



# Pet Talk

By Kim Carey

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, an occasional column about homeless pets and related topics.

With the Thanksgiving holiday quickly approaching, a day when many reach out to give back to their community, I thought it fitting to focus on one of the most rewarding ways to give back—volunteering. And, being an animal lover, I can't think of a better way to help than by volunteering at our local animal shelters.

Did you know that both The Flathead County Animal Shelter and the Humane Society of Northwest Montana welcome volunteers from all walks of life and from all backgrounds. If you've ever thought about giving back, but perhaps talked yourself out of it or haven't felt you have had the time,

I hope this article will convince you to finally step forward.

Now, if I'm going to convince you, I'll start with the personal benefits that you may not have considered (aside from the many benefits to the shelter animals themselves!).

Volunteering connects you to your community and other people within your community. Whether a few hours a day, a few hours a week, or just a few hours a month, even the smallest of commitments makes a difference.

Volunteering expands your network, boosts your social skills and is one of the best opportunities to make new friends. Indeed, some of my most valued friendships have come through volunteering. These people often have the same common interests and passions as you. You know the old saying "Birds of a feather flock together." Well, that's certainly true here.

Simply put, volunteering makes me happy. I look forward to my volunteering days and leave feeling that I've done something worthwhile. Helping others benefits you physically and mentally. Are you stressed out at work or with life? Well,

working with animals has been shown to improve mood and reduce stress. And it looks great on a resume, teaches you new skills, builds your social skills, gives you confidence...I could go on and on. Volunteering, in short, is good for you!

So what sorts of volunteer activities occur at the shelter? There are several opportunities. I spend my time in the morning walking and playing with dogs—what could be better? I enjoy being able to take the dogs out and let them dictate what our time is like. Some love to play ball, others want to just wander and sniff and be outside exploring, and others merely want to sit with you and be loved on.

Such times are especially rewarding because getting them out of the kennels allows them to just be dogs. Doing so also allows staff to easily clean the kennels without having to shuffle dogs around.

Then, in the afternoon, I do some office tasks to further help the busy staff. Even if one only has a few hours to spare, such work greatly reduces their burden.

So whether it's office work, cleaning kennels, tending cats, or walking dogs,

volunteer hours certainly make a difference.

Don't know where to start or what you can do to help? Shelters often maintain lists of ongoing needs and can help you decide what role might work for you. For example, the county animal shelter currently has 15 volunteers ranging from kennel cleaners, dog and cat socializers, walkers, a photographer, and office assistance folks.

But it could easily use twice as many and would like to expand the volunteer base to have more cat tenders, pet socializers, and dog walkers—especially those who can handle relatively large animals.

So if I've made my case today and convinced you to consider volunteering, please consult the county animal shelter website at <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/animal>.

Clicking on the *Programs & Services* tab shows detailed information about various volunteer opportunities. (You can also phone Volunteer Coordinator Shelby at 406-758-2149).

And if you love pets please consider adopting today! You can also help spread

the word among family and friends in rapidly growing Flathead County.

By the way, did you know about the **Senior Pet Voucher** offered by Flathead Shelter Friends? The free voucher, previously \$250, now pays \$350 toward veterinary care for adopted cats and dogs who are 7+ years old (and for some pets with special medical needs).

In closing, please have a happy Thanksgiving and we hope to see you at the **Whitefish Christmas Stroll** on December 8<sup>th</sup>!

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*Personal donations are always appreciated! For more information, see [www.flatheadshelterfriends.org](http://www.flatheadshelterfriends.org)*