

# Want to Help Animals? Here's What Shelters Want in a Volunteer

When people think of volunteering at an animal shelter, they often imagine walking dogs or grooming cats. There are a lot more activities shelters need help with, and there's something for almost any amount of commitment and any level of physical ability.



By Mark Robison

I recently talked to the volunteer managers at Nevada Humane Society and the SPCA of Northern Nevada – both in Reno – to learn about what they're looking for. Shelters in other cities have similar needs and programs.

Megan McCalister says there are two programs for which Nevada Humane Society would love more volunteers.

One is its hiking buddies program. This is where a volunteer takes a dog for a day of fun. It gets the dog out of the stressful shelter environment, gets them (and you!) some exercise, and makes them more likely to get adopted after you, naturally, share photos of your adventure together on social media.

You don't have to go hiking, although northern Nevada has many beautiful places to do that if you're inclined. One favorite stop for shelter dogs on an outing is Starbucks, where you can get them a Puppuccino – whip cream in an espresso cup. It's not on the menu but staff will know what you're talking about when you order one. (Don't tell anyone, but they're free!)

The main activity Nevada Humane Society always needs volunteers for is off-site adoptions. This is where animals are taken to places like Petco and PetSmart to show them off more widely to the public since not everyone visits the shelter. Volunteers are trained to process adoptions and to pick up animals and take them to the adoption location.

"Off-site adoption events are every single weekend," McCalister says. Some people really like volunteering at them because "they can build leadership skills, and you get to meet with the community."

Nevada Humane Society requires a minimum of two hours a month to stay in its volunteer program.

Nayla Garcia at SPCA of Northern Nevada said that if you don't have much time to give and can volunteer only sporadically, helping at the organization's thrift store is a perfect fit because it doesn't require much training and there's always sorting of donations and cleaning that's needed.

"There's an activity for every kind of personality," Garcia says.



Special event volunteers might be social butterflies, whereas a more introverted person might like to help with socialization of cats. Working with cats is also a good fit for those who are less mobile – Garcia says she has two cat volunteers who use walkers.

“Volunteers who are retired often help with our vaccination program – we have clinics every Saturday and Sunday,” she says.

Volunteers are essential to the success of nonprofit animal shelters and rescue groups.

Garcia says, “Volunteers help animals who are afraid and terrified and help them regain trust in humankind. And community outreach [by volunteers] is huge. They spread the word about the organization at special events and through social media.”

“Our volunteers do so much for us,” McCalister adds. “We’re always looking for more to be a part of our team.”

*Mark Robison is Senior Consultant at Humane Network. He was an award-winning senior editor at the Reno Gazette-Journal daily newspaper for many years, and he has been President of CockadoodleMoo Farm Animal Sanctuary since 2007.*

