

Understaffing Issues at Jeffersonville Animal Shelter: How to Manage in Addition to Love

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Abstract. Jeffersonville Animal Shelter was a public animal shelter in Southern Indiana. It received more than 3,000 animals annually and only had 13 employees. Sarah Green was the shelter director. Unlike the director of a private shelter, Ms. Green couldn't simply hire more employees to solve the understaffing issues. After recent \$1.3 million renovations, the shelter was not very likely to receive more funds from the city. In addition, compared to other public safety issues, animal control and wellbeing had lower priority. Despite several active and engaged volunteers, Jeffersonville Animal Shelter had plenty of unfulfilled needs, such as kennel cleaning and dog walking, especially on weekdays. Ms. Green wondered whether having more volunteers would relieve the shelter's understaffing problems. If so, who were potential volunteers? How could Jeffersonville Animal Shelter compete against other nearby animal shelters for more volunteers?

Keywords: animal shelters, animal rescues, understaffing, employee management, volunteer management.

Sarah Green, the director of Jeffersonville Animal Shelter, was struggling with understaffing issues and was eager to know how to relieve these problems and enhance animal wellbeing. Ms. Green said that "Our shelter receives more than 3,000 animals per year. But we only have 13 employees. We are absolutely understaffed."

United States Animal Rescue Shelters Industrial Overview

According to Burns (2022), animal rescue shelters are "establishments that provide a temporary home and care for stray and homeless pets while seeking permanent homes for them" (p. 4). No unit, establishment, or organization accounted for more than 4% of its total industry revenue. Without any main players, this industry had four revenue segments of products and services: animal care services (43.8%), spay and neutering services (38.3%), other medical services (9.5%) and educational and behavioral programs (8.4%). In 2022, the industrial average profit margin before interest and tax is 5.3%. Employee wages have consistently been the largest portion of animal rescue shelters' operational costs. As shown in Exhibit 1, employee wages counted 46.3% of revenue in 2022.

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The key success factors of this industry were: ability to attract local support/patronage, ability to educate the wider community, ability to take advantage of government grants, access to volunteer labor, a good reputation, and a low running cost.

Exhibit 1: Statistics of U.S. Animal Rescue Shelters Industry

| Year | Revenue per Employee (\$'000) | Wages/Revenue (%) | Employees per Establishment | Average Wage (\$) | Total Wages (\$m) | Number of Pets (in million) | Number of Pets per Employee |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2013 | 45.1 | 39.4 | 5.24 | 17,797 | 680 | 179 | 4,684.80 |
| 2014 | 44.5 | 39.9 | 5.41 | 17,758 | 745 | 171 | 4,076.00 |
| 2015 | 44.2 | 40.9 | 5.55 | 18,065 | 835 | 164 | 3,548.10 |
| 2016 | 42.5 | 42.5 | 5.75 | 18,059 | 934 | 174 | 3,364.31 |
| 2017 | 45.1 | 42.8 | 6.00 | 19,278 | 1,037 | 184 | 3,420.59 |
| 2018 | 44.1 | 40.0 | 5.98 | 17,637 | 1,053 | 183 | 3,065.12 |
| 2019 | 42.6 | 42.5 | 6.23 | 18,093 | 1,193 | 182 | 2,760.21 |
| 2020 | 35.0 | 44.9 | 6.38 | 15,686 | 1,112 | 196 | 2,764.80 |
| 2021 | 34.4 | 45.4 | 6.36 | 15,636 | 1,160 | 194 | 2,614.99 |
| 2022 | 33.6 | 46.3 | 6.29 | 15,565 | 1,184 | 198 | 2,602.93 |
| 2023 | 33.1 | 46.9 | 6.24 | 15,510 | 1,215 | 190 | 2,425.43 |
| 2024 | 32.6 | 47.5 | 6.20 | 15,467 | 2,344 | 191 | 1,260.32 |
| 2025 | 32.1 | 48.0 | 6.13 | 15,423 | 1,273 | 193 | 2,338.29 |
| 2026 | 31.8 | 48.4 | 6.08 | 15,389 | 1,299 | 194 | 2,298.28 |
| 2027 | 31.5 | 48.8 | 6.03 | 15,363 | 1,321 | 195 | 2,267.82 |

Source: Burns (2022)

Although not exclusively, Exhibit 2 shows some major and broad differences between animal shelters and animal rescues. In general, animal shelters are owned by local governments, take any animals in any conditions, and operated by paid employees. Unlike animal rescues, animal shelters are almost always full and tend to have simpler, faster, and cheaper animal adoption processes. However, with more limited budgets and less flexible resources, animal shelters can only maintain animals' minor health conditions. With exceptions, many private shelters were generally considered as rescues and included the word "humane", "society", or "rescue" in their names (Humane Society of the United States, n.d.).