descriptions, and a few tips and tricks.



Additional Consideration

In the process of hiring a social worker or social work intern, ensure existing training protocols provide basic process information for individuals who may be unfamiliar with animal welfare to create a well-informed, holistic approach for the community **and** their pets. In addition, consider integrating [compassion fatigue](#) resources for current staff and volunteers who frequently deal with complex and challenging situations.

Not Sure You're Ready to Begin Integrating Social Workers Into Your Processes?

Consider hiring a Case Manager or integrating case management best practices into existing customer-facing and intake staff processes. Trained case managers help people keep their pets, provide resources and support to struggling pet owners, assist owners who need to rehome their pets, and help people find missing or lost pets. Case management means every person and animal is treated as an individual and asked questions so animal services can help find the best possible solution.

Additional Resources

- [Case Management Toolkit](#)
- [Case Management FAQs](#)
- [Blog: Make Case Management Your Animal Shelter's Superpower](#)
- [They Did It: Hired a Social Worker for Their Animal Shelter](#) - ASPCA
- Sample Job Descriptions:
 - [LifeLine Sample Community Caseworker](#)
 - [Gateway Pet Guardians Pet Support Manager](#)
- Video Resources
 - [What is a veterinary social worker?](#) - MedVet Northern Virginia
 - [Bringing Social Work and Animal Welfare Together to Support People and Pets](#)

Supporting Research

- [Human-Animal Relationships and Social Work: Opportunities Beyond the Veterinary Environment](#) (Arkow, 2020)
 - **“This article identifies six reasons why social workers should be cognizant of human-animal relationships and introduces nine ways, with action steps, in which social workers can include these relationships into training and practice outside the more developed field of veterinary social work. These venues include: agencies working in child protection and child sexual abuse; children’s advocacy centers and courthouse facility dogs; animal shelters; domestic violence shelters; public policy advocacy; clinical practice; agencies working with older and disabled populations; veterinary sentinels for intimate partner violence; and pet support services for homeless populations.”**
 - **“More homes in the U.S. are said to have companion animals than have children (Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019).”**
 - **“In addition to appreciating a client’s individual and familial attachments or antipathy toward pets, social workers can achieve a fuller understanding of a client’s connectivity or isolation from the community by seeing human-animal relationships in a social context.”**

- “Social capital . . . is the connectivity among people which enhances cooperation for mutual benefit.”
- “Hoy-Gerlach et al. (2019) described promising opportunities for social work field placements in community animal shelters, including: reducing staff and volunteers’ compassion fatigue in an exceedingly difficult and emotionally draining work environment; placement of shelter pets as Emotional Support Animals; strengthening community responsiveness to violence through assessing overlaps and differences between child, elder and animal abuse investigations; creating and implementing educational programming across child and animal protection systems; and increasing community awareness of the link between violence to animals and violence to humans.”
- [Rediscovering connections between animal welfare and human welfare: Creating social work internships at a humane society](#) (Hoy-Gerlach et al., 2018)
 - “Increased awareness of the potential **relevance of human-animal interaction across social work practice** settings allows for explicit identification of/response to clients’ human-animal interaction-related strengths and concerns, ultimately supporting the well-being of both humans and animals.”